
Fostering HCI Research in, by, and for Latin America

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Abstract

Over the last 20 years, the Latin American Human-Computer Interaction (HCI) community has been working to shed light on how the diverse populations in the region are adopting, using, and making sense of computational technologies. Latin America's tense socio-political context, plurality of languages, collectivist culture, and historical relationship with the Global North make it a unique and rich space for HCI research. Considering the growing number of studies about Latin American communities and the emergent efforts to contribute to the HCI literature, we propose to host a SIG meeting at the 2020 ACM CHI conference. Our goal is to consolidate these efforts to better promote HCI research *in, by, and for* Latin America, by (1) bringing together researchers, practitioners, and students who are interested in engaging with Latin America through their research and practice, (2) envisioning a shared research agenda, and (3) identifying strategies for making its contributions more visible and impactful in the international community.

Author Keywords

Latin America, LatinX, HCI research

CCS Concepts

•Human-centered computing → Human computer interaction (HCI);



Figure 1: Map of Latin America. The term “Latin America” was coined to describe the part of the Americas with a shared history of Iberian colonialism. However, oftentimes it is also used to include countries such as Haiti, French colonies in the Caribbean, and even the Spanish-speaking population in the United States. As such, it includes about 33 countries. Image: Wikipedia.

Introduction

A hybrid and multifaceted cultural construction, “Latin America” (LATAM) emerged as a shared identity across several countries of the Americas highly shaped by Latin cultures. It gathers a group of about 33 countries, where Spanish and Portuguese are the dominant languages. LATAM developed from one of the largest cultural encounters between European, native/indigenous, and African people. Today, these communities represent a rich mixture of cultures, stories, and identities entailing more than 620 million people in the Americas and other parts of the world. Such a unique blend makes LATAM a promising economic actor in today’s globalized society. The region, however, faces a range of socio-economic, educational, and political challenges hindering its ability to undertake this role.

As the HCI foci continue expanding across the globe, we call for a better understanding on how technologies—which have been mostly developed in the Global North—have been appropriated by Latin American users, and ultimately, have mediated their cultures, communications, relations, traditions, and democracies [8]. By strengthening studies embracing the Latin American context, the HCI community can expect to produce both richer knowledge and a more inclusive and pluralistic community. In this Special Interest Group, we seek to discuss challenges and opportunities around HCI research conducted *in, by, and for* Latin America.

HCI in Latin America

As a region, LATAM has a long history of working together with ACM SIGCHI to foster research in HCI. The CHI 2001 Development Consortium was the first step towards promoting HCI research in the region¹. After this came the Latin American Conference on Human Computer Interaction

¹<https://clihc2005.laihc.org/program.html>

(CLIHIC)², which has been held biannually since 2003, and the ACM SIGCHI Latin American Community³, created in 2012 to bring together HCI researchers, practitioners, and students interested in working in LATAM. In addition, six countries in LATAM have their own local chapters⁴. With the support of allies from outside the community, these efforts have informed events such as summer schools in Mexico⁵ and Brazil⁶, and workshops in HCI venues such as CSCW 2018 [5]. These initiatives have also enabled Latin American countries to host important HCI-related conferences such as WUC 2014 and UbiComp 2020.

Despite the local efforts, most of the HCI research developed within LATAM still lacks international exposure. Since 2010, the number of CHI attendees traveling from Latin American countries have ranged between 0.5% and 1.2% of the total. One of the aspects that prevent a broader dissemination of the research responds to a discordance among regions about what counts as research publications. While most institutions from the Global North evaluate faculty members based on their contributions to prestigious conferences such as CHI, many institutions in LATAM limit the evaluation to indexed journals [9]. This difference in evaluation and publication models has restricted a large number of researchers from LATAM to be part of the international HCI community. We are interested in opening a discussion among researchers from LATAM and the broader CHI community about more inclusive publication and conference models.

²<https://clihc2019.laihc.org/index.html>

³<https://www.laihc.org/>

⁴<https://sigchi.org/get-involved/local-chapters/>

⁵<https://sites.google.com/view/sspci17/>

⁶<https://brazilrms.wordpress.com/>

HCI by Latin America

Due to the challenges faced by higher-education institutions to sustain HCI educational programs throughout LATAM [3, 4], Latin American scholars often emigrate to foreign institutions to pursue their academic careers. While ongoing efforts aim to connect Latin American scholars across the world [5], some problems remain to be addressed. For many scholars outside of LATAM, it is difficult to find people in their host institutions who can guide them in connecting their research interests back to the social and academic reality of LATAM. Further, the diverse nature of the sites and institutions in the Global North—together with the diversity entailed by the panethnic terms Latino/Latinx/Hispanic—obscure opportunities for Latin American scholars to learn about each others' work. The academic distance also restricts opportunities for scholars outside of LATAM to reach back and collaborate with academic institutions in the region. These scholars must also learn how to navigate the economic/governmental circumstances that often limit the institutions' flexibility to engage in international collaborations.

The increasing presence of Latin American authors in high-impact HCI venues suggests there is a strong potential for Latin American HCI scholarship to consolidate. This also highlights the need to address the aforementioned challenges to boost inclusivity. While existing efforts to support Latin American scholars in building a community have been useful for identifying points of action to move forward, their visibility is often limited. We believe that ensuring a larger visibility is critical, and that existing and new efforts need further, systemic support to achieve the required impact.

HCI for Latin America

LATAM constitutes one of the largest groups of consumers of technology around the world. As a result, we constantly

experience disruptions caused by foreign technology. Although ours is a region with enormous cultural and geographic diversity, it is also a place that shares complex socio-political and economic challenges. In recent years, LATAM has become one of the most violent regions in the world, and it is facing an unprecedented migration crisis. Additionally, the increasing number of protests across the region [2] reflect people's critical discomfort with rampant corruption as well as social and gender inequalities. These challenges affect not only the social conditions in the region but also influence how technology is adopted.

By considering HCI *for* LATAM, we aim at developing a deeper understanding of how technology can effectively and sustainably respond to the regions' cultural, political, and economic particularities. Some examples of previous research that focuses on LATAM have addressed calling volunteers to action using bots [10]; the offline internet in Cuba [6]; how people in Venezuela use Facebook to buy food items at fair prices [7]; and how social media help to navigate violence in Mexico [1]. The Latin American HCI scholarship would highly benefit from further fostering such academic work, which recognizes the characteristics of LATAM as an asset informing technology design.

The SIG Meeting

Similar to other emerging HCI communities, this SIG meeting's goal is to bring the Latin American community together at CHI 2020, encouraging participation and collaboration in HCI research. We intend to call for participation via e-mail, newsletters, social media channels, and word of mouth at the conference. At the beginning of the meeting, attendees will form small groups to discuss concrete topics of interest, their personal experiences, and their reflections on how to foster HCI research in the Latin American context. Then, groups will present their conclusions to the main group.

While attendees are presenting, we will take notes in order to gather and organize the insights. Towards the end of the session, we will build a shared agenda as a plan for future work that will benefit the Latin American HCI research community.

In summary, this SIG meeting will seek to (1) invite researchers, practitioners and students from LATAM as well as the broader HCI community to engage with LATAM through their research and practice; (2) envision a shared research agenda; (3) characterize and synthesize the opportunities and challenges around HCI research conducted *in, by, and for* LATAM to make its contributions more visible and impactful in the international community.

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