SCIENTIFIC COOPERATION AND INTEGRATION IN LATIN AMERICA: A DREAM?

In 1986, at the time of the founding of the European Union, its member states committed not only to strengthening political and economic cooperation but also to extending it in a sustained manner to research, technology, and environmental affairs. Although Latin America is far from forming a similar entity, the region has witnessed multiple initiatives aimed at cooperation and integration, in which science, education, and technology have been incorporated as strategic components.

The region possesses a broad array of legal instruments, including agreements, multilateral treaties, and bilateral conventions that encompass these areas. These instruments date back to 1946, when Latin American countries joined UNESCO, which provided a global framework for initiatives in science, education, and culture. During the 1970s, subregional agreements were signed, such as the Andrés Bello Convention (CAB) in 1970, established among the members of the then Andean Pact (1969), now the Andean Community of Nations (CAN, 1996). Subsequently, the CAB expanded to include other countries, recognizing the relevance of education, science, and culture as part of development strategies, albeit dominated by a primarily economic vision.

In 1990, the CAB was renewed to include additional Caribbean countries and has since focused its activities primarily on education, remaining in force to this day. In 1991, the Southern Common Market (MERCOSUR) was created, within which a specialized body for scientific and technological policies was established: the Specialized Meeting on Science and Technology (RECyT), responsible for the MERCOSUR Prize and for consolidating regional scientific statistics. In the 21st century, the Union of South American Nations (UNASUR, 2008) envisaged projects for technology transfer and horizontal cooperation, human resource training in health, engineering, and basic sciences, policy harmonization, and the creation of shared scientific infrastructure; however, these initiatives were not implemented due to the institutional crisis of the organization.

Finally, the Community of Latin American and Caribbean States (CELAC, 2010) has promoted agendas and plans for scientific and technological cooperation focused on health, biotechnology, energy, climate change, and ICTs, as well as cooperation initiatives with China aimed at project financing, scholarships, and technology transfer. Nevertheless, like UNASUR, this forum lacks institutional stability, which limits its sustainability over time.

It can be stated that the region has extensive experience in the creation of institutions oriented toward cooperation and integration in science, education, and technology, as evidenced by the brief overview presented above. However, this experience has resulted in a multiplicity of regional bodies with uneven outcomes and limited structural continuity.

A review of these efforts reveals partial achievements: some organizations have succeeded in establishing cooperative structures and agreements with national and international entities; all have faced severe funding constraints due to their dependence on state contributions; and political changes have also been a disruptive factor, conditioning the continuity of commitments made. The withdrawal of key countries, such as Brazil or Argentina, can completely dismantle ongoing regional initiatives.

In general, integration structures have been organized from state-centered perspectives, managed by technical experts and specialists, with little or no participation from other social actors who could contribute to sustaining these processes in the long term. In the scientific field, this refers to associations and scientific organizations in Latin American countries, whose participation has historically been undervalued in formal integration schemes. In this regard, the Interciencia Association—which brings together scientific societies from the region—has maintained, through its journal *Interciencia*, a sustained effort to create and preserve a regional, independent space for Latin American science.

Accumulated experience confirms that scientific integration in Latin America requires stable institutional networks, active participation by scientific communities, and long-term commitments.

This brief overview seeks to highlight the efforts that will be required for Latin America to establish a stable institutional network in the fields of education, science, and technology.

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