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From Dresden to the world: images of the German Hygiene Museum's relations with Latin America, 1911-1933

De Dresden para o mundo: imagens das relações do Museu Alemão de Higiene com a América Latina, 1911-1933

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Abstract

As of the nineteenth century, the number of world fairs and hygiene exhibitions grew significantly. This phenomenon was linked to the experience of modernity and the emergence of bacteriology, when different cities were sanitized with the aim of combating urban diseases and epidemics. For the purpose of sanitary education and hygiene propaganda, many objects and pictures were displayed in hygiene exhibitions and museums, such as the International Hygiene Exhibition of 1911 and the German Hygiene Museum, both in Dresden. The goal of this article is to analyze a chapter of the international history of health through images that portray the connections between the German Hygiene Museum and Latin American countries between 1911 and 1933.

Keywords: visual history; hygiene exhibitions; German Hygiene Museum; German-Latin American relations; diplomacy.

Resumo

A partir do século XIX, o número de exposições universais e de exposições de higiene cresceu significativamente. Esse fenômeno estava ligado à experiência da modernidade e ao surgimento da bacteriologia, quando diferentes cidades foram higienizadas com o objetivo de combater doenças e epidemias urbanas. Visando à educação sanitária e à propaganda da higiene, inúmeros objetos e imagens foram exibidos em exposições e museus de higiene, como na Exposição Internacional de Higiene de 1911 e no Museu Alemão de Higiene, ambos em Dresden. O objetivo deste artigo é analisar um capítulo da história internacional da saúde por meio de imagens que retratam as conexões entre o Museu Alemão de Higiene e os países latino-americanos de 1911 a 1933.

Palavras-chave: história visual; exposições de higiene; Museu Alemão de Higiene; relações germano-latino-americanas; diplomacia.

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The origins of the first museums are commonly associated with the collecting practices of the early modern age (Carlan, 2008), but the modern meaning of museum – “a building in which a collection of objects is displayed for the public’s enjoyment” – can be found since the eighteenth century, when the term “exhibition” also first appeared. However, the two terms are not synonyms. In the nineteenth century, for example, exhibition refers specifically to a “temporary installation” of something displayed (Heesen, 2018, p.60-61). Some modern museums were created in this period, among them the Ashmolean Museum (Oxford, 1683), the British Museum (London, 1753), the Louvre Museum (Paris, 1793), and the Royal Museum (Rio de Janeiro, 1818) (Carlan, 2008; Bennet, 2005).

During the nineteenth and twentieth centuries the number of exhibitions and museums grew and hygiene exhibitions, as well as scientific congresses, were often organized as part of mega-events, such as the World Fair in London (1851) and the universal expositions of Paris, which became frequent as of the mid-nineteenth century (Bennet, 2005; Almeida, 2010; Sanjad, 2017; Heesen, 2018). The birth of universal exhibitions was a phenomenon of capitalist modernity and urban reforms, from which Walter Benjamin (1985) created the concept “fetishism of merchandise.” For Benjamin, the universal exhibitions also served as events to entertain the popular classes, which were considered dangerous in a period of revolts against the European elites.

Before the first international hygiene exhibitions (Internationale Hygiene-Ausstellungen, hereafter IHA) in Dresden (1911), at least three previous initiatives in the field of hygiene need to be mentioned: the German Exhibition in Berlin (1882-1883) and the world fairs in Paris (1900) and St. Louis (1904) (Vogel, 2003, p.19). Nevertheless, Dresden 1911 was the first truly large-scale exhibition (Stein, 2013, p.356). Latin American countries were represented in many of these events and at the hygiene exhibition in Berlin (1907), where the exhibits displayed by the Brazilian Oswaldo Cruz Institute (Instituto Oswaldo Cruz, hereafter IOC) received a gold medal (Silva, 2011, p.219).

