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Positioning Latin America in International Relations: Analysis of the Joint AMEI–ISA 2025 Conference at Universidad del Mar

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Between June 4 and 6, 2025, the University of the Sea (UMAR) at Huatulco hosted a Joint Conference of the Mexican Association of International Studies (AMEI) and the International Studies Association (ISA). This gathering, which brought together more than 400 participants from about 25 countries, is part of a tradition of inter-American academic cooperation that began in 1983 in Mexico City and continued in Acapulco (1993), Manzanillo (1997), and Cancún (2008). The significance of these types of conferences lies in the fact that they provide spaces where knowledge about the discipline and practice of international relations is produced, debated, and (de)legitimized. Academic conferences are, in themselves, exercises of scientific diplomacy and epistemic community-building that may, in the long term, influence public policy formulation, professional training, and the definition of global research agendas.

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The title of the conference, “Positioning Latin America and Mexico in International Relations,” was not chosen casually. On the one hand, it responded to the need to make visible the theoretical and practical contributions of a region traditionally marginalized in dominant academic International Relations (IR) circuits, a discipline frequently characterized as predominantly American and British. On the other hand, it reflected the opportunity to collectively examine the place that Mexico and Latin America (should) occupy in the changing international system, marked by the rise of China, the war in Ukraine, migration crises, climate emergency, and the resurgence of authoritarian discourses.

This article is guided by the following research question: In what ways did the Joint AMEI–ISA Conference contribute to challenging the center-periphery hierarchies in the production of knowledge in IR, and what are its implications for the positioning of Latin America within the discipline? To address this question, the analysis draws on a conceptual framework articulated around three axes: the notion of epistemic communities as spaces for the production and legitimation of knowledge (Haas, 1992); the critique of the center-periphery dynamics that have characterized the production of knowledge (Mignolo, 2002), particularly in IR; and the contributions from the South as pathways toward epistemic plurality (Acharya, 2014). From this perspective, the conference is not merely an academic event, but a situated practice of knowledge construction that can contribute to reconfiguring power relations within the disciplinary field.

This contribution analyzes the Joint AMEI–ISA Conference as an event of significance for the international community of internationalists, identifying its historical background, the actors involved in its development, its distinctive characteristics in terms of participation and academic program, the logistical challenges overcome, and its implications for the positioning of Latin America and Mexico in IR. The analysis is based on our direct experience as co-program chairs, as well as on preparatory documents, the final program we developed, participant lists, and informal evaluations collected during and after the event.

Historical Background: 42 Years of Inter-American Academic Dialogue

To understand the significance of Huatulco 2025, it is necessary to situate it within a trajectory of more than four decades of bilateral cooperation between both organizations. The first AMEI–ISA Joint Conference, held in 1983 in Mexico City, took place in the context of the late Cold War, the Latin American debt crisis, and democratic transitions across the region. That meeting laid the foundations for a dialogue that, although intermittent, enabled exchanges between Mexican and U.S. academia in the context of what Hoffmann (1977) termed “American social science” as the axis of the discipline, and at a time when disciplinary narratives were beginning to be questioned from non-Western perspectives (Buzan & Little, 2001).

The second conference, in Acapulco (1993), coincided with the imminent entry into force of the North American Free Trade Agreement (1994) and a moment of optimism regarding hemispheric integration. The third, in Manzanillo (1997), and the fourth, in Cancún (2008), reflected the increasing diversification of the international agenda, with topics such as the environment, regional security, and the rise of new powers, while also unfolding alongside crises affecting several Southeast Asian countries. Between 2008 and 2025, seventeen years passed without joint meetings—a period during which both the discipline and the world changed dramatically: the 2008 financial crisis, the Arab Spring, the COVID-19 pandemic, the war in Ukraine, democratic backsliding in multiple regions, and the climate emergency all emerged as central items on the global agenda.

The specific genesis of the conference in Huatulco cannot be understood without the figure of Dr. Modesto Seara Vázquez (1931–2022). A jurist, internationalist, and institutional visionary, Seara was the founder of Oaxaca's public university system — including UMAR— and creator in 1967 of the then Mexican Institute of International Studies, later renamed AMEI. Seara conceived the idea of hosting a joint conference in Huatulco as a way to decentralize national academic life and to project Oaxaca as a center of internationalist thought. Conversations with then-ISA Executive Director Mark Boyer in 2019 gave shape to this vision during Boyer's visit—along with Jennifer Fontanella (ISA's Operations Manager)—to the Huatulco campus.

The COVID-19 pandemic delayed the project, but did not cancel it. 2020 and 2021 were years of uncertainty, marked by calls and rescheduling efforts. Following Seara's passing in December 2022, the project might have faded into obscurity, as so many initiatives dependent on individual leadership do. However, in 2023, Mark Boyer reestablished contact with then-Director of the UMAR Institute of International Studies, Dr. Alberto Lozano-Vázquez, with a clear message: "Let's make it happen." This renewed momentum revitalized the organizational process. Dr. Lozano contacted the AMEI leadership, then headed by Pedro González Olvera and with Adriana Sletza Ortega Ramírez as the incoming president. Their support was immediate and unconditional.

