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**From intellectual cooperation to cultural diplomacy :  
the Brazilian and Chilean experiences  
(1918-1946)**

Before European supremacy was challenged after World War I, exchanges between intellectuals, scientists, and physicians in particular, were already increasing between Latin American countries. This dynamics reached a climax in the 1930's with a growing number of university exchanges, notably between the Southern Cone's countries, but also towards the United States.

At first these exchanges were launched by scientists and academics, and they were meant to become both a medium and an instrument for countries like Brazil and Chile to develop tools for cultural diplomacy. Over the course of a decade Brazilian and Chilean governments had indeed become aware that intellectual cooperation could benefit their national propaganda. Thus they decided to get involved into multilateral organizations: the International Institute of Intellectual Cooperation and the Pan-American Union. The IICI, prior to the UNESCO, was linked to the League of Nations and mostly European-rooted, when the Pan-American Union was closely dependant on the United States. These two institutions enabled Brazil and Chile to create a national image that they could promote worldwide.

This paper intends to show how these two countries built an international identity thanks to two types of networks: informal networks created by the exchanges between Latin American countries

and formal networks set up by the IICI and the Pan-American Union. We will first picture these two dynamics dealing with intellectual cooperation, and then present the structuring process of the multi-faceted Brazilian and Chilean cultural diplomacies. Finally we will study more specifically the academic exchanges. Over the course of our presentation, we will try to identify who the involved actors were and which countries were the main targets of Brazil's and Chile's cultural policies. Questioning these issues will lead us to define what Brazil's and Chile's diplomatic objectives were so as to establish where they would stand on the international scene.

The transnational character of intellectual cooperation led us to analyze two specific countries, Brazil and Chile. Our research project – a comparative study - will deal with networks, exchanges and movements of men and ideas. Although these countries were thoroughly different, given their geographical dimensions and their (contrasted) political objectives, both Brazilian and Chilean governments aimed at improving their international status. It seems therefore interesting to study how those two governments used *soft power* to support their national interests.

#### **I. Informal and formal networks**

In 1937, at the second meeting of the national commissions of intellectual cooperation which took place in Paris, Miguel Osório de Almeida, delegate of Brazil, presented a report entitled “The inter-American intellectual cooperation. Its beginnings, evolution and organization”. On the one hand, he pointed out the difficulties Latin American countries had to face in terms of economic, social and politic issues to explain that intellectual cooperation was not a priority in their agenda. On the other hand, he insisted on their interest for the question, even before the League of Nations created the International Commission of Intellectual Cooperation in 1922. He declared: “We began, thus, in many parts of America, to do intellectual cooperation before everyone. Journeys, meetings, congresses, general conferences, recommendations, resolutions, all means were employed to

achieve this goal”<sup>1</sup>. In other words, America had got ahead of Europe. The speech of Miguel Osório de Almeida also challenged an idea that still prevails today, according to which intellectual, scientific and cultural exchanges between Latin-American countries were (and are) non-existent.

A few Latin American researchers, such as Hugo Suppo or Marta de Almeida<sup>2</sup>, tried to demonstrate that the Brazilian delegate was not mistaken. For that purpose, they studied the Medicine congresses that have taken place since the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. There were two types of congresses: the Latin American congresses of medicine, first set in Buenos Aires in 1898, and the Pan-American congresses of medicine, the first edition of which took place in Washington in 1891. Marta de Almeida notices that the latter attracted countries of both Central- and North America, while the first gathered countries from the South Cone. It was a fact that the Pan-American congresses of medicine played a prominent part in setting the dynamics of the Latin-American congresses of medicine: Argentina, Chile, Uruguay and Brazil provided for both the meeting’s places and the majority of the participants.

According to their general settlement, the Latin American Congresses of Medicine were meant to achieve five objectives : 1) to contribute to the progress of medical sciences; 2) to spread the scientific knowledge that could be of interest for the Latin American nations; 3) to favour the adoption of uniform measures in the field of international sanitary protection; 4) to create and maintain solidarity bonds between institutions, associations and medical personalities in Latin America by favouring the intellectual exchanges; and 5) to pursue only scientific goals. We can say that these objectives match the definition of intellectual cooperation perfectly. The corollary is the creation of networks: we often find the same actors in the committees in charge of the organization

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<sup>1</sup> Archives from UNESCO, A III 56, « Rapport sur la coopération intellectuelle inter-américaine. Ses débuts, son évolution, son organisation », by Miguel Osório de Almeida.