In the twentieth century, hygiene exhibitions were often incorporated into national or international exhibitions or were included as part of international medical congresses not associated to world fairs. This also applied to the medical congresses held in Latin America after the Chilean exhibition in 1901. These initiatives enabled the creation of hygiene museums, usually at medical faculties or institutions (Almeida, 2004, 2010). In Brazil, the first hygiene exhibitions were organized in two great events: The National Exhibition of 1908 and the International Hygiene Exhibition of 1909, which occurred alongside the IV Latin American Medical Congress (Almeida, 2010). A few years after these events, the Hygiene Museum of the National Department of Public Health in Brazil was created (Vai inaugurar-se..., 27 Aug. 1912).

Physicians and government authorities realized that without hygienic education, the fight against epidemics was impossible. The main goal of hygiene exhibitions and museums was to teach lay people about diseases, a healthy lifestyle, and hygiene practices, as well as showing the progress of medical and bacteriological sciences. In several cases, associations with aesthetic ideals, racial goals, and eugenics propaganda can be found. As a result, multiple and diverse material objects were collected or created, and audiovisual

resources were produced. Germany's hygiene-related objectives motivated the production of many anatomical objects, such as those created by the anatomist Werner Spalteholz (1861-1940) for the German Hygiene Museum (Deutsches Hygiene-Museum Dresden, hereafter DHMD). His most famous collection was the transparent man (*Der durchsichtige Mensch*), invented "to give transparency to the tissues and bones of the human body" (Schwarz, 11 Jan. 1928).

Even though film was used in the early twentieth century, the adoption of teaching and visual materials (*Lehr- und Anschauungsmittel*) as well as new techniques – in combination with art¹ – were fundamental for making the human body visible and the etiology of diseases and hygiene care understandable for a wider audience, putting into practice something suggested since the Enlightenment and the Encyclopaedia tradition (Nikolow, 2015). The photo in Figure 1 was published in the DHMD's book for international propaganda purposes and displays a specific characteristic of the museum: the creation of museum objects. At first glance, it looks like an art studio, but in reality it is the workshop of a science museum. The image focuses on a man working on an anatomical object (an ear).



Figure 1: Deutsches Hygiene-Museum Dresden sculpture workshop (Gehlen, 1930, p.7)

The DHMD's activities were expanded in the interwar period and the institution became one of the most remarkable museums in the world in its area. The museum not only inspired similar institutions and projects, but its collections also circulated globally. Moreover, my research shows that the transatlantic activities of the DHMD became part of the German foreign culture policies (*auswärtige Kulturpolitik*) of the Weimar Republic, through which German-Latin American cultural relations can be studied.

This article presents images of the DHMD's relations with Latin American countries between 1911 and 1933. In the historiography of the international exhibitions, the number of works dedicated to investigating the global context is increasing. However, according to

Sanjad (2017) and Almeida (2010), researches about the role of Latin America unfortunately remain small in number. This article is a contribution to this last group of studies.

Following recent trends in global history (Conrad, 2017; Cueto, 2015), with the support of visual history² (Perlmutter, 1994; Paul, 2006) and drawing on the biographies of objects³ (Alberti, 2005), this article analyzes several meanings of the global exchanges in the DHMD's history and in German-Latin American relations, during which objects and collections crossed the Atlantic. Understanding that my research goals would not be achieved if I depended solely on written sources, images are also analyzed, many of which are the only records of the DHMD's objects and activities, as an Allied aircraft destroyed 80% of the museum in February 1945 (Vogel, 2003, p.106). In Latin America, for the most part, similar museums no longer exist.

The International Hygiene Exhibition of 1911 and the first exchanges with Latin America

The DHMD was officially founded in 1912, one year after the first IHA. The event of 1911 was idealized and organized by the industrialist and philanthropist Karl August Lingner, known for the Odol businesses (Stein, 2013). The first step in Lingner's project was the exhibition "Popular Diseases and their Control" (Volkskrankheiten und ihre Bekämpfung), displayed in the Dresden Exhibition (1903). This is the origin of Linger's section "The Human Being" (Der Mensch) at IHA in 1911 (Lienert, 2009).