This effort was further reinforced by university authorities, led by then-UMAR's Rector María de los Ángeles Peralta Arias, as well as María del Rosario Enríquez, then Academic Vice-Rector and now UMAR's Rector, who understood the importance of hosting an event of this magnitude for the university's prestige and international projection.

Support also came from ISA's new Executive Director, Dr. MJ Bosia, professor of International Relations at St. Michael's College in Vermont, and ISA President for 2025, Dr. Siba Grovogui, professor of International Relations at Cornell University. Both enthusiastically endorsed the project, and Grovogui emphasized the importance of attending in person.

It was in this context that we, Carla Martínez Machain and Ricardo Villanueva, were appointed co-program chairs by ISA and AMEI, respectively. Carla Martínez, originally from Mexico City, drawing on her experience within the U.S. academic system and her deep knowledge of the workings of ISA and research networks in the United States; Ricardo Villanueva, from his position as a faculty member at the host institution, and with a strong understanding of local dynamics and of AMEI. From the outset, we understood that our task would be not only academic, but also one of bridge-building between different ways of organizing and understanding academic conferences.

Characteristics of the Conference: Portrait of an Epistemic Community

The Conference brought together more than 400 participants, of whom 292 were presenters (in any role: presenter, chair, or discussant) and 146 were attendees without presentations. This presenter-to-attendee ratio (approximately 2:1), while perhaps atypical in countries such as the United States and the United Kingdom, is noteworthy in Mexico, where most conference participants are usually non-presenting attendees (typically students). In this conference, the majority of registrants sought not only to listen, but also to present their work and receive feedback.

Geographic and Institutional Composition

The geographic distribution of participants offers several noteworthy observations. Mexico contributed with 121 participants, followed by the United States with 82. This numerical proximity reflects both the success of the local call for participation and the strong interest of Mexican academia in engaging in an event of this nature, but it may also be interpreted as symptomatic of mobility difficulties faced by U.S.-based scholars in a post-pandemic context and amid budgetary constraints at several universities in that country. Indeed, prior to the Conference, as program chairs, we received numerous cancellation requests due to lack of institutional funding—not only from the United States, but from institutions abroad more generally.

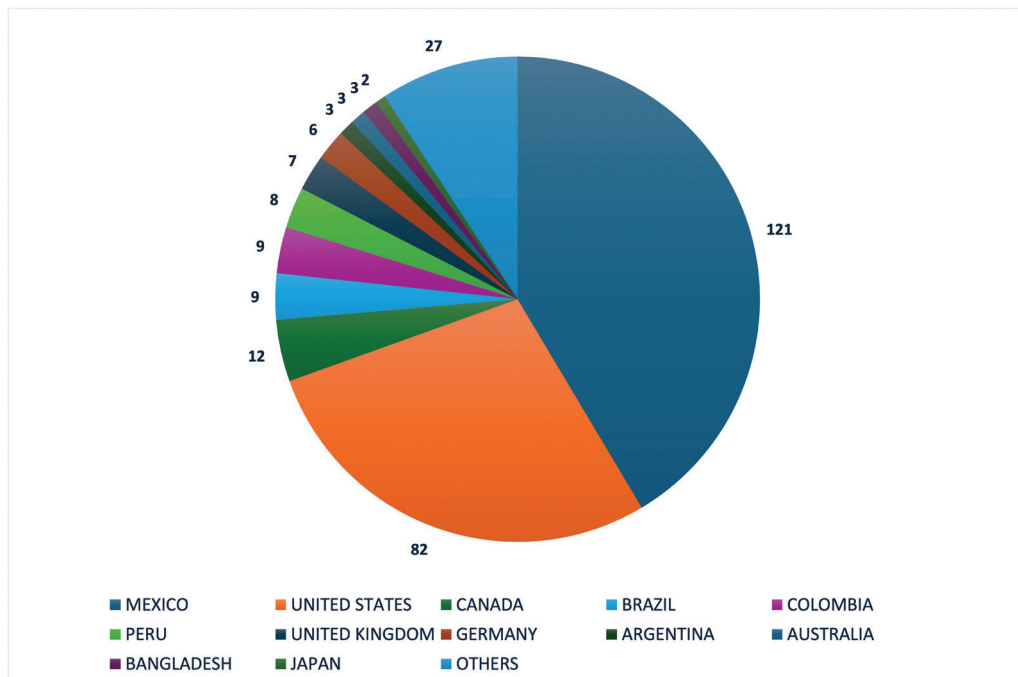
The presence of Canada (12 participants), Brazil (9), Colombia (9), and Peru (8) consolidated the regional character of the event, moving beyond the original bilateral axis and transforming the Conference into a largely hemispheric academic space. Participation from the United Kingdom (7), Germany (6), Australia (3), and Japan (2), while numerically modest, indicates the Conference's capacity to function as a global point of attraction and suggests that interest in Latin America as both an object of study and academic interlocutor extends beyond the continent.

