Symposium: "Celebrating the Cognitive Sciences in Latin America: Introducing RELACCO (*Red Latinoamericana de Ciencias Cognitivas* - Latin American Network of Cognitive Sciences)"

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What is RELACCO?

RELACCO stands for 'REd LAtinoamericana de Ciencias COgnitivas' (Latin American Network of Cognitive Sciences) and is a new initiative that aims at bringing together researchers, students and institutions from Latin American countries involved in the Cognitive Sciences to promote exchanges and academic collaboration between them.

Through the exchange of knowledge, resources and experiences, we seek to strengthen the development of the Cognitive Sciences in the region, foster inter/transdisciplinary research, and consolidate a scientific and humanistic community committed to excellence, inclusion, horizontality, critical and ecological thinking, and individual and social responsibility.

At RELACCO, we believe in science as a collective endeavor, open and sensitive to the social and cultural challenges of today's world, with an emphasis on those of our region. Therefore, we want to work to build bridges between disciplines, contexts, and communities, and to make Latin American scientific thought and production visible on a regional and global scale, with no detriment to other international ties and interactions.

Why RELACCO?

We think this is a relevant and timely project in the Latin American scene given the undisputable rise of research interest in cognition in many Latin American countries (Argentina, Bolivia, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, Mexico, Peru and Uruguay…) in the last fifteen years, and especially in the light of recent international developments pointing at capitalizing regional resources and influence with a clear cultural identity and epicenter. And at the present time there is no organization, institution or network doing this. We also believe that presenting this project within the COGSCI Conference 2026 in Brazil is an ideal opportunity —in timing, location and purpose— as this is the first COGSCI Conference taking place in Latin America, bringing naturally together many Latin American researchers and participants, in perfect timing with the birth of RELACCO, which in turn is attuned to the Cognitive Science Society's aims and values.

The Symposium's proposal: All participants belong to different disciplinary origins: Philosophy, Psychology, Biology, Linguistics and Biochemistry. They all work in interdisciplinary Centers or institutions and foster inter/transdisciplinary dialogues and interactions. They belong to four different Latin American countries (Mexico, Uruguay, Brazil and Argentina), which geographically span both the Northern and Southern hemispheres. The speakers will cover five subjects related to different aspects of RELACCO's theoretical basis and purported aim that together can illustrate its antecedents, justification and usefulness.

Juan C. González: "Peculiarities and challenges of Interdisciplinarity in Latin American Cognitive Science"
In this talk I address the necessity and difficulty of interdisciplinary work, using Cognitive Science in Latin America as a focal case. I will argue that the lack or deficiency of a clear methodological, epistemological and conceptual common ground has hindered the development of Cognitive Science and the achievement of its original interdisciplinary objectives. Hence the urgent need for dialogue between disciplines with common goals. Furthermore, a full shift to interdisciplinarity seems inevitable for tackling humanity's complex problems, which no single discipline can solve. However, since individual polymathy is now impossible, the alternative could be to resort to a dynamic, multiscale integrative vision. This approach implies consciously oscillating between specialized and general perspectives, orchestrating various disciplinary inputs toward a common end. I will then bring forth the specific case of cognitive research in Latin America, highlighting both the field's universal hurdles and the unique challenges of conducting it in Mexico, challenges shared across the region. I will conclude by outlining how the RELACCO can help mitigate these common problems in Latin American cognitive science.

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Roberto Aguirre: "Opportunities and challenges for teaching, communicating, and disseminating Cognitive Sciences in Latin America"