Figure 2 shows the official map of the IHA. From the main hall (no.1), one can see the history (no.2) and ethnology (no.3) sections on the left and the cancer (no.4) and infectious diseases (no.5) sections on the right. The street Herkules-Allee divided two great attractions: the section on "The Human Being" and the foreign pavilions. These included the Brazilian pavilion, which was situated in the building marked with the number 30 on the map, located between Königlicher Grosser Garten to the south and Kgl. Botan. Garten to the north. Even without an official pavilion, other Latin American scientists from Argentina, Cuba, and Mexico also attended the event (Internationale..., s.d.).

In 1911, the Brazilian delegation included the renowned scientist Oswaldo Cruz (1872-1911). The main goal was to show the progress of Brazilian medical science and public health in Rio de Janeiro and São Paulo (Moraes, 2015). The activities of the Brazilian pavilion were recorded in written and visual sources. In the main hall (Figure 3), there were two models. The one on the right is the Moorish castle built to house the IOC, in Rio de Janeiro, which still stands today as an important feature of the city's architectural and cultural landscape.

In the back, one can see a cinematograph, where four films were shown, two about tropical diseases and two about scientific work in São Paulo (Moraes, 2015). To the right was a room with snake specimens from the Butantan Institute's collection (Figure 4).

There was also a room on the campaigns run to fight the plague and another one on the battle against yellow fever in Brazil, where a small house was displayed with the following sign: "Isolation of a sick person with yellow fever in their own home, which has been made inaccessible to mosquitoes carrying the disease" (Figure 5). There were also two images, one of *Aedes aegypti* on the left (the mosquito that transmits the disease)

and another displaying statistics about the reduction in the number of cases in the state of Pará showing comparative data from the summer period between November 1910 and March 1911.

Turning left from the main hall, visitors could find out about one of the remarkable topics included in the IOC's display in Dresden: the Chagas disease (Figure 6). The room displayed the work of Carlos Chagas (1879-1934), a scientist from IOC who, in 1909, discovered this new disease, caused by the protozoan *Trypanosoma cruzi*, named after Oswaldo Cruz. The infection is transmitted by an insect which serves as the host and the disease can affect the heart and the nervous system (Kropf, 2010).

Further displays included pictures of patients with Chagas disease and anatomopathological transparencies and preparations about the above-mentioned diseases (Brasilianischer Staatspavillon..., s.d., p.5-6). There was, however, no information about the Vaccine Revolt (1904), an uprising against Oswaldo Cruz's campaigns and the urban reforms in Rio de Janeiro city,⁴ because the main goal was to display modernity, science, and progress, meaning a narrative with no discursive noise, social contradictions, or political disputes, in order to exalt Brazil's national image abroad; in other words, propaganda for a country civilized as a result of a reform process.

At the end of the event, the IOC received a beautiful honorary certificate, which shows that the work displayed in Dresden made an exceptional impression. The certificate, drawn in ink, seems to suggest the difference between the civilized and the non-civilized man (Figure 7). It could also suggest how difficult and heavy the task of civilization is (represented by the giant man), hygiene education included.

In the end, the exhibition received over five million visitors and made one million Goldmarks. The following year, the DHMD was planned as a way of continuing the same work in the form of traveling exhibitions (Wanderausstellungen). It was officially created as an association (Verein für das National-Hygiene-Museum) and on April 16, 1912, the Dresden city council decided to support plans for a permanent building for the museum, but this was not achieved due to Lingner's death in 1916 and the devaluation of the institution's heritage after the Great War (Lienert, 2009, p.110; Steller, 2015, p.77).