In institutional terms, UNAM led participation with 23 active academic contributors, followed by the host institution UAM with 18, UAM with 12, and the Pontifical

Catholic University of Peru with 8. This is significant: a non-metropolitan public state university located on the coast of Oaxaca and founded only in 1992, while serving as host, emerged as the second most represented institution, surpassing elite private universities and other public institutions with longer academic traditions. This suggests a degree of decentralization in Mexican IR academic life, the vitality of IR programs in Oaxaca, and the commitment of the UMAR academic community to the event.

Figure 1.

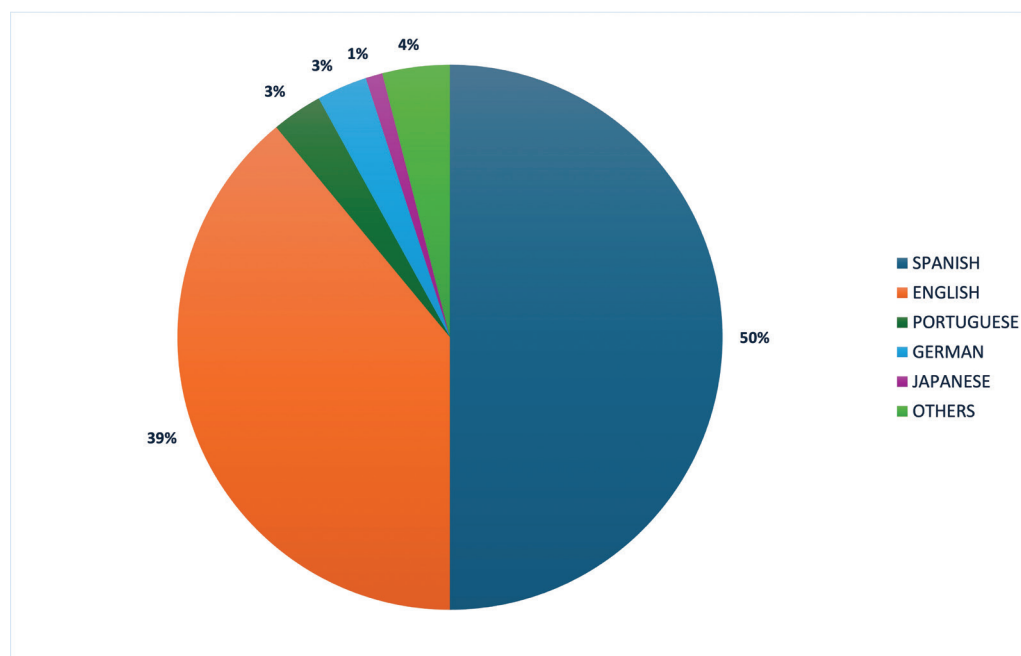
Nationalities of Attendees



Note: Authors' own elaboration.

The geographical diversity of the conference was not purely quantitative. The presence of scholars from countries as diverse as Germany, Australia, Brazil, Canada, the United States, Japan, Mexico, Peru, the United Kingdom, and others, enriched the discussions by exposing participants to different intellectual traditions, methodological approaches, and research questions. This multicultural character generated exchanges that transcended the academic realm —informal conversations in the hallways, shared meals, and conviviality during the cultural events— that contributed to weaving collaborative networks beyond the formal sessions. The diversity of origins enabled the construction of a more inclusive and plural global academic community.

Figure 2.

Languages of the Conference

Note: Author's own elaboration.

Structure and Content of the Academic Program

The academic program, composed of 78 panels and roundtables distributed across 19 simultaneous spaces over three days, was organized around the theme “Positioning Latin America and Mexico in International Relations.” The thematic diversity was broad and reflected several of the principal currents in the contemporary discipline, offering a rich experience for both presenters and attendees. Next, we present a sample of the panels we were able to follow, acknowledging that this is only a very partial selection of the richness of the program.

Latin American Foreign Policy and Bilateral Relations: Panels such as “The Foreign Policy of and Toward Latin American States,” featuring papers by Leslie Wehner (University of Bath), Rodrigo Fracalossi (University of Southampton), Sam Bell (University at Buffalo), among others, analyzed the domestic and international determinants of foreign policy in the region. The panel “Mexico’s Role in Latin American Integration Processes” brought together specialists to explore topics such as the Pacific Alliance’s potential to establish a common policy toward climate change, the ambivalences of environmental certifications—which may result in greenwashing in cases such as Colombia and Guatemala—the strategy of Russia in Mexico and Latin America between 2014 and 2024, and the impact of the

USMCA on economic growth and carbon emissions in Mexico. The panel addressed these phenomena through the lens of South–South and triangular cooperation, evaluating their potential to strengthen the region’s role in the international system. The roundtable “Peru in the New International Scenario” was based on the premise that Peruvian foreign policy has been insufficiently studied, generating widespread lack of knowledge regarding the interests and lines of action of the Andean country’s diplomacy, while underscoring the importance of analyzing this Latin American country whose regional and global dynamics carry broader implications.

