



Newsletter

Welcome to our First Newsletter!

It has been almost 9 months since we have started working together in the [BRIDGES-LAC Project](#). These have been months of intense work and planning to launch and get the Project going. During the month of May we launched the [BRIDGES-LAC site](#) and now we are proud of releasing our First Newsletter.

The [BRIDGES-LAC Newsletter](#) is intended to keep you updated on the progress of the Project and on the different activities that take place in the European and Latin American education community. The objective is for all of us to enrich its content and include interviews to experts and short briefings by renowned people in the field.

[BRIDGES-LAC Newsletter](#) is intended to become a humble contribution to the strengthening of the European Community's policy of Higher Education as well as to the enhancement of communication between Europe and Latin America in terms of cooperation in order to strengthen the relations that have already been forged between both continents.



Education and Culture

Erasmus Mundus

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Words by Professor Ramón Torrent

BRIDGES-LAC is a project funded by the European Commission within the Framework of the Erasmus Mundus Action 4 Programme and co-financed and coordinated by the Observatorio de las Relaciones Unión Europea - América Latina, OBREAL (see www.obreal.org) with the participation of MENON, Leiden Universiteit, Universidad de Deusto, ALADI, AUSJAL, FLACSO (Secretaría General) and FLACSO (Mexico).

BRIDGES-LAC seeks to contribute to the strengthening of Community policies in the field of higher education and to enhance the relation between the European Union and Latin America and the Caribbean. The Newsletter that we are now launching is directed to all those that are interested in the advancement of initiatives in this area.

This issue provides general information on the BRIDGES-LAC project and on the activities carried out since it was launched, including information on Higher Education in Latin America and the Caribbean.

We hope you will find it useful and that you will contribute to this Newsletter and help us continue building BRIDGES to consolidate the joint efforts of both regions in the field of Higher Education.

Your input and contribution is most welcome!

Activities carried out by BRIDGES-LAC Participation in Meetings and Conferences

BRIDGES-LAC's Kick-off Meeting Setting the tone for a Successful Project

On January 21 and 22, BRIDGES-LAC conducted a kick-off meeting in Brussels to get our Project on the road and off to a positive start. Key to its success was the participation of all stakeholders who were able to get a more comprehensive vision of what the Project is trying to accomplish and to get involved with the different dimensions of BRIDGES-LAC. The latter were extensively discussed and analysed during the first day.

At the same time, this meeting provided the participants the opportunity to meet each other and reflect on what each of them could contribute to the Project. In this respect, participants were able to decide what their role will be in BRIDGES-LAC according to their possibilities and expertise. Most of the group work took place during the second day.

On the second day, the Kick-off Meeting was further enriched by the presence of external observers from the European University Association (EUA), the Education, Audiovisual and Culture Executive Agency (EACEA) and the European Commission (EC). External Observers had an opportunity to learn about BRIDGES-LAC and meet the owners of the Project. At the same time, BRIDGES-LAC benefited greatly from their presence and expertise in the field of higher education Projects.

Since BRIDGES-LAC believes that the feedback from its Partners is crucial for the internal monitoring and evaluation of the Project, an Evaluation Survey was carried out.

Some of the results were as follows: 86% of the participants judged that the debate about the main issues of the project had been Very Positive while 14% considered it Positive. The same percentages apply when referring to the networking among partners in terms of exchanging ideas, experiences and knowledge. When asked the extent to which participants had been able to convey their main concerns on the project and be heard by the other partners, 43% said it had been Very Positive and 57% considered it Positive.

All participants found the level of overall consensus among working groups Very Positive. On the presentation of the project design, 43% of the participants rated it as Very Positive and 57% as Positive. When rating the clarity with which the rationale behind the Project had been explained, 29% of the participants said it had been Very Positive, 42% rated it as Positive and 29% remained neutral.

But all in all, the BRIDGES-LAC Kick-off Meeting proved to be a success and a great opportunity to launch a valuable Project.

