

Graphic introductory reports - accompanying texts - English

Preliminary note: this text was translated from the original German using a translation program. We apologize for any errors or inaccuracies.

00 – Introduction

Welcome to terralat – the digital Latin America museum. In the following tour you will get an impression of Latin American realities. You will move through four exhibition rooms and some side rooms on the topics of natural areas of Latin America, history of Latin America, indigenusness in Latin America and, finally, Latin America in dialogue. Each topic and side room begins with a graphic introductory report that offers you an insight into the topics.

You will then find an object gallery with a selection of digital objects in different exhibition variants, such as digital showcases in a classic exhibition style, digiramas - i.e. digital dioramas, and audiovisual display methods.

These are provided with introductory texts that are gradually expanded and adapted. The comment function with integrated translation function allows you to communicate and discuss with other visitors and the museum itself.

In the media library you will find the graphic elements and other documents such as text files and AR models as well as podcasts for free download in the future.

We look forward to your feedback in our guestbook!

You can also follow us on our social media channels and subscribe to our newsletter to stay up to date on topics related to Latin America and the museum itself.

Contact us via the contact form or by email to provide feedback or make a cooperation request.

Thank you for your visit and welcome to digital Latin America!

01 – Natural areas of Latin America

Latin America is characterized by diversity and extremes. Almost limitless expanses and bizarre landscapes such as the Salar de Uyuni, the largest salt lake in the world, can be found there, as can some of the highest mountains on our planet. With the Andes being part of the longest mountain range in the world.

The richest river in the world, the Amazon, is home to a variety of animal and plant species. The tropical rainforest along the extensive river system is called the lungs of the earth - but is

threatened by massive deforestation and soil exploitation.

In Latin America you will find deserts, mountains, coasts and canyons, subarctic climates, tropical climates, island paradises and ice landscapes. It is the origin of a large number of today's cultivated plants such as tomatoes, chili, corn, cocoa and potatoes and thus also shapes the culinary and food supply around the world.

It is home to fascinating creatures such as the Andean condor, pink river dolphins and the axolotl.

The landscapes, flora and fauna continue to inspire researchers and writers alike today. And of course the residents.

02. History of Latin America

The history of Latin America is far deeper and more complex than it appears to be through European-influenced historiography.

Due to the conquest, missionization and migration, not only our own historical traditions and biographies were partially lost, but also knowledge about the respective environment.

Nevertheless, some fascinating stories and developments survived, which are still being researched and interpreted in an interdisciplinary manner today. This includes the study of past indigenous cultures as well as the study of indigenous cultures that have survived and changed, such as the Maya, Aztecs, Guaraní, Quechua, Aymara and Mapuche, and of identities that have only developed in the recent past, such as the Chicano culture in the USA.

02.1 Ancient America

Today we call Old America the America of the time before the arrival of Christopher Columbus and the subsequent colonization. It is important to note that Latin America is a European construct and describes a space in which groups lived, some of which had no contact with or knowledge of one another.

People settled extensively on the double continent of America. The specific climatic and natural conditions significantly shaped the cultural achievements and traditions. From the 16th century onwards, the Spanish colonial empire not only covered large parts of what is now Latin America, but also parts of the Pacific, such as the Philippines. This can still be seen today in the linguistic influence of Spanish loanwords.

Graphic introductory reports - accompanying texts - English

This construct also means that Easter Island, which today belongs to Chile, belongs to Latin America, although it is located in Polynesia. The modern construct of Latin America also shapes our view of ancient America.

02.2 The so-called discovery and European development

From a European perspective, America was discovered by Columbus. The groups encountered naturally had knowledge of their immediate and sometimes distant surroundings. These were essential for the European conquerors - as well as the support of the local elites - as this was the only way they could even begin the strenuous explorations, let alone survive. Who exactly first settled the two Americas and what contacts there were with the Polynesian region are still a mystery to research today.

02.3 Conquista, colonialism and colonial legacy

The Conquista refers to the subjugation and conquest of the so-called New World, particularly by the Spanish. The Conquista would not have been possible without the support of the local population. Through changing alliances, Latin America was finally conquered and subjugated almost entirely by the Europeans.

In times of colonialism, the conquistadors - i.e. the conquerors - often used local structures to enforce their rule. This includes, for example, the encomienda system for work organization and distribution of tasks.