Theory and Disciplinary History: One of the most compelling panels was “Los mitos de RRII / The Myths of IR,” featuring Brian C. Schmidt (Carleton University), David J. Sarquis (UMAR), David Jorge (El Colegio de México), and Alberto Lozano-Vázquez (UMAR). Schmidt, one of the discipline’s most renowned revisionist historians, presented a version of his work on the myth of the First Great Debate and liberal idealism, while Sarquis challenged the myth of anarchy, Jorge revisited the myths surrounding the failure of the League of Nations, and Lozano problematized the epistemological myth of 1919. Seeing Schmidt engage in dialogue with Mexican scholars in an auditorium constituted a powerful image of the intellectual horizontality experienced throughout the Conference. Moreover, this panel served as the foundation for a collective volume expected to be published in 2026, demonstrating the Conference’s capacity to generate concrete academic outputs.

Critical Approaches and Southern Epistemologies: One of the most innovative aspects of the program was the inclusion of panels that challenged the Eurocentric assumptions of the discipline. “Feminist Security Studies in Abya Yala” brought together scholars to discuss the contributions of Latin American feminism to security studies. “The New Politics of Gender and Feminism” explored gender inequalities in areas such as digital access, education, criminal law, reproductive rights, and foreign policy in Latin America. Adopting a multidisciplinary perspective, the presentations highlighted the structural challenges that persist within neoliberal frameworks and contemporary feminist agendas, revealing how sociopolitical structures both reproduce and resist gender-based precarity. Likewise, the panel “The Future of Theory in International Relations: Critical Perspectives from Mexico” offered a critical reflection on IR theory. Participants put forward critical perspectives that challenge dominant theoretical, methodological, and epistemological foundations, while also debating the relevance of contributions emerging from Mexico. The panel was moderated by César Villanueva and featured the distinguished participation of Eduardo Tzili Apango, Jaqueline Briceño Montes, and Salimah Monica Cossens.

Environment and Climate Change: The climate crisis occupied a central place in the program. Panels such as “The Effects of Climate Change on Populations” and

“Green Energy Transition in Latin America” addressed, from different perspectives, the environmental challenges facing the region. Beyond the panel sessions, the presentation of Lourdes Alonso-Serna’s book *Political Economy of Renewable Energies in Latin America* (2024) stood out, as it analyzes the contradictions of the energy transition in contexts of extractivism. Meanwhile, the panel “Global Environmental Politics” offered a complementary perspective by examining the legal and institutional dimensions of environmental governance, with presentations analyzing the framework of the CITES Convention and its influence on international trade, law as a tool for environmental protection, the evolution of the environment as a human right, the urgency of transitioning toward sustainable development models, and marine pollution caused by oil tankers alongside the institutional limitations in addressing it. Taken together, these sessions underscored the need to approach the environmental crisis from an interdisciplinary perspective.

Migration, Latin America, and Human Mobility: The complexity of contemporary migration flows was addressed in the panel “Crossing Borders: Challenges and Responses to African, Turkish and Latin American Migration,” which examined the intersections between migration, health, and identity in contexts of mobility. The presentations analyzed issues ranging from the journey of Turkish migrants through Mexico toward the United States, the precarious conditions faced by unaccompanied minors under militarized border policies, and the fragility of temporary protection for displaced populations in Turkey and Colombia, to the impact of chronic illnesses —such as diabetes in rural Guatemala— on land dispossession and forced migration.

Geopolitics and Latin America: The reconfiguration of the global order and its implications for the region were analyzed in several panels. The panel “Latin America in the Face of China’s Rise” examined the region’s positioning amid strategic competition between China and the United States, with particular emphasis on technological and geopolitical dimensions. Through case studies on Brazil, Central America, and perceptions surrounding Taiwan, presenters analyzed the dynamics of Chinese geodigital power, the possibilities for regional cooperation, and the regulatory challenges emerging from the growing presence of Chinese firms and capital in strategic sectors. Likewise, the roundtable “Geopolitics of Migration: Global Interests and Challenges” explored the increasing centrality of migration in international agendas, analyzing how states use migration as a diplomatic instrument to project power and territorial control, often in tension with human rights. Taken together, both sessions demonstrated how extra-hemispheric actors —whether through investment, technology, or migration diplomacy— are reshaping Latin America’s geopolitical space, compelling the region’s countries to navigate between great-power competition and their own development and stability agendas.