The DHMD in the *Kulturpolitik* for Latin America during the Weimar Republic

According to Wulf (1994), the *Kulturpolitik* was first proposed in 1912, when the German historian Karl Lamprecht (1856-1915) held the conference "On Foreign Cultural Policy" ("Über auswärtige Kulturpolitik"). The discussion, however, was interrupted by the outbreak of the First World War. After the war, the German Ministry of Foreign Affairs (Auswärtiges Amt) was reformed. The Department of Culture was created and assumed the role of organizing German cultural diplomacy. In this context, Germany developed a Latin America policy (*Lateinamerikapolitik*) for the first time, with focus on immigration, commerce, and economic goals, which also contributed to its scientific relations (Rinke, 1997; Silva, 2011; Muñoz, 2018).

After the First World War, Georg Seiring (1883-1972), the managing director of the DHMD, started a campaign to have a new building constructed as part of his vision to



Figure 4: Room with snake specimens from the Butantan Institute (Exposições..., 1911)



Figure 5: Room about yellow fever in Brazil (Exposições..., 1911)



Figure 6: Room about Chagas disease (Exposições..., 1911)

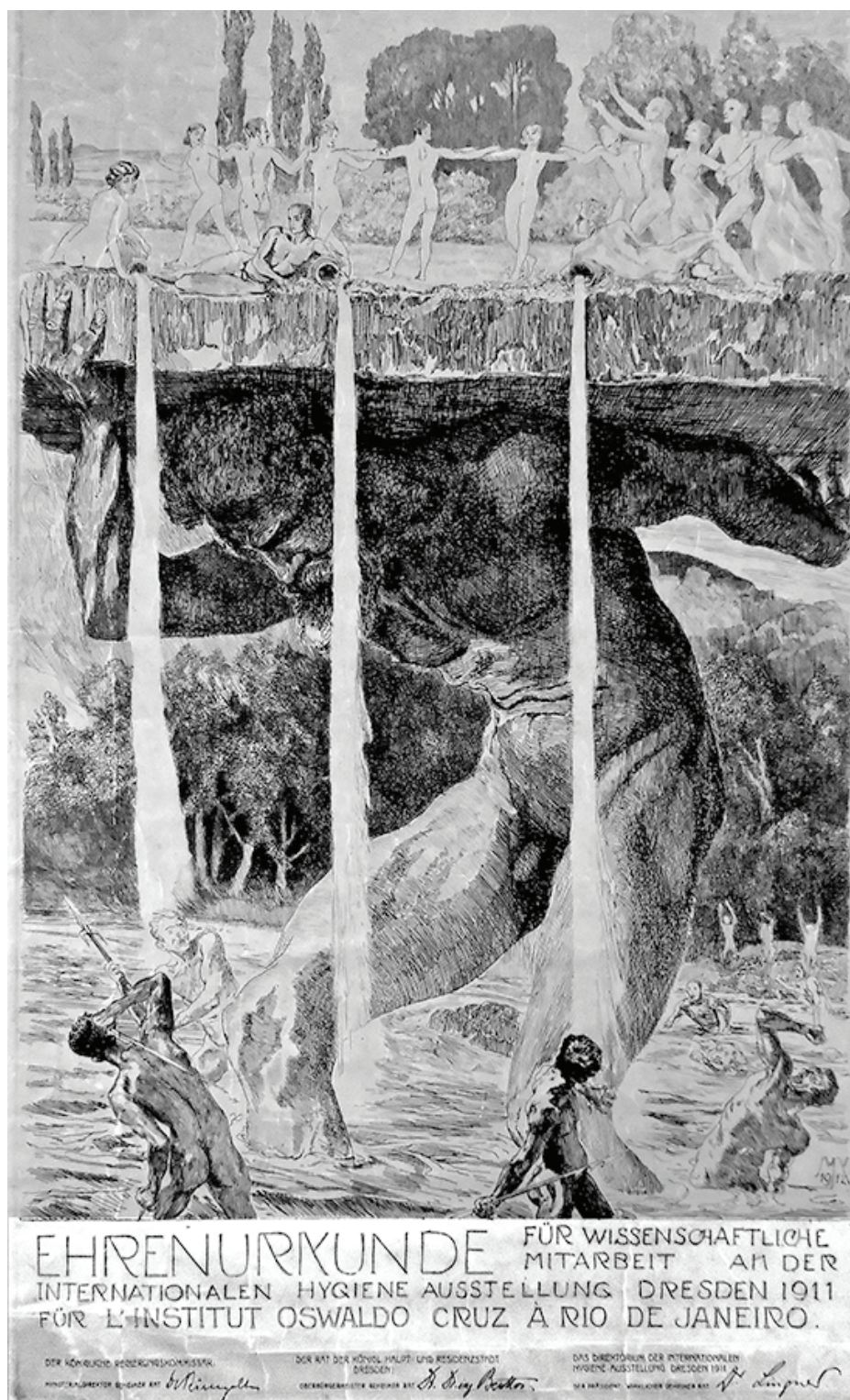


Figure 7: Certificate of honor for Instituto Oswaldo Cruz's participation at the Internationale Hygiene-Ausstellungen 1911 (Diploma..., 1911)

make DHMD a new style of museum. In 1922, the institution was recognized as the Central Institute of Public Health Care (Zentralinstitut für Volksgesundheitspflege) by the government (Steller, 2015, p.72-75, 86). But it was not a simple task to achieve Seiring's goals due to the economic difficulties Germany faced in the postwar period (Richard, 1988). In this context, the museum carried out traveling exhibitions inside and outside Germany, which helped spreading the DHMD's work and its objectives of hygiene education.⁵

The first traveling exhibition went to the Netherlands in 1920. It was an extraofficial initiative, i.e., not supported by German diplomacy. After initial mistrust by the Dutch, the exhibition was successful. Since then, the DHMD's activities were incorporated into the country's *Kulturpolitik* and official foreign propaganda. The correspondence exchanged between Seiring and the Foreign Ministry became frequent, including reports on actions undertaken by the museum. In the 1920s, "Der Mensch," the DHMD's most successful exhibition, circulated through many European cities and even outside of Europe, increasing the institution's prestige.