The conquistadors were preceded in their conquests by diseases that had mostly been brought in from Europe. Many indigenous people died from this before they even saw a European.

The structures of colonialism are still noticeable in Latin America today. For example, in Chiquita's banana production. The company is also known locally as el pulpo, the octopus, because its political and economic sphere of influence is very large and can intervene anywhere. The term "banana republic" also goes back to the machinations of the company and its predecessor, United Fruit.

02.4 Discoveries and Expeditions

European historical tradition names a large number of explorers and famous expeditions. The so-called explorer Columbus was followed by many conquistadors who conquered and

subjugated the new land with the help of local groups and alliances.

Afterwards there were many more expeditions and voyages of discovery by Europeans. These would not have been possible without the help of the local population. However, in contrast to the European explorers, local helpers are mostly unknown today.

Exceptions such as that of Malinche, who acted as interpreter of Cortez and the conquest of the Aztec Empire, therefore only provide a small insight into the roles of the local helpers. Even in Latin America, it is mainly European explorers who are known to this day. These include names such as Alexander von Humboldt, Fernando Magellan and Amerigo Vespucci. Their expeditions and voyages of discovery were certainly arduous, full of hardship and certainly represented remarkable achievements. But when viewed in this way, it is generally forgotten who made these achievements possible. The countless unnamed local helpers.

02.5 Independence, reforms & revolutions, autocracies & democracies

When you think of Latin America, you often think of so-called banana republics and politically unstable regions and regimes.

In fact, in the eventful history of Latin America, various upheavals and regime changes have occurred again and again, some of which can still be traced back to the conquest by the Europeans or are related to European politics. In the first half of the 19th century, almost 50 years after the United States, independence movements emerged in the Americas, starting with Haiti, which led to the formation of today's states. The libertador Simón Bolívar, after whom the state of Bolivia was named, but who was also involved in many other struggles for independence, achieved particular fame.

Revolutions were often associated with important reforms that are still noticeable today, such as the agrarian reform of 1953 in Bolivia, which followed the revolution in 1952.

In addition, there were repeated coups and coups, such as the CIA-supported coup of the democratically elected President Allende by Pinochet, which installed an authoritarian and criminal regime and had a lasting influence on today's democratic Chile.

Despite the politically unstable situation in parts of Latin America, it should not be forgotten that many of the Latin American countries are older

Graphic introductory reports - accompanying texts - English

democracies than those of many European countries.

02.6 Pan-Americanism and modern Latin America

Pan-Americanism is a collective term for movements that, among other things, pursue common economic, political and social goals. The idea of Pan-Americanism is an old one and has been revisited again and again by different actors with different motives. What is important is the identity-creating idea that transcends national borders. The Pan-American Highway is emblematic of this - a 48,000 km long highway network that stretches from southernmost South America to Alaska. It is completely navigable except for a 90km long section on the Isthmus of Darién in Panama.

Today's Latin America combines tradition and modernity. Today, in many regions such as Guatemala, hand-made traditional costumes are still part of the street scene, while at the same time there is usually a modern telecommunications network. Research and modern mobility concepts such as Mi Teleférico, the longest urban cable car network in the world with over 30,000km in La Paz, can be found in Latin America, as can autochthonous music and traditional dances and sounds alongside modern ones.

In general, different forms have developed in art, which can be traced back to different influences, causes and biographies. The Mexican painter Diego Rivera worked in Europe and the USA before returning to Mexico. There, for example, he was in contact with Picasso and adapted various styles. The famous painter Frida Kahlo, an icon of modern art, had a German father. Singer Shakira's father is of Lebanese origin, while her mother is Colombian with Spanish-Catalan roots. Socially and ethnically, Latin America forms a diverse mosaic. In addition to the descendants of indigenous and European people, the descendants of African slaves should not be neglected. In addition to Brazil and the USA, the Caribbean also plays an important role. In addition, in Argentina, for example, there is a society that was heavily influenced by Italian immigrants. Currently, Chinese, mostly migrant workers, also play an important role in infrastructure projects such as roads and mining and in the telecommunications industry.

The diversity and diversity of the various social and ethnic groups led to various ethnogenesis and thus to a wide variety of cultural expressions

and mixed forms, which, despite their differences, form the overall picture of Latin America.