Training and Professional Development Activities: Aware of the structural asymmetries faced by Latin American scholars in accessing global academic networks, we promoted specific training and mentoring activities. The session “Demystifying the Peer Review Process: A Bilingual Café for Latin American and Early Career Scholars” offered an informal roundtable setting in which attendees were able to interact directly with editors of high-impact English-language academic journals, rotating among tables to gain diverse perspectives on the peer review process. In a complementary initiative, the roundtable “Meeting of Authors and Editors of Indexed and High-Impact International Relations Journals: Recommendations for Publishing from the Global South” brought together prominent editors with the specific aim of providing concrete recommendations —what to do and what to avoid— to improve the chances of favorable evaluations for articles submitted from the Global South. Finally, the “ISA Journal ‘Meet the Editors’ Roundtable” offered an additional opportunity for Latin American scholars and early-career researchers to learn about the mission and publication priorities of ISA’s leading journals, receive practical advice on manuscript submission, and participate in open discussion and Q&A. Collectively, these spaces proved especially relevant in a context where academic evaluation systems in Latin America increasingly demand publication in indexed journals, despite the absence of systematic training mechanisms in this area. High attendance and the quality of the questions posed demonstrated both the strong interest in and the need for these types of professional development initiatives.

The Keynote Address

The selection of the keynote speaker was one of our most significant symbolic decisions. After several deliberations and with the advice of Dr. Adriana Ortega, we chose Dr. Andrea Oelsner (University of San Andrés, Argentina). Her career embodied the spirit of the Conference: a Latin American scholar trained at the London School of Economics, who taught for fifteen years at the University of Aberdeen (Scotland) and ultimately chose to return to her home country to contribute to the development of the discipline from Argentina. Her keynote lecture, “Peace and Conflict in an Illiberal World: Position of and Opportunities for Latin America,” began from a fundamental premise: the crisis of the liberal order is not a recent phenomenon, but rather one with deep historical roots that must be understood in order to analyze its consequences for international politics, particularly in the areas of conflict and security. Building on this diagnosis, Oelsner assessed the state of violence in Latin America and argued that the region possesses both the space and the opportunity to contribute significantly to international peace and security. To this end, she drew upon Latin America’s long tradition of peaceful dispute resolution and highlighted the diversity of peacebuilders and international jurists who have emerged from the region, proposing that these foundations can serve as a platform for a more prominent international role in the current global context.

Logistics and Operations

A rigorous analysis of a conference of this nature cannot overlook its material dimension. Transforming a university campus —designed for the everyday life of students and faculty— into an international convention center for three days entails considerable logistical challenges. This section outlines some of the principal challenges and the ways in which they were addressed.

Adaptation of Spaces

The first challenge involved mapping and adapting the more than twenty spaces that would host the Conference's activities.

The spaces utilized included:

- *Isidro Fabela's Institute of International Studies*: With its meeting room (28-person capacity), reading room (60), and archive room (30), it hosted smaller and more intimate panels, including the academic publishers' exhibition on the ground floor.
- *Regular Classrooms*: Fifteen classrooms ("aulas") were adapted with capacities ranging from 35 to 85 people. Room 22 was reserved exclusively for the Editors' Café, while Room 29 (85-person capacity) and Room 36 (85-person capacity) were among the most frequently used.
- *Auditorium*: With a capacity of 220, it hosted high-attendance panels and several roundtables.
- *Multipurpose Hall*: With a capacity of 480, it served as the venue for the opening ceremony, keynote address, closing ceremony, and cultural events.
- *Library*: Its reading and silent study rooms (50-person capacity each) provided quiet, air-conditioned spaces for panels.
- *Mathematics Conference Room*: With a capacity of 60, it was used intensively throughout the three days.

Another challenge was the temporary partitioning of the Fabela Archive Hall (upper floor), an open-plan space that required compartmentalization to create a more intimate and acoustically suitable environment for panel discussions. With the assistance of maintenance staff, partitions and curtains were installed, completely transforming the room into a functional and aesthetically pleasing venue.

Volunteer and Service Management

Operational success depended heavily on an army of volunteers: approximately 70 undergraduate International Relations students from UMAR, skillfully coordinated by Lucero Ruiz Guzmán. In the weeks leading up to the event, Ruiz organized training meetings, assigned specific roles (classroom support, transportation, registration,

information services, and cultural event logistics), and created an instant messaging group that proved vital for communication throughout the three days.

The volunteers were the welcoming faces who guided participants, resolved technical issues in classrooms (many brought their own laptops to ensure projector functionality), managed registration, and participated in cultural events. Seeing students confidently guide renowned international professors was a powerful demonstration of institutional commitment and of the human capital cultivated at UMAR.

The ISA staff, which included Adelina Mkami, Jennifer Fontanella, Nichole Page and Lauren Pérez Bonilla, were also essential to the Conference's success. The latter three were present throughout the event. They staffed the registration desk and supported both the volunteers and the co-program chairs, answering questions and adjusting the program whenever necessary.