Another strategy was to sell collections (*Sammlungen*), as was negotiated between the DHMD and the Brazilian organizers of the International Exhibition for the Centenary of Independence celebrations in 1922 (Allgemeine..., s.d.).⁶ One year before, "Professor Rabello" was tasked "by the director of Public Health to organize an exhibition of this kind for the Centenary, guided by Dresden's model" (Reuniu-se..., 5 Jul. 1921).

The picture in Figure 8 was taken at the hygiene exhibition of the National Department of Public Health (Serviço Nacional de Saúde Pública, SNSP), part of Brazil's Centenary of Independence celebrations. The exhibition was organized by Renato Kehl (1889-1974)⁷ (Souza, 2006, p.107) and other SNSP employees (Pelo maior..., 30 Oct. 1922). According to Kehl, many objects were sent by the SNSP's services in the states. The most interesting for Kehl was Maranhão's collection of "miniature rural houses common in this Northern State," which were condemned by the SNSP as unhygienic, considering the high humidity in these kind of constructions (Na Exposição..., 6 Nov. 1922; Educação Sanitária..., s.d.). These places were the perfect habitat for many insects, including *Triatoma infestans*, transmitter of Chagas disease (Kropf, 2010). In an interview with *Rio-Jornal* newspaper, Kehl mentioned the two houses with thatched roofs depicted in the middle of Figure 8.

Models of hygienic houses were also displayed, as were several hygiene propaganda pamphlets advising of the risks of dirty water and venereal, epidemic, and endemic diseases. According to Kehl, the SNSP's sanitation work, especially in rural areas, allowed the "defense of health" and "national salvation" (Pelo maior..., 30 Oct. 1922). Education and propaganda were keywords in the exhibition.

Figure 9 is a map that shows the DHMD's foreign cultural activities⁸ – including Argentina and Cuba – and Figure 10 shows the exhibition "Der Mensch" in Vienna in 1925. These images summarize not only how the museum worked without a permanent building, but also the strategies to spread the museum's work and to make money to enable the promotion of hygiene education and the building of a permanent home for the museum (Steller, 2015, p.75-79).