Those present at the Kick-off Meeting:

OBREAL: Ramón Torrent, Nicolas Espitalier, María Victoria Calabrese, María Basílico and Nicolás Patrici

MENON: Claudio Dondi and Fabio Nascimbeni

Foundation for the Jagiellonian University: Pawel Swiderski

Leiden Universiteit: Richard Griffiths

Universidad de Deusto: Laura Gómez Urquijo

Tuning Latin America: Pablo Beneitone

Asociación Latinoamericana de Integración (ALADI): Fabio Villalobos

Asociación de Universidades Confiadas a la Compañía de Jesús en América Latina (AUSJAL): Susana di Troilo

Facultad latinoamericana de Ciencias Sociales (FLACSO) Secretaría General: Juany Guzmán

Facultad latinoamericana de Ciencias Sociales (FLACSO) Mexico: Giovanna Valenti

Those Present as Observers (22 January):

European Commission (EC): William Aitchinson

European University Association (EUA): Lidia Borrell

Education, Audiovisual and Culture Executive Agency (EACEA): Anila Troshiani

OBREAL Organises the Conference on “The Universities and the V Summit of the Heads of State and Governments of Latin America and the European Union”

OBREAL, together with the Rectors' National Assembly of Peru, organised a conference at the highest level in Lima on 17 and 18 March. The objective of this conference is to extend the debate on the role played by universities within the framework of the V UE - Latin America and Caribbean Summit of Heads of State and Government.

Traditionally, OBREAL has tried to build bridges that will advance the dialogue on different aspects of the relationship between the European Union and Latin America. Underpinning OBREAL's work is the belief that developing stable and long-term relations between both continents entails a vigorous debate on the co-relations among all aspects of cooperation.

Against this background, it can be asserted that the meeting provided the chance for wide-ranging discussion, including a comparison of the

different variables that impact cooperation mechanisms.

Professor Ramón Torrent -coordinator of OBREAL and BRIDGES-LAC- made a presentation on “Education on Regional Integration and International Economic Relations”.

The Conference resulted in a declaration submitted to the Summit through the Peruvian Government. The declaration underscores that: [...] “The cooperation at university level is an essential tool to advance the discussions of two of the core subjects of the V Summit in a comprehensive manner. To be able to achieve this objective in the most effective way, the construction of the ALCUE Common Area for Higher Education must be opened to the main players in the field, including higher education institutions. Their participation within the framework of a constant bi-regional dialogue must be enhanced in order to gather all the stakeholders involved in cooperation at the university level [...]”

BRIDGES-LAC attends the ERASMUS MUNDUS Co-ordinators Meeting

Professor Ramón Torrent, general co-ordinator of BRIDGES-LAC, and Nicolás Patrici, member of the staff, represented BRIDGES-LAC at the Erasmus Mundus Co-ordinators Meeting that took place in Brussels on the 28 and 29 of February, 2008.

During this meeting BRIDGES-LAC representatives have had the chance to learn about other projects and discuss with this Agency of the European Commission about the co-operation policies in the field of Higher Education.

During the meeting the European Commission presented different strategies for future actions

in the area of Higher Education co-operation as well as past experiences gathered in different projects implemented over the past years.

This meeting provided a unique opportunity to introduce BRIDGES-LAC in the Higher Education community and to share its experiences with those involved in other projects and initiatives.



BRIDGES-LAC in México

Advancing Dialogue and Opening doors to cooperation with Latin America

Mexico is probably a metaphor of Latin America and its potential; especially in the field of cooperation in Higher Education. Mexico is a country of enormous diversity with a huge economic potential in addition to being a recognised benchmark in the area of research within the Spanish-speaking world.

Mexican Universities have been ranked among the top universities in academic excellence worldwide. Moreover, the Mexican system guarantees the poorer sectors of the community access to quality education. For example the Universidad Autónoma de México (UNAM) is the only Latin American University that is ranked among the top 100 universities in the world. However, even if Mexico is highly developed in some areas, it is still a country of large inequalities and low levels of social cohesion.

This renders Mexico the metaphor of the Latin American economic and social reality. This is one of the main reasons that made BRIDGES-LAC chose Mexico as the starting point for the research activities and synergies that started in month of May and will be developed throughout the project. Mexico is probably the paradigmatic case in all of Latin America.

Technical Aspects of the visit to Mexico

Objectives, Development and Launching of the BRIDGES-LAC Survey

Europe and Latin America have traditionally maintained long-standing and strong relations in the field of education. Not surprisingly, most Latin American academicians and professionals have –at some point in their careers- been influenced directly or indirectly by the European academic tradition.

It goes without saying that most Latin American academic systems have always been patterned after the European “continental” systems. However, the levels of excellence achieved by US universities have started to overshadow the traditional European influence on the Latin American academic systems and choices.

According to a recent survey¹, American education is perceived by Latin Americans as the system with the highest quality indexes.