Transportation and Mobility

Because UMAR's campus is located several kilometers from Huatulco's hotel zone, a detailed transportation plan was essential. The following arrangements were coordinated:

- *A van for ISA staff*, providing transportation to and from their accommodations, including airport pickup and daily transfers during the Conference.
- *A van for AMEI staff*, providing transportation to and from their accommodations.
- *A shuttle bus for general participants*, with daily departures from UMAR to downtown Huatulco at 12:25 p.m. and return service at 2:00 p.m., as well as departures at the end of each day's activities (7:00 p.m. on Wednesday and Friday; 7:30 p.m. on Thursday).

Flight coordination constituted another logistical challenge. A detailed matrix was prepared listing the arrival and departure flights of key participants, including the keynote speaker and the ISA President. There were moments of tension when, only days before the Conference, the ISA President's flight had still not been confirmed, complicating transportation assignments and podium planning. The issue was ultimately resolved, but it served as a reminder that in organizing international events, flexibility is just as important as planning. It is important to acknowledge and express our gratitude for the valuable support of Irma Guadalupe González, Head of Public Relations at UMAR, who diligently coordinated the transportation logistics, even on non-working days and beyond regular working hours.

Registration, Equipment, and General Services

Participant registration was located in a corridor in front of the Rector's Office, beneath a rented permanent canopy to provide protection from the sun and possible rain. Three tables with institutional tablecloths were installed, along with chairs for registration staff,

queue-guiding posts with divider straps to organize lines, and signage indicating the different participant categories. Electrical extensions and power strips were provided for registration laptops, and Wi-Fi access was made available in the area.

Food and beverage management —efficiently coordinated by Pedro González Olvera on behalf of UMAR and Isaac Flores for AMEI— included the installation of water dispensers at strategic points (next to the registration desk, at the entrance to the Multipurpose Hall, and in the exhibitor area), as well as the organization of coffee breaks and receptions. Special mention should be made of the Thursday evening reception following the keynote address, held under a dedicated tent outside the auditorium, which fostered convivial interaction among participants.

Cultural Events: Integration and Local Relevance

A distinguishing feature of this Conference was its emphasis on cultural integration. The afternoons of Wednesday and Friday were filled with color and rhythm through performances of traditional Oaxacan folk dances.

On Wednesday, June 4, after the afternoon sessions, performances included:

- “Calenda,” performed by three dance groups featuring sones from Tlahuitoltepec
- “Dance of the Isthmus of Tehuantepec,” performed by Folclor y Cultura de Huatulco
- “El Palomo Miahuateco,” performed by the dance group from Miahuatlán de Porfirio Díaz
- “Sones and Chilenas from Pochutla,” performed by the UMAR Dance Club

On Friday, June 6, following the closing ceremony, performances included:

- “Sones and Chilenas from Pinotepa,” performed by Folclor y Cultura de Huatulco
- “Jarabe Mixteco,” performed by the Miahuatlán dance group
- “Sones and Chilenas from Putla,” performed by Folclor y Cultura de Huatulco

Special recognition should be given to UMAR International Relations students Maori Zea and Alicia Pérez, who not only participated in the performances but also contributed to the organization of the cultural events. The success of these events was also made possible thanks to the key contributions of Irma González, Head of Public Relations, and Ana Isabel Ramírez, Head of Academic Management at UMAR.

These performances more than acts of entertainment, were a statement of intent: we were in Oaxaca, and the region’s cultural richness was an inherent part of the academic experience. Seeing international scholars enjoy, interact with, and in many cases dance alongside the performers —while sharing Mexican food during the receptions— was perhaps the clearest indicator of the event’s success in fostering community and creating a hospitable environment.

Thus, these activities, far from being mere complements to the academic program, were core components of the conference experience. The warmth of the reception, the natural and cultural setting of Huatulco, as well as the enthusiastic participation of students and volunteers, generated an atmosphere of integration that transcended the academic realm and favored the construction of a more cohesive community of internationalists. The cultural dimension of the conference was not a decoration, but a factor that contributed significantly to the success of the gathering.

Implications for International Affairs and the Discipline of IR

The Joint AMEI–ISA Conference was not an end in itself, but rather a means of influencing the position occupied by Latin America and Mexico in the practice of international affairs and within the discipline of International Relations. We identify at least five major implications.

The Visibility of Latin American Academic Production

For decades, the discipline of IR has operated under a center–periphery dynamic in which theories produced in the Global North are applied to Southern realities, while theorizing originating from the region itself is rarely recognized. This phenomenon has been extensively documented by authors such as Tickner and Wæver (2009), Acharya (2014), and Villanueva and González (2023), who have analyzed the marginalization of international thought produced outside the English-speaking world.