Figure 8: Hygiene Exhibition of the National Department of Public Health, Rio de Janeiro, 1922 (Educação Sanitária..., s.d.)



Figure 9: Foreign activities of the Deutsches Hygiene-Museum Dresden through traveling exhibitions and shipping of permanent exhibitions, around 1927 (Ansichten..., s.d.)



Figure 10: The exhibition “Der Mensch” in Vienna (Ausstellung..., 1925)

Figures 9 and 10 are part of the photo album *Das Deutsche Hygiene-Museum im Ausland* (The German Hygiene Museum Abroad), where one can also find images of the hygiene exhibition in Cuba in 1926 (Das Deutsche..., s.d.).⁹ The exhibition in Havana was also photographed and archived in a separate photo album with 14 pictures, three of which can be seen below. Figure 12 displays a section called “the child and the mother” – which also was the title of one of DHMD’s special exhibitions, displayed in Vienna in 1928 – and Figure 13 shows a section about malaria.¹⁰ Among the sections displayed in Havana are the muscles (Figure 11), the bones, the digestive tract, the respiratory and nervous systems. A comparison between Figures 10 and 11 shows many objects also displayed at the exhibition “Der Mensch” in Vienna in 1925. In relation to Argentina, Becerra (2009, p.230) found sources showing successful negotiations about the purchase of collections between the Argentinian Social Museum (Museo Social Argentino) and the DHMD from 1924 (cf. Poetzsch, 29 Mar. 1927).

In 1928, a plan was developed to take “Der Mensch” as a traveling exhibition through Central and South America. The journey envisioned visiting 22 cities in Hispanic America (Spanische Abteilung) and 12 cities in Brazil (Portugiesische Abteilung) (Deutsches Hygiene-Museum, 25 Apr. 1928). Nonetheless, after eight months of intense negotiations, the project



Figure 11: Deutsches Hygiene-Museum Dresden's collections at the Hygiene Exhibition in Havana: section about muscles (Präsentation..., 1928)



Figure 12: Section "The child and the mother" at the Hygiene Exhibition in Havana (Präsentation..., 1928)



Figure 13: Section about malaria at the Hygiene Exhibition in Havana (Präsentation..., 1928)

was cancelled by the DHMD (Deutsches Hygiene-Museum, 14 Jan. 1929). In the same period, the DHMD decided to donate collections to the Chilean government through the Chilean Consul in Dresden. The collection including four objects created by Spalteholz (Porto-Seguro, 13 Dec. 1928).

The International Hygiene Exhibition, Dresden 1930

As a result of Seiring's strategies, the DHMD was able to construct a permanent building, which was designed by the well-known architect, Wilhelm Kreis (1873-1955). On October 8, 1927, the foundation-stone-laying (*Grundsteinlegung*) took place, and inauguration ceremony was held on May 16, 1930 (Vogel, 2003, p.61). The inauguration of the DHMD's building was part of a bigger event: the second international hygiene exhibition of Dresden, in 1930, to which Brazil, Argentina, Chile, and Mexico were invited. The Brazilian government, however, cancelled its participation (Secretaria..., 10 Mar. 1930). The event was a great success, and the exhibition was organized once again in 1931 (Amtlicher..., 1931).

Figure 14 shows a delegation of 50 Argentinian physicians and dentists who visited the DHMD before the IHA of 1930. Figure 15 is a photo of the Chilean exhibition at the IHA in 1930, where it is possible to see many national products, including wine and saltpeter. The country's diplomats saw the international exhibitions as a propaganda opportunity for Chile and its products.¹¹ The Ministry of Well-Being also sent "some small standard polyclinic apparatus and equipment, models of statistical files, brochures and propaganda material" (Barros Castañón, 26 Mar. 1930). Figure 16 shows a photo taken by Else Seifert of the main entrance on Nations Square, showing the flags of the foreign nations, including that of Chile (second from the bottom on the left).