At the same time, Latin American academic communities and university students believe that completing their studies abroad provides a unique opportunity for professional growth. However, it is a fact that even if Europe is not recognised as the highest quality education alternative it is still considered the most “friendly” academic environment to carry out research and pursue studies outside Latin America. In this context, mobility within the European space –unlike that in the United States- is perceived as a unique experience that goes beyond university frontiers.

One of the dimensions of the BRIDGES-LAC project entails a detailed study of the exchanges that exist between both continents. The European Community and Member States have developed a comprehensive scholarship programme offering Latin American students the opportunity to pursue post-graduate studies in Europe.

Even though the above-mentioned scholarship programmes vary widely, their primary objective is to offer mobility with a view to strengthening the relationship between both continents in the future. What problems arise at the moment of implementing these programmes? Who has access to the scholarship programmes supported by the European Community and Member States? How does this exchange impact Latin American countries?

With the exception of some reports and studies carried out by European organisations and Latin American Ministries of Education, there are few answers to these questions. There is hardly any consistent and reliable information that will help better understand these issues and create an integrated exchange system.

Against this background and in order to answer these questions **BRIDGES-LAC**, through the joint work of **OBREAL** and its partner **FLACSO México**, have developed a survey on the accessibility to European Higher Education.

The survey is intended to identify the difficulties encountered by Latin American students when accessing European Higher Education and to assess the impact of the academic exchange at the local level. The survey has been developed from a closed sample limited to Latin American scholars who have pursued studies in Europe in the past or that are in the process of studying in the continent through any of the European scholarship programmes (Alban and Erasmus Mundus).

The purpose of this survey is twofold: 1)

Synergies advanced during the visit to Mexico

During the first half of May, **BRIDGES-LAC** tried to identify -through meetings with the main stakeholders of the Mexican academic community -the main challenges posed by the cooperation in the field of Higher Education.

Firstly, **BRIDGES-LAC** met with the representatives of the commercial section and the political affairs and cultural section of the European Commission Delegation to discuss and share its experiences. This was a key meeting to identify common strategies and to endeavour to establish **BRIDGES-LAC** as what it really is: a catalyser of mutual dialogue.

From then on, **BRIDGES-LAC** met with stakeholders that bring together different institutions within the framework of Mexican higher education: ANUIES, AMPEI, UNAM, FLACSO, EL COLEGIO DE MÉXICO, the

better understand the problems encountered by Latin American students when trying to access European Higher Education and 2) to consolidate reliable data. In an effort to ensure that the data collected are complete and accurate, and relying on the renowned academic trustworthiness and professionalism of **FLACSO México**, **BRIDGES-LAC** has focused on ensuring the methodological quality of the most important disciplines.

Furthermore, **FLACSO México** has developed an IT system in order to ensure the privacy and reliability of the data collected. In the future, this system will make it possible for other projects to encourage the development of data protection systems that warrant the reliability of their surveys.

After the implementation of the technical aspects of this survey, that has included discussions with experts and an extensive bibliographic review together with the development of a wide range of sociological variables and indicators, **BRIDGES-LAC** has launched, in June 2008, a pilot survey that is expected to be completed during the month of July.

¹ Carried out within the framework of the VALUE project. For more information see: www.value-project.org

Universidad La Salle and the Universidad Iberoamericana.

Efforts were also directed to finding a point of convergence with European initiatives now operative in Mexico, such as the Pilot Global Promotion Project conducted by ACA in Brussels and by DAAD in Mexico.

This last initiative resulted in a meeting of the Mexican GPP and **BRIDGES-LAC**. The meeting was held at the academic headquarters of **FLACSO México**. Both parties found common ground between both projects.

All activities carried out by **BRIDGES-LAC** in Mexico are pervaded by a series of core elements that show that a successful cooperation in higher education entails a broader view of this issue, one which takes into account the impact of this cooperation in all the other aspects of society.

The most challenging points are the following:

- The lack of a consolidated system for the generation and exchange of information;
- The lack of clear mechanisms to build confidence and trust among stakeholders;
- The lack of mutual understanding and recognition.

As a first step, and as part of the consolidation of a confidence-building strategy based upon mutual recognition, **BRIDGES-LAC** -in full agreement with the stakeholders visited in Mexico- considers that it is crucial to bring to the table structural discussion elements capable of generating an agenda of mutual interest that will allow for the advancement of higher education in Europe and Latin America.

It goes without saying that the latter requires a profound understanding of the different domestic realities.

