

REPORT TO DDRN ON THE CONFERENCE

"New Latin American Development Strategies in a Changing International Economic and Political Context"

By Steen Fryba Christensen and Vibeke Andersson, Organizers.

The conference was organized in a collaborative effort by the local organizers from Aalborg University and Claes Brundenius from the Research Policy Institute at Lund University, and Gwen Sullivan from the University of Texas. At the local AAU level the initiative was a joint effort between the Humanities and the Social Sciences, concretely the humanities program of "Spanish and International Relations" and the social science program "Global Development Studies".

The conference was held at Aalborg University in the days May 20'th to May 22'nd. The conference focused on two general lines of inquiry with regard to new Latin American development strategies. One line focused on the significance of the international context for development strategies, while the other line focused on state-society relations and their impact on development strategies.

The objective with this approach was to assure cross-disciplinary dialogue and to engage in discussions on current development strategies in Latin America with inspiration from different perspectives and levels of analysis. These two general lines of inquiry gave logic to the structure of the conference that counted on three elements, namely three keynote presentations with plenary discussions, two panels with five keynote presentations followed by plenary sessions and parallel workshops with paper presentations by most participants and debates in which keynote presenters took active part. Both panels and workshops were divided into the two general lines of inquiry.

There were three inspiring keynote presentations. Eric Hershberg (President of Latin American Studies Association) opened the conference with a presentation entitled "Development strategies in Latin America in the light of a changing international context" where he characterized and analyzed current Latin American development strategies in the light of the current international context and compared these strategies with those of the recent past. He highlighted that the international context is characterized by weakening US hegemony, booming commodity prices and a shift in interstate alliances in Latin America inspired by an ideational shift away from the liberal strategies and alignment with the US of Latin American countries in the 1990s.

José Félix Rivas, Director in the Venezuelan Central Bank, spoke on "Venezuela's development strategy during the government of Hugo Chávez", thus presenting the most noteworthy country case with regard to new development strategies in Latin America today.

Finally, Brian R. Roberts from the University of Texas focused on current developments in state-society relations in Latin America in his keynote presentation with the title "Neo-liberal social policies and state-society relationships in Latin

America: The impact on Citizenship". In his presentation Prof. Roberts particularly highlighted rising social insecurity in urban Latin America.

In the two panels "Development Strategies and the International Dimension" and "State-Society Relations", there were five keynote presentations. Claes Brundenius, Raúl Bernal-Meza and Judith Sutz focused on different aspects of development strategies in the light of the international dimension, while Raúl Madrid and Gwen Sullivan made presentations on state-society relations. Following the panels there was plenary sessions with rich discussions between all participants.

Parallel workshops focused on different aspects related to the changing international context and on different aspects of state-society relations. The workshops were based on presentations of paper submissions and moderated debates. They included 15 presentations.

The conference's objective of addressing and discussing current Latin American development strategies from various disciplines and perspectives as well as from different angles and backgrounds in order to create debates amongst participants with this varied inspiration was fulfilled. Participants expressed that they were content with the size of the group of participants that allowed for a constructive discussion climate that made them feel at ease and led to a high level of interaction and interesting discussions based on the different presentations.

Ways forward: The conference identified some core themes that could be emphasized in future conferences on current Latin American development strategies. One core theme is that the current international context is changing significantly with a shift in the international balance of economic power. At the same time, Latin American countries are experiencing a positive economic context that has decreased their external economic vulnerability. This opens up for new opportunities for new international alliances and more autonomous development strategies in Latin America in the future. With regard to the state-society dimension, the state has been weakened in its function of providing public services and social security in a number of countries. On the other hand there are some promising country examples (Mexico and Brazil) where poverty oriented programs based on conditional cash transfers have had some successes. These two themes should be explored further in future conferences. It was discussed at the end of the conference in which context this should happen and there was some support for the idea that it would be a good idea to promote more collaboration between Latin American research environments in order to make joint conferences. No concrete steps were taken in this direction at the conference, but there was a general interest amongst the Nordic participants.

The conference attracted nearly 30 participants along with students and staff from AAU. Participants were mainly from academic circles with only a few practitioners along with the Bolivian ambassador and a Central Bank director from Venezuela. The academic participants represented a number of countries (Denmark, Norway, Sweden, Germany, Great Britain, Argentina, Uruguay, Venezuela, Bolivia, Mexico, Canada and the United States) which made fertile ground for creating international contacts.

The conference would not have been possible without the support by the Danish Development Research Network (DDRN), Det Obelske Familiefond, the University of

Lund, the Venezuelan Central Bank and the support of the Institute of Language and Culture and the Institute of History, International and Social Studies at Aalborg University.

Finally, the organizers would like to thank secretaries Lisbeth Rishøj Amos and Susanne Aarup for their invaluable help with information dissemination and administrative tasks, and we would like to thank the two student aids Joan and Marius who helped with the many practical tasks such as transporting participants to and from the airport and to and from their hotels, setting up the computers etc.

The organizers are currently planning the publication of conference proceedings which will be collected in one volume and divided into thematic clusters. A number of the written contributions can already be seen on the conference homepage <http://lads.conference.aau.dk>.

**Conference: "New Latin American Development Strategies
in a Changing International Economic and Political Context"**

Aalborg, May 22, 2008

List of participants

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