03. Indigeneity in Latin America

The cultural area of Latin America is just as diverse as the natural area. Already at the beginning of the European conquest, the conquistadors encountered local groups, world views and cultural achievements. These groups are referred to as indigenous. It is a collective name for different groups that settled the various regions before the arrival of the Europeans.

However, as a result of the subjugation of local groups by the Europeans, not only did numerous cultures perish through military subjugation and the importation of European diseases, but also many cultural achievements and local knowledge.

Contrary to popular opinion, there is still a great deal of cultural diversity, including indigenous ones, throughout Latin America. It is therefore wrong to speak of lost cultures, but rather of changing cultures that were never static and always adapt to new circumstances. They are therefore part of a social mosaic and enrich plural societies through art, crafts, languages, world views and their own historical traditions.

03.1 Creation myths

Their creation myths are as diverse as the cultures. From peoples climbing from one world to the next and worlds destroyed and reshaped by gods to the biblical story of creation. All these versions explain their environment and how it is used harmoniously by humans. Rituals and other forms of expression of faith serve to create and maintain balance and harmony and still play an important role in the lives of rural populations in particular today.

03.2 Fairy tales and myths

In addition to the respective forms of creation, there are numerous other myths and fairy tales. These have important cultural meanings and explain relationships with flora, fauna and people. In addition, fairy tales and myths convey ideological processes, local knowledge and one's own history. They explain people in the context of their surroundings.

03.3 Worldview, tradition, cosmovision and medicine

Worldview, tradition, cosmovision and medicine often form a unity in indigenous Latin American

Graphic introductory reports - accompanying texts - English

cultures. They influence each other and are not viewed as independent social phenomena, as is the case with Western societies.

However, they definitely shape the image of society and also the majority and popular culture, such as the Mexican Día de los Muertos or the coca plant in the Andean region.

03.4 Cultural assets - arts and crafts

Crafts and art shape Latin American societies in many different ways. You can find indigenous handicrafts such as vases and cups, but also textiles such as cloths and clothing, at almost every market. The different patterns and colors can be assigned to specific local groups and regions.

Modern art provides an individual insight into the indigenous world and worldview through the respective artist. In addition, lively art scenes have developed that can be found throughout Latin America, from jungle villages to megacities such as Sao Paulo.

03.5 Music, dance and costume

Music and dance represent our own cultural achievements and are often part of our own historical tradition and processing. They make references to the Conquista and their own worldview and history.

Music is often made with so-called autochthonous instruments as well as instruments of Western origin.

In addition, there are numerous traditional costumes that are used both in everyday life and on special occasions, such as dancing, playing music or performing certain rituals. These are decorated with local patterns and certain colors, which also convey certain content or represent a certain region. These include, among other things, symbols for flora and fauna.

03.6 Indigenous modernity

Western media and beliefs often give the impression that indigenous societies live in the past. Their everyday and cultural life as well as their traditions are conveyed as something static. Indigenous societies not only have their own history and their own historical tradition, but also their own demands on modernity. They are part of modernity, just like all other societies: they are networked,

participate politically and have their own modern channels such as TV and radio stations, social media representations, etc.

They represent themselves legally nationally and internationally, demand rights and the observance and preservation of their rights, culture and environment.

Indigenous groups and individuals ultimately decide for themselves whether and how they will participate in what we commonly see as the modern world.

04. Latin America in dialogue

Latin America and its subregions are in contact with various other regions of the world in various ways. This can involve political, economic or cultural cooperation.

In addition to the USA, Europe also traditionally plays an important role politically and economically. However, their influence has recently waned in favor of other political and economic powers such as China and Russia. This also has to do with the stigmatization of Latin American people, for example in the USA and their migration policy, which is why people are also looking for other partners in Latin America. Here too, postcolonial structures play an important role in understanding the region more closely.

China in particular is, among other things, massively expanding its sphere of influence in Latin America. Through numerous economic cooperations, political influence is growing significantly. Historically, Latin America plays an important role for Germany. Not only did National Socialists like Klaus Barbie flee to various Latin American countries after the fall of Nazi Germany and make a career there, but also the Honeckers, for example, after the decline of the GDR.

Author: Mathias Hartmann

Collaboration: Martin Schultz