The Conference in Huatulco helped challenge this asymmetry in several ways. First, panels such as “The Myths of IR” demonstrated that a critical mass of Latin American scholars exists who not only consume theory, but also produce, question, and reinvent it from their own epistemological frameworks. The presence of Brian Schmidt —a widely recognized figure in the discipline— debating on equal terms with Mexican scholars about anarchy and the myth of 1919 served as an illustrative representation of the intellectual horizontality experienced throughout the Conference, countering the traditional narrative that portrays the periphery as a mere recipient of knowledge.

Second, the proliferation of Spanish-language panels (approximately 40% of the program) and the emphasis on Latin American topics helped normalize the idea that theory can be produced from and about Latin America. Finally, Andrea Oelsner’s keynote address demonstrated that Latin American diplomatic practice —with its emphasis on mediation, friendship, and international law— has generated concepts that could enrich mainstream theory and constitutes a significant contribution to the debate on disciplinary plurality.

The Construction of South–North and South–South Collaboration Networks

The Conference facilitated encounters among scholars from Mexico, the United States, Canada, Brazil, Peru, Colombia, Argentina, and beyond. These networks are not merely social; they serve as mechanisms for future joint research, collaborative publications, academic mobility, and interinstitutional research projects.

The Conference represented a space for institutional articulation between two academic communities with distinct trajectories and intellectual traditions: AMEI, primarily Latin American, and ISA, with its predominantly U.S. character. The convergence between both associations transcended the mere organization of an event; it constituted an exercise in academic diplomacy that enabled dialogue among different epistemic communities, research agendas, and professional experiences. In this sense, the conference was a laboratory of international scholarly cooperation that demonstrates the possibility of building bridges across diverse intellectual traditions.

Roundtables with ISA journal editors opened channels of communication that may translate into a greater presence of Latin American authors in high-impact journals. During these sessions, several Latin American scholars received direct feedback on their manuscripts and established contacts that may result in future publications. Such interactions, though intangible, are crucial for ensuring that the region's voices reach global audiences.

Likewise, the gathering of scholars from different countries in the region strengthened South–South collaboration. For example, the National University of Costa Rica and AMEI deepened their relationship to the point that it has already produced at least one joint event in Costa Rica. These ties are fundamental to building a stronger regional academic community.

The Training of New Generations of Internationalists

The participation of graduate students not only as attendees, but also as volunteers and presenters in Early Career Scholars panels, carries important implications for the discipline in Mexico and Latin America. These young scholars experienced immersion in a professional academic community that may shape their future career trajectories.

For many, this was their first international conference; for others, it was their first opportunity to present their work in a bilingual and multicultural environment, receive feedback from established scholars, and establish international contacts. The panel “Early Career Scholar International Relations: Environment I,” for example, brought together seven UMAR students who presented research on topics such as marine pollution, climate change, and environmental law, with experienced discussants providing detailed and constructive feedback.

The volunteer experience was equally formative. More than seventy students involved in the organization acquired skills in event management, intercultural communication, problem-solving, and teamwork that complement their academic training.

The Decentralization of Mexican Academic Life

That a public state university located on the coast of Oaxaca served as host for a conference of this magnitude sends an important message: academic excellence is not the exclusive domain of major metropolitan centers (such as Mexico City, Monterrey, Guadalajara, and Puebla) nor of elite private universities. UMAR demonstrated that it is possible to organize a world-class event with professionalism and warmth, opening the door for future editions to explore venues beyond the traditional academic centers. This is particularly significant in a country where academic centralization has long been considerable. The Huatulco Conference contributed to expanding opportunities for collaboration for institutions located outside the country's metropolitan hubs.

The Affirmation of a Regional Research Agenda

Finally, the Conference helped affirm a research agenda centered on problems and questions relevant to Latin America—one that engages with global debates without subordinating itself to them. Some of the program's central themes—extractivism and the energy transition, migration and human mobility, feminisms and Southern epistemologies, China's presence in the region, citizen security, and criminal violence—reflect the core concerns of contemporary Latin American societies. Addressing these issues from Latin America is not parochialism, but rather a necessary contribution to their global understanding. It is part of what Acharya (2014) has called “Global IR” and what other scholars have posited as a necessary “decolonization” of the discipline (Grovogui, 2006; Sabaratnam, 2011), in which the experiences and questions from the periphery serve as sources of theoretical production.

Final Reflections: The Future of Inter-American Dialogue

From a disciplinary perspective, this Conference in Huatulco offers empirical evidence that the production of knowledge in IR is not exhausted in the hegemonic centers of the Global North. The experience documented here suggests that academic conferences, far from being mere exchanges of research findings, constitute practices of knowledge production that can challenge established epistemic hierarchies. The visibility of Latin American contributions, the construction of South-South networks, and the decentralization of Mexican academic life are not merely organizational achievements, but indicators of changes in the dynamics of knowledge production in IR. This Conference evidences the need to recognize the multiplicity of perspectives emerging from peripheral contexts, thus contributing to a more

plural discipline less dependent on dominant narratives. In this sense, the five implications identified are concrete manifestations of how an academic conference can help challenge center-periphery hierarchies and open spaces for epistemic plurality.