At the same time, a strong strategic synergy has been generated with the EMA Latin American chapter -EMA-LAC- and common concerns have been identified. This synergy will allow EMA-LAC to use FLACSO Mexico as a dissemination channel of the information and the experiences that its members have had in Europe while incorporating students in the debate on cooperation in the field of higher education.

To conclude, **BRIDGES-LAC** has started to consolidate the relationships already existing between Latin America and Europe in the belief that cooperation in the field of education is the most stable and far-reaching mechanism to ensure the constant enhancement of cooperation, mutual recognition and knowledge transfer between both regions in the future.



BRIDGES-LAC Participates in the Seminars organised by VALUE in Brazil and Argentina

In 30 June, MENON, as coordinator of the VALUE Project (www.value-project.eu), organised a Seminar at the Universidad Pontificia de Río de Janeiro, Brazil, to discuss the Green Paper drafted by VALUE, and to extend the debate and consolidate other points of view. Fabio Nascimbeni and María Victoria Calabrese presented the main guidelines of the VALUE Project. After the presentations, representatives of the International Relations Department of the Universidad PuC-Rio and the Universidad Estadual de Río de Janeiro discussed, commented and contributed their feedback to the debate.

The Asociación ORION, a partner in the VALUE Project, carried out a Seminar, "Final Experts' Roundtable and First Results of the VALUE Project".

Experts from Europe and the region attended the event on 4 and 5 July in the cities of Buenos Aires and La Plata.

The Seminar was held at the Campus of the University of Bolonia in Buenos Aires, at the Universidad Nacional Tres de Febrero and at the Rectorado de la Universidad Nacional de La Plata. The interaction between these three Universities increased the participation of attendees and enhanced the quality of the Seminar.

On 4 July, Nicolás Patrici, represented **BRIDGES-LAC/OBREAL** at the Seminar organised by VALUE at the Campus of the Universidad de Bologna in Buenos Aires, Argentina.

The Director of the Universidad de Bologna in Buenos Aires, Mr Giorgio Alberti, opened the Seminar and underscored the significance

of this type of projects in the consolidation of the relationships between Europe and Latin America in Higher Education.

After these opening words, the President of the Asociación ORION, Luis Lima, highlighted the positive impact these initiatives have on Universities in the XXI century. Eduardo Gálvez outlined briefly the history of the VALUE Project.

Claudio Dondi, Board member of MENON presented VALUE´s Green Paper. The Seminar gathered renowned experts such as Mr Ernesto Villanueva (PhD) from the CONEAU, the Deputy Minister of Education of the República del Paraguay, Marta Lafuente, as well as representatives of the Delegation of the European Commission in Argentina, and other renowned Argentinean University professionals.

The second Seminar took place during the afternoon at the Universidad de Tres de Febrero and was attended by the representatives of the International Relations Departments of several Universities in Argentina. Claudio Dondi, Eduardo Gálvez and María Victoria Calabrese presented the main issues of the VALUE Project and opened the debate.

On 5 July, Claudio Dondi together with the Fundación ORION and his Secretary General, Eduardo Gálvez; presented VALUE´s Green Paper at the Universidad Nacional de La Plata.

The Seminar of Río de Janeiro and the events in Buenos Aires and La Plata have represented a great contribution to the debate on the feasibility and the possible implementation of the ALCUE Common Higher Education Area.

Forging Synergies during the First Six Months



One of BRIDGES-LAC´s main objectives is to advance synergies with other stakeholders that are also working in the field of Higher Education cooperation.

The BRIDGES-LAC team has organised several meetings geared to fostering synergies that go beyond those already existing with the projects carried out by its own partners. As a result, BRIDGES-LAC has developed close cooperative relationships with the EMIS project, Casa América de Cataluña, ACA (Academic Cooperation Association), EUA (European University Association) and EMA -Erasmus Mundus Association-.

BRIDGES-LAC and EMIS

EMIS is a Project carried out within the framework of the ERASMUS MUNDUS Action 4 Programme financed by the European Commission and administered by the International Relations Office of the Universidad Aut3noma de Barcelona. The main objective of the EMIS Project is to assess the impact of the offices of International relations of European Universities in the establishment of good practices in terms of exchange.

