



“Academic cooperation between Europe, Latin America and the Caribbean: an asset to overcome the current crisis”.

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The current Covid-19 pandemic is not only challenging for each of us, it also deeply questions one of the major trends of the past decades: the growing mobility of people between countries and continents. Scholars and students made a noticeable share of overseas travelers, due to the fact that international mobility was relatively easy and affordable, that administrative procedures had been simplified and that learning benefits largely overcame institutional and personal costs. Yet, some threats associated with globalization had been underestimated and should definitely be considered in order to continue building a shared space of higher education between Latin America, the Caribbean and Europe.

In this context, it might be appropriate to consider how the construction of this bi-regional space could be affected by the current crisis, but also how it should be part of the solution. I would like to consider it from the vantage point of an institution, the IHEAL –Institute for Advanced Latin American Studies – from the Sorbonne Nouvelle University, whose *raison d'être* has always been developing academic exchanges with Latin American and Caribbean countries.

The IHEAL was founded in 1952, in order to strengthen connections between France and Latin American countries, in the era of cold war, decolonization and the rise of the Non-Aligned Movement. The French Republic wanted to build upon a long-lasting relationship with many countries of the Region to establish its influence through culture and science. The IHEAL soon became a prestigious place holding seminars and conferences and inviting politicians, artists and intellectuals.

Many political refugees, as well as influential French scholars, taught at the IHEAL. The institute received a growing number of students from Latin American, the Caribbean but also from Europe, making possible to launch interdisciplinary Master and PhD programs. Similar institutions exist in most European countries and they have a long record of research cooperation established through networks like the CEISAL (European Council of Latin American Research) and the help of European programs, such as Erasmus.

Most Latin American and Caribbean universities are offsprings of the European University system. That's certainly the case for those universities founded in the colonial period, like the University of Santo Domingo established in 1538. But even after that, when independent Nations created their own universities to train at home their elite and muster a scientific basis, Europe was taken as a reference and many European scholars were invited to contribute to the creation of Universities – such as the Polish geologist Domeyko, rector of the University of Chile between 1867 and 1883. Although Latin America and Caribbean Universities have their own histories and identities, this initial connection facilitated the setting of cooperation and joint programs between the two regions. Nevertheless, cooperation tended to be one way only, dominated by European Institutions that would create their own networks.

In the past two decades, academic cooperation between the two regions underwent important changes:

- Joint programs have been established on an equal foot-



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ing, mainly at the Master and PhD levels, between Latin American, Caribbean and European universities.

- Academic mobility of scholars and students has been fostered to develop closer relations between academic communities.
- The focus on Latin American and Caribbean studies has shifted to a global vision of major issues.
- European Institutions have increased their own cooperation.

The Laglobe Joint Master degree launched by the IHEAL with the Instituto Iberoamericano from the University of Salamanca and the Nordic Institute of Latin American Studies (NILAS) at Stockholm University exemplifies this endeavor to renew cooperation between the regions. The Laglobe Master works with a large network of academic and non-academic partners in Europe and Latin America. It is the only program in Latin American studies funded under the Erasmus Mundus scheme.

One important feature of Laglobe is that students spend one semester in each partner university and one semester in Latin America or in the Caribbean in order to make themselves familiar with different academic cultures and acquire first-hand knowledge of Latin American and Caribbean countries. Another important point is that the bilateral relation between Latin America and Europe is seen from a multidisciplinary global perspective, hence the title “Latin America in a Global World”. The first generations of students have shown a great enthusiasm for the program design and are willing to take their part in the bi-regional relation, in NGO, government or the private sector, address a long list of topics, from environment to gender and equality issues, and bring fresh views on the bi-regional relation in the Global context. .

In his well-known 1919 essay, *Crisis of the Mind* Paul Valery stated: “Everything came to Europe, and everything came from it. Or almost everything”. After the Great War, Europe could still be seen as a unique world crossroad, although its power was visibly coming to an end. One century later, academic cooperation opens up many different and interesting crossroads for science and for training, in order to bring to Europe and from Europe, people and ideas. In the 2020 Crisis of the Virus, one of the main challenges for higher education is how we

will be able to pursue international cooperation, even if travel restrictions were to persist. Scientific experience and mutual knowledge gathered by the IHEAL and its European and Latin American and Caribbean partners are certainly an important asset to devise appropriate answers.