<sup>2</sup> ALMEIDA Marta, *Da Cordilheira dos Andes à Isla de Cuba, passando pelo Brasil : os congressos médicos latino-americanos e brasileiros (1888-1929)*, Tese de doutoramento em História social, FFLCH, Universidade de São Paulo, São Paulo, 2004

Hugo Rogério SUPPO, « Ciência e relações internacionais. O congresso de 1905 », in *Revista da SBHC*, nº1/2003, Ciência e relações internacionais, p.6-20

of the congresses. University teachers, members of learned societies, and/or civil servants working in the departments of hygiene, education or health, are the actors involved, and thanks to their position, they were able to release pieces of information related to the congresses.

When Xavier de Oliveira, physician and professor at the university of Rio de Janeiro, launched the project of a Pan-American Institute in 1926, he referred to these scientific meetings and their main protagonists (he holds up as examples Barros Borgoño, from Chile, David Speroni, from Argentina, and Aloysio de Castro and Nascimento Gurgel, from Brazil) as the “founding fathers” of the inter-American intellectual cooperation<sup>3</sup>.

Some statesmen, both in Brazil and Chile, soon realized the interest of these congresses in terms of international image and propaganda. Rio Branco, the Brazilian Foreign Affairs minister between 1902 and 1912, made his best to transform the third Latin American congress of medicine which took place in Rio in 1905 in a great event. According to him, “no form of official propaganda is worth propaganda done by men of merit, of convictions, unacquainted with political passions”<sup>4</sup>. In Chile too, we were conscious of the political advantage of this sort of event. Indeed, Barros Borgoño, who belonged to the organizing committee of the first congress, became minister of foreign affairs in 1918, and had always encouraged intellectual cooperation.

After World War I, with the emergence of a structured organization of intellectual cooperation thanks to the League of Nations, the Brazilian and Chilean actors, whether they were official or not, got involved in more formal networks. The International Committee of Intellectual Cooperation of Geneva, and its executive organism, the International Institute, settled in Paris, offered to connect intellectuals from the whole world, thus providing them with a greater audience. This is how we can explain why Brazil, despite its withdrawal from the League of Nations, never questioned its membership of the intellectual cooperation organization.

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<sup>3</sup> Quoted by Hugo Rogélio SUPPO, « Ciência e relações internacionais. O congresso de 1905 », in *Revista da SBHC*, n°1/2003, Ciência e relações internacionais, p.28

<sup>4</sup> Rio Branco’s speech at the opening of the third congress, quote by Hugo SUPPO [2003, p.9].

In the meantime, in 1917, the Pan-American Union created a Service of Intellectual Cooperation, and favoured many scientific encounters. Besides, after the war, intellectual cooperation became a topic of discussion in the Inter-American conferences.

Chile and Brazil took part in this dynamics. A Brazilian project was at the origin of the creation of the Inter-American Institute of Intellectual Cooperation at the time of the Habana conference in 1928. And Chile organized the first American meeting of national committees of intellectual cooperation in Santiago in 1939.

Thanks to these formal and informal networks, the practice of intellectual cooperation became more usual in America, particularly in the southern half of the continent. It led to a real “pactomania” in this field, especially in the 1930’s. Treaties, agreements, covenants were signed, either between two countries or on a continental scale. The social and political contexts of those years can also explain the multiplication of such treaties: the Good Neighbor Policy launched by Roosevelt, the fear of a new war, the feeling of a certain decadence of Europe can be evoked.

The agreements used to deal with three types of matters:

- 1) Artistic and cultural cooperation;
- 2) Teaching and education (particularly with the exchange programs offered to professors and students);
- 3) The exercise of liberal professions.

In the scope of this paper, we will focus on the second topic. As for the continental covenants, we will only mention those related with this subject. The first was a resolution approved in 1910 at the 4<sup>th</sup> Inter-American conference and was meant to encourage university exchanges. The fact that a similar resolution was also approved in 1933 at the Montevideo Conference, shows how difficult it was to launch such a dynamics in a continent where the elites were mostly attracted to Europe.