I will outline the distinct opportunities and challenges for teaching and communicating Cognitive Sciences in Latin America. The region's development is shaped by its unique socio-cultural and academic context. While it shares structural barriers like chronic underfunding and reliance on foreign research agendas with Africa and parts of the Middle East, its path differs from Asia's state-led investment models, such as China's, or Russia's strong, integrated traditions. A core challenge is institutional. The interdisciplinary essence of Cognitive Science conflicts with rigid, department-centric university structures, leading to fragmented elective courses rather than cohesive degree programs. This stifles the formation of a critical mass of trained professionals and a clear institutional identity. Furthermore, a significant linguistic tension exists. While English proficiency is essential for global scientific engagement, proficiency in Latin America is highly variable compared to other regions. This creates a strategic imperative: the region must both master English for global dialogue and vigorously produce and legitimize high-quality science in Spanish and Portuguese. Strengthening academic work in local languages is crucial for effective teaching, nuanced public communication, and epistemic equity. This focus on local languages aligns with a major opportunity. To ensure authentic and impactful science, Latin America must investigate cognition within its own diverse cultural realities, moving beyond findings from WEIRD populations. The path forward depends on building stronger pan-Latin American networks to consolidate efforts, overcome internal fragmentation, and amplify this regional scientific voice.

Juan Carlos Valle-Lisboa: "Decoding context: A Latin American case for culturally-responsive Cognitive Science".

Learning is a polysemous concept in Cognitive Science, referring to distinct processes that nevertheless rely on shared neurobiological mechanisms. One form of learning underlies early development and is largely universal, unfolding with minimal instruction and laying the foundations of cognition. Another supports the acquisition of culturally transmitted skills such as reading and mathematics. Learning to read for comprehension requires the development of decoding, fluency, vocabulary, and background knowledge, all of which depend on children's linguistic abilities. However, how these factors interact depends on cultural and educational contexts. Building on results from our studies of reading acquisition in a Latin American setting, I will argue that while the same core factors are involved, there are differences in their interactions that require a special attention to the cultural context. Our results, as well as those of others, underscore the importance of developing and testing theoretical frameworks across diverse cultural contexts. Embracing this cultural diversity is a foundational step towards a more robust and genuinely universal Cognitive Science. Fostering strong regional research networks is key to this endeavor, enabling the systematic comparison of findings, pooling of resources, and pushing a Latin American contribution on the global stage.

Janaina Weissheimer: "Cognitive Sciences for Education as a way to promote social sustainability in Latin America"

Learning across Latin America involves developing adaptive skills within environments marked by chronic adversity, ranging from community violence and poverty to institutional instability, political unrest and educational inequities. These contexts present both challenges and opportunities for understanding developmental processes that promote resilience. Based on my experience as a coordinator of the Brazilian Science for Education Network (Rede CpE), I will first discuss how building a bridge between scientists and teachers for the last 12 years has been crucial to offer a sustainable ecosystem of communication, synthesis, best practices, research, and innovation for vulnerable populations in non-WEIRD countries like Brazil. I will then argue on the paramount role of networks, such as RELACCO, in promoting collaborative research and disseminating cognitive science knowledge for social and environmental justice, and the reduction of social inequality through cognitive science-based Education. These networks offer a model for co-constructing interventions that respect cultural meaning systems while addressing the structural inequities that constrain developmental opportunities, providing a foundation for future empirical testing of these multilevel strategies.

Rocío Martínez Vivot: "Biology, Context, and Cognition: Challenges for a Latin American Cognitive Science".

Integrating biological perspectives into RELACCO is especially important, as it strengthens genuinely interdisciplinary approaches and optimizes knowledge production where resources are scarce. The study of cognitive processes can be enriched by examining their physiological and epigenetic correlates. Evidence shows that chronic stress, early violence, and material insecurity significantly influence neurobiological regulation, particularly during development. Behavioral epigenetics further indicates adverse early environments cause lasting changes in gene expression related to stress, learning, and emotional processing. Moreover, most genetic and biomarker data in scientific literature under-represent Latin American populations, whose distinct genetic backgrounds reflect unique historical and social trajectories. Personal research with vulnerable children in Buenos Aires revealed that even with theoretical agreement, limited awareness of local living conditions among international researchers can significantly constrain study design and implementation. These points align with arguments for the central role of context in cognitive development and the challenge of building socially relevant research agendas in Latin America. They underscore the need for a situated Cognitive Science that articulates biological, social, and cultural analyses to produce knowledge sensitive to Latin American realities, in line with RELACCO's principles.