



Laboratory of Knowledge

Confronting Inequalities in Latin America: Perspectives on Wealth and Power

Call for fellowships "Wealth, power, and nature"

Deadline: July 02, 2021

Natural resources have played a vital role in the history of Latin America and have molded the configuration and scale of social inequalities in the region. Since Colonization, the exploitation and exports of raw materials like silver, copper, soy and crude oil have shaped societies, political systems as well as the national economies of the continent. In this regard, the wealth of natural resources in Latin America, its significance for the world market and, most importantly, recurring resource revenues have stirred up hopes and expectations regarding economic development. As the example of the latest commodity boom shows, in which prices for natural resources on the world market climbed to historically high levels, such developmental fantasies mostly have fallen short of expectations – despite some success and regional variation. Even more so, while several countries sought to overcome natural resource dependency in the past, natural resource driven and export-led development remains one central pattern and strategy for development in the region.

The exploitation, export and transportation of natural resources in Latin America has brought about a specific economic and social structure that is – to a varying degree and in different historic phases – reliant on the appropriation and allocation of natural resource windfalls. In this regard, the availability of ‘resource rents’ shapes the expectations of economic actors and the institutional setting of the state as well as determines possible pathways for developmental policies such as industrial, infrastructural and labor reforms. In this regard, natural resource dependency and exploitation, as well as the prevalence of rent, have shaped the way wealth is generated and distributed in Latin America. However, the presence of economic and political structures dependent on natural resources has not only altered the way social inequalities are reproduced but also brought about a specific set actors and balance of forces. While, after independence, land holding elites have been able to appropriate most of natural resource during the 20th century, this traditional oligarchy slowly and partially made place for transnational coporations and big *economic groups*. Today a whole set of diverse and often antagonistic actors organize the way nature is exploited.

While research on different models and patters of development – including the role of natural resources – experiences steady attention, the connection to economic elites is lacking. Especially in Latin America, that is characterized by a long-lasting, relative persistent social inequality, however, the questions whether and how economic elites at different scales are



embedded into processes of development and the exploitation of nature, remains pivotal. On the one hand, economic elites group around the control of natural resources and revenue streams, employing diverse strategies to appropriate resource rent. On the other hand, these social actors tend to reproduce and/or deepen already existing social inequalities and power asymmetries. Against this background and in face of socio-ecological crisis it is overdue to analyze the connection between nature, development, social inequalities, and elites in Latin America.

CALAS seeks to advance research in this field by enabling a discussion between diverse academic fields such as political economy, geography, and ecology as well as, elite sociology, anthropology and the humanities. Therefore, CALAS invites senior and junior fellows to present proposals regarding the third research axis of the CALAS-Laboratory II “Wealth, power and nature”. In doing so, the thematic focus lies on researching the interplay between natural resource exploitation and economic elites. How have natural resources, their exploitation, export and according revenue streams shaped Latin American societies? What is the role of economic elites at different scales in this configuration? What are regional, national, and local particularities? And: Under what conditions can Latin American societies overcome one-sided and excessive exploitation of nature? We invite fellows to study such and similar questions regarding the connection of nature, wealth and power by employing new and innovative research designs. Main dimensions of research are:

1. Development, Natural Resources, and Rent

This research dimension is concerned with different patterns and strategies of development based on natural resource exports as well as with possible repercussions for society. The research axis seeks to analyse how the exploitation of natural resources and the generation of economic rent have brought about a specific societal configuration that inscribes itself in institutional settings, political programs, daily discourses, and actor constellations. CALAS invites scholars to discuss the depth of natural resource driven development, the significance of discourses and ideas about nature as well as alternative pathways for more inclusive societies.

2. Economic elites and the exploitation of nature

This second research dimension tackles the question of whether and how the specific patterns of resource exploitation bring about a specific constellation of economic elites. Therefore, the axis seeks to discuss economic and political strategies employed by these elites, the relation between ‘extractive’ elites, land-based elites and other sectorial elites as well as the distinct worldviews and perceptions. Among other things, this includes investment and diversification strategies (e-g- regarding the internal market), intra-elite struggles and specific views and attitudes towards resource exploitation, degradation of nature etc. Interested scholars might also delve into a specific *habitus* of elites in extractivist societies, for example researching their biographies, educational decisions, consumption patterns and lifestyles.

CALAS promotes the exchange between different knowledges at a horizontal level and invites applications from researchers, intellectuals and social actors that take up these two dimensions. The call is open to experts in the fields of social sciences, economics and the



humanities. Research projects can address a wide range of topics, either through case studies and/or within comparative designs. We invite to explore new methodological and theoretical paths and encourage to present experimental and original research designs. Fellows have access to CALAS' various publication formats and actively participate in the research network. They also have the opportunity to publish the results of their research in an edited volume linked to the laboratory of knowledge "*Confronting Inequalities in Latin America: Perspectives on Wealth and Power*".

Conditions of the scholarships:

- A maximum of 8 scholarships for four months will be awarded, distributed between two categories of researchers according to their qualifications and academic experience: senior and junior.
- Fellows must carry out a research at CALAS at the University of Guadalajara, Mexico between January and June 2022. During this period, they may make short stays outside of Guadalajara e.g. to collect data relevant to the research project.
- Applicants must have a PhD and/or have published at least two international academic papers of high quality relevant to the topic of the call.
- Fellows have to participate in the activities and events of CALAS during the period of their fellowship. An interest in a structured exchange with other fellows in regular meetings and working groups is expected.
- Fellows have to publish the results of their projects in the form of a working paper or at least two academic articles and present their findings in public presentations at the CALAS Headquarters and/or its Regional Centres.
- Senior and junior fellows will receive competitive remuneration. They have all the infrastructure of CALAS at their disposal and – if necessary – will receive family support and a fund for research trips.
- CALAS is committed to inclusion and the goal of gender parity and promotes affirmative action policies. We especially welcome applications from qualified individuals with disabilities.

Requirements

- Fill out the [application form](#).
- Motivation letter explaining how the project fits into the Laboratory's research program "*Confronting Inequalities in Latin America: Perspectives on Wealth and Power*"
- Two-page curriculum vitae, including a list of relevant publications.
- A proposal for the research project, including a brief statement of the issue, objectives, methodological strategy, work plan, and timeline. The proposed project should focus on ONE of the dimensions sketched out above. Total length of the proposal: between 3000-4000 words.



Submission of documents:

- Applications (in Spanish, Portuguese or English) should be sent as single pdf-file to the following email address: convocatorias@calas.lat, Reference: Research Grant: Wealth and Power.
- Deadline: July 02, 2021.
- Announcement of selected proposals: September 1, 2021.

The fellowships are subject to funding from the German Federal Ministry of Education and Research. Due to the expected number of applications, rejections cannot be justified.

For more information:

Centro María Sibylla Merian de Estudios Latinoamericanos Avanzados
Dr. Irene Lungo Rodríguez,
tel. +52 33 3819 3000 (ext. 23594),
desigualdades@calas.lat