The way countries like Brazil and Chile structured their cultural diplomacy departments in the 1930's, the national interest they had in being part of this movement are some keys to understand why this type of agreement was more successful than in the previous period.

## II. Structure and goals of the Chilean and Brazilian cultural diplomacy

This paper, as my PhD work, is based on the idea that Brazil and Chile (and Argentina) used cultural relations to build their cultural diplomacy. These two terms are often used as though they were synonymous. In fact, the differences between them are fundamental. As JM Mitchell wrote, “the purpose of cultural relations is not necessarily (...) to seek one-sided advantage. At their most effective, their purpose is to achieve understanding and co-operation between national societies for their mutual benefits” [1986, p.5]. Whereas “cultural diplomacy is narrower in scope. It is essentially the business of governments” [idem, p.3], and “seeks to impress, to present a favourable image, so that diplomatic operations as a whole are facilitated” [idem, p.5].

Cultural diplomacy can be undertaken in a large variety of ways, and this is the reason why we chose to compare the Brazilian and Chilean experiences. If the structure of government and social institutions differs in these two countries, their goals in terms of image on the international scene were quite similar. In 1927, Gabriela Mistral, the Chilean delegate at the IICI, wrote an article in the diary *El Mercurio* to encourage the participation of Latin American countries to this institution because “Spanish America needs to be better known by Europe where so many superficial opinions can be heard about this part of the world. Spanish America has to promote information about its schools, its classics and its press.”<sup>5</sup> An undated Chilean report gave the same analysis: “the work of the international intellectual cooperation (...) could be for us a propaganda tool in order to publicize our intellectual production.”<sup>6</sup> The Brazilian discourse was not different: “For us the intellectual

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<sup>5</sup> UNESCO, A I 83, 13/07/1927

<sup>6</sup> UNESCO, A III 46

cooperation must mean propaganda of Brazil”<sup>7</sup>. Both Chilean and Brazilian actors of cultural diplomacy pointed out the need to transform their country’s image abroad. And abroad meant Europe. These individuals wanted to fight the New World clichés and the patronizing opinions of Old Europe. Ildefonso Falcão, a Brazilian diplomat involved in the setting up of the Brazilian cultural diplomacy, was deeply aware of this challenge when he wrote: “It is time that we get known abroad through our achievements so that Brazil stops being considered as a vast area populated by savage Indians and illiterate half-breed”.<sup>8</sup> For these two countries, whose governments aimed at gaining legitimacy on the international scene, this type of image had to be erased and replaced. Political and intellectual elites were anxious to prove that their countries deserved a seat among the circle of the modern and civilized nations. For that purpose, the informal and, more and more, the formal network would appear as relevant instruments. The IICI, in this context, seemed to be the most efficient, since it had “the biggest influence”<sup>9</sup>.

This is the reason for which the cultural diplomacy of Brazil and Chile was built around the Institute’s network. Nevertheless, institutionally speaking, different paths were chosen.

As far as Brazil is concerned, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs – also called Itamaraty - became the core of such politics. We’ve seen that Rio Branco was acutely aware that intellectual cooperation could benefit the national propaganda. In the 1920’s, the Itamaraty favoured the participation of Brazilian personalities in inter-American and international congresses, supported Xavier de Oliveira’s project of Inter-American Institute of Intellectual Cooperation, and nominated a delegate, Elyseu Montarroyos, to the IICI. Montarroyos was very active and spoke very soon in favour of the development of Brazil’s activities in the field of intellectual cooperation. However it is mostly under Getúlio Vargas’ regime, from 1930, that this conviction led to a formal organization. A Service of Intellectual Cooperation was finally created in 1934, but formally instituted in 1937 by a ministerial

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<sup>7</sup> Arquivo Histórico do Itamaraty (AHI), 542,6, 1045/18392, 26/03/1939

<sup>8</sup> AHI, 542,6, 995/16141, 02/02/1936, *Diario de Noticias*, Rio de Janeiro

<sup>9</sup> AHI, 542,6, 1045/18392, 26/03/1939

order. In this text it was stipulated that this Service would be “an organ of connection with the International Institute of Intellectual Cooperation”<sup>10</sup>. In fact, it was much more than this. According to Ildefonso Falcão, who ran it in 1935-1936, “it is a service meant to present Brazil in all its cultural aspects This service will publicize every Brazilian cultural achievement and will thus foster intellectual cooperation with the modern world educated community”.<sup>11</sup>

Ribeiro Couto, whose action had been decisive for the creation of the Service, made its goals even clearer: “The purpose is to set the basis for a discreet propaganda of Brazilian intellectual values abroad, avoiding, as much as possible, that these endeavours should be perceived as an ostentatious official propaganda”<sup>12</sup>.