In short and in response to the research question guiding this article, the Joint AMEI–ISA Conference contributed to challenging center-periphery hierarchies by making Latin American academic production visible, horizontalizing dialogue with canonical figures of the discipline, and affirming a regional research agenda that engages with global debates. Its implications for the positioning of Latin America include the construction of South–South and South–North networks, the formation of new generations of internationalists, and the decentralization of internationalist academia in Mexico.

The Conference was much more than the sum of its panels and activities. It represented both the reactivation of a tradition spanning more than four decades and its updating for the twenty-first century. In reflecting on the event as co-program chairs, we identify several achievements as well as future challenges.

Achievements

1. *Visibility of Latin American Academic Contributions:* The Conference placed Latin America's theoretical, historical, and practical contributions at the center of debate, demonstrating that the region has much to offer not only as an object of study, but also as a producer of knowledge.
2. *Construction of Collaboration Networks:* Bridges were built between Mexican academia and ISA's global network, while South–South collaboration was strengthened.
3. *Training of New Generations:* The substantial participation of students—as volunteers and presenters—planted an essential seed for the development of an academic community more conscious of its role in the world.
4. *Academic Decentralization:* UMAR's success as host demonstrated that public state universities can lead world-class events, contributing to the dismantling of academic centralization in Mexico.
5. *Affirmation of a Regional Agenda:* The Conference contributed to consolidating a research agenda centered on issues relevant to Latin America, one that engages with global debates from a situated perspective.

Challenges

1. *Frequency of the Meetings:* The success of Huatulco 2025 raises the question of whether we should wait nearly two decades (the previous ISA-AMEI Conference,

held in Cancún, took place in 2008) for the next joint conference. Institutionalizing these meetings on a more frequent basis could consolidate the progress achieved and strengthen collaborative networks.

2. *Accessibility and Inclusion:* It is necessary to reflect on how to make these events more accessible to scholars from universities with limited resources, graduate students, and colleagues from countries with lower institutional capacities. Travel grants, fee waivers, and institutional support are crucial in this regard.
3. *Linguistic Balance:* Although the conference was officially bilingual, asymmetries persist between those who are able to present in English and those who do so in Spanish. Continued efforts are needed to develop translation mechanisms that facilitate participation in both languages without creating a disadvantage for either group.
4. *Follow-up on the Networks Created:* The true success of the conference will be measured by what happens afterward: joint research projects, collaborative publications, academic mobility, and sustained networks of cooperation. It is necessary to strengthen the networks that emerged during the event.
5. *Epistemological Reflection:* Beyond the inclusion of peripheral voices, the Conference raises the need to question the very criteria for validating knowledge in IR. What constitutes valid or acceptable knowledge? The Conference opens the door to these types of questions, but requires critical engagement that interrogates the foundations of the discipline, so that plurality is not merely a gesture of inclusion, but an effective transformation of the modes of knowledge production.

On a personal level, serving as co-program chairs of this conference has been a transformative experience. For Ricardo Villanueva, it represented the culmination of intense months of work at his own university, the pride of seeing his campus and region host a global event, and the confirmation that collective effort can overcome any logistical obstacle. Witnessing his colleagues and students at UMAR engaged, enthusiastic, and professional was a source of immense satisfaction and proof that the Mexican public university remains vibrant and capable of achieving great things.

For Carla Martínez, it represented a unique opportunity for sustained collaborative work and for reconnecting with her Mexican academic roots from her position in the United States, as well as for witnessing firsthand the vitality and rigor of the research being produced in Mexico. Participating in the construction of a bridge between the two academic communities that have shaped her career was a deeply meaningful experience, one that reinforces her commitment to continuing to build ties and facilitate dialogue.

We agree that, beyond titles, institutional affiliations, and productivity indicators, these gatherings are spaces for the construction of epistemic communities where the personal and the professional intertwine, and what made this conference truly remarkable was the warmth of its participants: the volunteers who worked tirelessly from early morning until late at night to set up rooms and register attendees; the presenters who, in some cases, traveled thousands of miles to share their work; the mentors who dedicated their time to the development of young scholars; the dancers who shared their art; and the support staff who resolved every unforeseen challenge with the resources available.

The legacy of Modesto Seara Vázquez is not merely one of buildings and institution-building, but of vision. This conference demonstrated that, through collective effort and a clear sense of purpose, it is possible to continue positioning Mexico and Latin America at the center of International Relations.

The curtain has fallen in Huatulco, but the collective endeavor of rethinking the discipline from the Global South has only just begun. May future conferences—in Mexico, in Latin America, and throughout the Global South—carry forward this legacy and take it even further. 🌿

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