BRIDGES-LAC and EMIS have many things in common besides both being managed from Catalonia. In fact, **BRIDGES-LAC** and EMIS are based on the understanding that the implementation of best practices in the field of cooperation is the most effective way of promoting European Universities and

postgraduate programmes. Furthermore, both projects advance the idea that good practices can only be achieved on the basis of a thorough knowledge and active exchange with the universities of origin.

EMIS is developing a survey aimed at identifying the main elements through which the international relations offices develop good practices at the moment of receiving scholars. In the case of **BRIDGES-LAC**, one of the dimensions of the project includes a survey to probe the challenges encountered by scholars upon their arrival at the university of destination.

In view of the natural synergy that exists between projects, **BRIDGES-LAC** and EMIS have decided to join efforts and share the results of their work in order to produce joint recommendations.

BRIDGES-LAC and Casa Am3rica de Catalunya

International co-operation in the field of higher education gathers numerous representatives of diverse stakeholder groups. The representatives of the national sector are stakeholders of undeniable significance. Their role in the management and dissemination of Higher Education is extremely important. Generating synergies with the different national stakeholders -in Europe and Latin America- is at the core of the **BRIDGES-LAC** Project.

Spain has become -as shown by the official data issued by the European Commission- the favourite destination of Latin American students. In fact, Spain's national policy to attract Latin American students has proved very successful. Within Spain, Catalunya is the autonomous community that ranks highest in terms of attractiveness among Latin American students. In this sense, the Casa Am3rica de Catalunya has become the link between the Latin American community and the Catalonian society, and the Spanish community as well. In this respect, the Casa

Am3rica de Catalunya manages all the issues related to the scholars whose destination through an Exchange programme supported by the Spanish Government.

BRIDGES-LAC and Casa Am3rica de Catalunya have agreed to work jointly in the promotion of European higher education while disseminating the diverse realities of the European continent and the characteristics and education systems of Latin America.

At the same time, the survey carried out by **BRIDGES-LAC** includes the scholars of Casa Am3rica de Catalunya as a case control study that will be used to compare the experiences of the Latin American scholars that study in Europe with the scholarship programme of the European Union and those scholars that pursue studies in Europe with scholarships granted by national governmental institutions. This comparison will allow the identification of good practices at both levels.

For more information please refer to: <http://www.americat.org>

BRIDGES-LAC and EMA, and EMA-LAC

It is clear that students are the most important stakeholders in the student exchange programmes that take place between Latin America and Europe. They are, of course, the actors most affected by public policies to advance mobility. Furthermore, students are crucial actors at the moment of conveying and sharing experiences while generating networks with the potential of influencing bi-continental relations in the future.

In this sense, **BRIDGES-LAC** has been able to develop an important strategic synergy with EMA and its Latin American chapter. **BRIDGES-LAC** and EMA's Latin American chapter will work jointly as staunch supporters of the dissemination of students' experiences in Europe while collecting the appropriate data to produce recommendations that will enable the steady improvement of these experiences.

Not surprisingly, one of the most important dimensions in the **BRIDGES-LAC** Project focuses in the generation of multiplying participatory units that will allow the long-term exploitation of the results of the Project.

BRIDGES-LAC -through its partner FLACSO-México- has agreed with EMA-LAC that FLACSO México will be the first focal point in Latin America. There is no question that FLACSO's regional structure renders it the most appropriate institution to institutionalise the dissemination of information. EMA-LAC will have its own space within FLACSO to work together in the design of joint dissemination strategies.

BRIDGES-LAC and ACA

It is crucial that **BRIDGES-LAC** cooperates and participates in initiatives within the field of higher education carried out by different stakeholders of the cooperation community. ACA -Academic Cooperation Association- carried out a successful Pilot Project of Global Promotion (Global Promotion Project) in Mexico during 2007 and 2008.

BRIDGES-LAC and ACA have agreed to work together in their initiatives in Latin America. At the same time, **BRIDGES-LAC** will share with ACA the results obtained in the survey it is carrying out at present in order to cooperate to the better understanding of the perceptions that predominate in Latin America regarding European higher education.

BRIDGES-LAC and EUA

The EUA -European University Association is the institution that best represents European Higher Education. Its tradition and impact are highly significant. In this respect, **BRIDGES-LAC** is extremely honoured to have EUA as an External Observer of the Project, since this will enhance the quality and impact of the discussions that will be generated by the **BRIDGES-LAC** Project.



Your comments and remarks on this issue are most welcome. If you would like to contribute to the next BRIDGES-LAC Newsletter please contact: info@bridges-lac.org or visit www.bridges-lac.org