In the case of Chile, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs did not play such a prominent part, but it was not entirely absent either. The main actor was no doubt the University of Chile.

In the 1920s, the Chilean government took little part in the IICI’s work. Its main contribution was the nomination of Gabriela Mistral as a delegate to this institution. But her many other activities as a diplomat did not enable her to fulfil this mission, even though her reputation was a trump card for the image of Chile in European circles. She nevertheless remained connected to the Institute until 1939, as a member of the Ibero-American committee in charge of the edition in French of works from this part of the world.

The relations between the IICI and the countries members were not only undertaken by their governments: a national committee of intellectual cooperation was founded, bringing together the representatives of the intellectual life of the country. Such a committee was founded in Brazil in 1925, officially independent from the government, but in fact closely linked to it. In Chile, the national committee was first created in 1930 by Francisco Walker Liñares, the Chilean delegate to the League of Nations. Because of the political troubles that shook the country at that time, the

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<sup>10</sup> UNESCO, A I 86, 23/06/1937

<sup>11</sup>AHI, 542,6, 995/16141, 02/02/1936, *Diario de Noticias*

<sup>12</sup>AHI, 542,6, 995/16141, 01/03/1934

committee did not start its work until 1935, when the University of Chile reactivated it. Even if the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Ministry of Education provided for its financial needs, and even if representatives of these ministries were part of it, the Chilean committee was quite independent from the government bodies. Its goal was to “establish contacts and coordination between the different cultural activities of the country, and to create spiritual bonds with foreign countries, so as to publicize the Chilean culture abroad and the foreign cultures in Chile”<sup>13</sup>. In 1936, an Office of Intellectual Cooperation was created within the university, thereby demonstrating a will to make the university the very core of Chilean cultural politics. Where the Brazilian organization was entirely designed for the international scene, the structure chosen for the Chilean cultural politics illustrates an opposite goal: its target was mostly national. This is not surprising when we consider the fact that two of its main actors were Juvenal Hernandez and Amanda Labarca. The first was the university rector from 1933 to 1953, and many authors refer to this period as “one the most brilliant, stable and prestigious stage of the University of Chile”<sup>14</sup>. They insist on the effort made by Juvenal Hernandez to spread culture through the university among all social classes. As for Amanda Labarca, her commitment in the area of education was well known: she had been head of the secondary school system of in 1931, and of the Study Department of the University of Chile from 1933 to 1956.

### **III. Academic exchanges: a tool for the Brazilian and Chilean cultural diplomacies**

Until the 1930s, academic exchanges in America were quite rare, although not inexistent. The numerous agreements signed in the course of the decade, and the increasing interest for intellectual cooperation, not only in Brazil and Chile, but also in Argentina, Uruguay, Bolivia and Peru, led to a change.

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<sup>13</sup> Comisión chilena de Cooperación Intelectual, *22 años de labor : 1930-1952*, Santiago de Chile, 1953, p.5

<sup>14</sup> Rolland Mellafe, Maria Teresa Gonzalez, *El Instituto Pedagógico de la Universidad de Chile (1889-1981) : su aporte a la educación, cultura e identidad nacional*, Monografías de Cuadernos de Historia, n°2, 2007, p.147

As far as Brazil is concerned, the exchanges of professors and students with the other American Republics started acquiring some importance from 1937 on, and in 1945, the Service of Intellectual Cooperation was in charge of exchanges with twelve American countries: Canada, Argentina, Paraguay, Uruguay, Venezuela, Bolivia, Chile, Peru, Colombia, Ecuador, the Dominican Republic and Costa Rica. The agreements with the United States were quite different and were not undertaken by the Service. We know that professors and scientists from this country came to Brazil to take part in conferences and that students from the latter went to the United States. The relationship between both countries was rather asymmetrical, one delivering the knowledge and the other receiving it<sup>15</sup>.

The Itamaraty helped, as much as possible, send professors in countries with under-developed educational bodies, as was the case with Bolivia for example.

In 1944 the Service provided for 90 grants for foreign students in Brazil. They were distributed as such: Bolivia (10), Chile (12), Colombia (1), Ecuador (2), Peru (1), The Dominican Republic (2), Costa Rica (1), Uruguay (3), Argentina (2) and Paraguay (56). We can note the disparity in favour of Paraguay, which can be explained by the role this country played in the rivalry between Argentina and Brazil for the leadership of South America. These two countries also organized numerous multiple student exchange towards Uruguay. It is also interesting to point out the increasing academic and intellectual exchanges between Argentina and Brazil. From the 1930s to 1950s, the Argentine and Brazilian governments encouraged the creation of many delegations, poetry or writing contests between schools in the two countries, and grants were offered so as to promote research on topics related the neighbour nation. This dynamics implied a commitment of actors from both the State and the civil society. In this case, intellectual cooperation, and the way it became a tool for

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<sup>15</sup> See Roberta LIMA, Maria Ferreira, *A Política brasileira de expansão cultural no Estado Novo (1937-1945)*, mestrado em história, UERJ, 2006

cultural diplomacy, appears clearly as a means to strengthen the manoeuvres of the traditional diplomacy.

Whereas academic exchanges were managed by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Brazil, it was the University of Chile that undertook the whole organization in this country.

In 1936, when the National Committee of Intellectual Cooperation began to manage academic exchanges, 13 grants were allocated to Chilean students. In 1949, the number of grants came to 187. The committee did not provide for the grants: they were allocated by the Ministry of Education, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and by the partner countries of the exchanges. Apart from the grants, the university favoured academic exchanges by the organization of visits of groups of Chilean students to other countries. For example, in 1936, a group from the Faculty of Commerce and Industrial Economy visited Ecuador, Peru and Colombia. These visits used to be a real exchange for the visited country would send later students or professors: also in 1936, a Chilean group went to the Medicine School of Buenos Aires, and the next year an Argentine group visited its counterpart in Santiago<sup>16</sup>.

The other side of the exchanges was the welcoming of foreign students. In 1941, for example, they were distributed as such : Argentina (6), Bolivia (1), Brazil (1), Colombia (2), Costa Rica (2), Ecuador (2), United States (2), Guatemala (1), Haiti (1), Honduras (1), Mexico (2), Santo Domingo (1), San Salvador (1), Panama (2), Paraguay (2), Peru (2), Uruguay (2), and Venezuela (2)<sup>17</sup>. 18 countries were concerned, which can be considered as a will from the University of Chile to attract students from the whole of America. That was a means to make Chile appear as an educational centre in the continent.

The reception of the foreign students was particularly important during the Summer Courses that began to be organized in 1935. The initiative was taken by Juvenal Hernandez and Amanda Labarca, who undertook their organization, following the model of the North-American Universities where

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<sup>16</sup> *Boletín Bimestral de la Comisión Chilena de Cooperación Intelectual*, Nov.-Dec., Año I, n°6

<sup>17</sup> Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Chile, *Circulares ordinarias* 1936-1943, n°33, 24/09/1941.

both of them had taught<sup>18</sup>. The Summer courses were not only designed for foreign students; they also aimed at attracting Chilean professionals. Once more, we can see that the cultural politics of the university were addressed to both a national and an international public. Between 1935 and 1959, 119 Summer courses were organized, were attended by 79 000 students, of which 5000 came from Latin-American countries.

The question is: can national-focused policies created by a single university be called “cultural diplomacy”? We can say that the work of the university was a part of it. If the Ministry of Foreign Affairs never created, as Brazil did, a special service dedicated to this field, it did not despise the benefits of a cultural expansion. This is not the purpose of this paper to detail the other actions of that ministry in terms of cultural diplomacy. This is why we will only focus on the use that was done of the university’s work. The Ministry used to publish documents of “Information and propaganda” aimed at being distributed among the Chilean diplomatic network so as to provide elements that could be divulgated to improve Chile’s image abroad. One of these documents is dedicated to the University of Chile<sup>19</sup>. Here is a quotation from the introduction: “When we consider Chile’s history, the civilizing and leading part played by the University of Chile can be considered as a permanent feature; this institution was at the origin of the Republic, had formed the generations who headed the country, who gave Chilean public life the principles of law and civilization; and these principles had prevailed both in the Chilean society and in Chile’s relations with the other people”<sup>20</sup>.

We can notice the image of Chile the Chilean governments and intellectuals wanted to publicize abroad was that of a civilized and modern country, whose strength lied in its educational system. A country that, therefore, could be considered as a model.

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<sup>18</sup> Jorge Caceres VALENCIA, *La Universidad de Chile y su aporte a la cultura tradicional, 1933-1953*, Santiago, Ed. Esparza, 1998, p.44

<sup>19</sup> Ministry of Foreign Affairs, *Información y propaganda, Boletín de divulgación*, n°1, 6 pages, no date

<sup>20</sup> *Idem*, p.1

## Conclusion

We can draw many conclusions from what has been said. First of all, the participation of Chile and Brazil in the intellectual cooperation networks and their setting up of a cultural diplomacy couldn't have been possible without the commitment of a great number of intellectuals who played a decisive part. It's undeniable in Chile, where the university is at the core of the system. In Brazil, it stems from the general politics of Getúlio Vargas. Even before the proclamation of the *Estado Novo* in 1937, Vargas had converted the State into "the superior representative of the idea of Nation"<sup>21</sup> and arranged things so as to make intellectuals develop their thought within the scope of the state. He succeeded quite easily since there was a convergence of interests between a state that proclaimed itself as the true mainspring of society, and intellectuals who used to consider themselves as "the most enlightened group of the society", and tended to "educate the Nation"<sup>22</sup>. The interest of my research on cultural diplomacy lies therefore not only in its consequences for the foreign policy of these two countries: the development of their international image began at a time when national identity was being debated, and when intellectuals were being summoned to clarify what "brasilianity" and "chileanity" actually meant. Our PhD project will compare what is presented as the "true" Chile and Brazil on the international scene, and what is considered as the core of their national identity inside their frontiers.

We also want to demonstrate that, although they were considered as secondary powers in terms of geopolitics, both Brazilian and Chilean governments aimed at playing a relevant part in the world that emerged after World War I. Cultural diplomacy can be seen both as an alternative and a support to traditional diplomacy. For example, Brazil's participation to the IICI's work allowed this country to appear on the European scene although its government had left the League of Nations in 1926. Moreover, the presence of Chilean and Brazilian intellectuals in international organizations and

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<sup>21</sup> VELLOSO Mônica Pimenta, *Os intelectuais e a política cultural do Estado Novo*, Rio de Janeiro, Centro de Pesquisa e Documentação de História Contemporânea do Brasil, 1987, p.3

<sup>22</sup> *Idem*, p.4

networks gave their country an aura and a legitimacy that could be exploited by diplomats. It helped them to be considered as “serious”, “modern” and “cultivated” nations. We must add that the recognition they could get from Europe through the IICI gave them legitimacy among the other Latin American nations, where the European reference was still powerful.

A new dynamics was set in this period: Latin American countries were eager to bond more on the sub-continental level. And for that purpose, intellectual cooperation, and in particular academic exchanges, constituted a privileged path. The role of the Good Foreign Policy was certainly an element worth mentioning as we’ve seen with Brazil and Chile, where the United States had become a major partner. Nevertheless, the main lesson we can draw from their activity in the field of academic exchanges, is their will to be integrated into a Latin American dynamics. As for Brazil, the challenge was to modify the perception its neighbours had of a Portuguese-speaking country, which used to be an Empire when the ancient Spanish colonies became republics. In the case of Chile, it is a question of breaking its geographical isolation and draw attention away from its conflicts with Peru, Bolivia or Argentina. As the organizer of the first Conference of the American Committees of International Cooperation in Santiago in 1939, Chile had become, for the time of the meeting, the very centre of the continent, instead of one of its fringes.

Academic exchanges made one thing possible: continental solidarity stopped being a matter of diplomats and politics only to start involving parts of the civil society as well.