According to Steller (2015, p.73), 1930 was the high point of the DHMD's productivity. In 1933, Seiring wrote a report about the "importance of the DHMD's activity for German cultural propaganda," in which he mentioned the exchanges with Cuba, Brazil, Argentina, and Chile along with many other details that cannot be explored in this article (Seiring, Nov. 1933).

Final considerations

The images selected for this article carry many meanings. The pictures were taken by private or institutional photographers to register the events (memory) and were used for different purposes. For example, the photograph in Figure 14 was used by the DHMD to demonstrate its international-oriented discourse in the official guide of 1930. The visual messages of many of the photos transmit a discourse of progress, but they also had propaganda purposes. Progress and propaganda are the two keywords that help us see their deeper meanings according to the national interests of each country. In other words, the hygiene exhibitions and museums were used to display images of national identity, civilization processes, and expectations for the future that could only be achieved with the support of science and health.



Figure 14: Delegation of 50 Argentinian physicians and dentists on a visit to the German Hygiene Museum on January 22 [1930]. Photo: Bohr, Dresden (Internationale..., 15 Feb. 1930)



Figure 15: Products of Chile at the International Hygiene Exhibition in Dresden, 1930 (Zañartu, 8 Jul. 1930)



Figure 16: Nations Square at the International Hygiene Exhibition in Dresden (Seifert, 1930-1931)

Behind the internationalism and hygiene education displayed in the pictures about the hygiene exhibitions, intense diplomatic negotiations with economic goals and desires for profit took place, as a result of which many objects and collections crossed the Atlantic. By following the DHMD's global exchanges, which included relations with Latin American countries, it was possible to analyze the history of museum objects in circulation and to understand museums not only as a storage facility for objects and collections of cultural and patrimonial value, but also as a social and political institution. However, there are many details that I was not able to explore in this article and there are still gaps to be filled in by my current research.

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NOTES

¹ Some employees of the DHMD are described as painters and illustrators (Albrecht, 1931, p.97).

² Visual history methods allow historians to understand many things about non-written sources. Historians may investigate images through their creators (person or institution), their techniques (focus and angle), their uses and purposes, and their contents, expressions, and meanings. The description should also be pre-iconographic, covering the motivation and context of production (propaganda, for example), and post-iconographic, such as reflexes in society (Perlmutter, 1994; Paul, 2006).

³ Here I focus on the prehistory of the object (original context). According to Alberti (2005), historians of science should also study the history of objects from their collection or creation (motivations, for example) to their arrival at a museum.

⁴ Jaime Benchimol (2003) also shows that the popular revolt was stimulated by politicians involved in a failed coup.

⁵ The idea of traveling exhibitions can also be found in the early stage of Lingner's project. After the exhibition in Dresden (1903), Lingner's traveling exhibition "Volkskrankheiten und ihre Bekämpfung" toured to Frankfurt (1904), Munich (1905), and Kiel (1906), displaying the achievements of bacteriology (Stein, 2013, p.360).

⁶ The sources are unclear as to the results of the negotiations.

⁷ Renato Kehl was the main promoter of the eugenics agenda in Brazil (Souza, 2006).

⁸ The date given by the DHMD Sammlung is probably wrong. The map was created around 1930, because the exhibition "Der Mensch" was held in Luxemburg in 1928 (cf. Das Deutsche Hygiene-Museum..., s.d.).

⁹ On the DHMD Sammlung website, 1928 is mentioned as the exhibition's date in Cuba. However, I believe that the correct date is 1926 as mentioned in the photo album *Das Deutsche Hygiene-Museum im Ausland*, because I found a report about "a small museum sent to Cuba" in a document from 1927 (Poetzsch, 29 Mar. 1927).

¹⁰ The malaria mosquito was also the target of a Rockefeller campaign in Latin America (Cueto, Palmer, 2016), an important institution for the United States's foreign cultural policy. Stefan Wulf (1994, p.30) understands this institution as a partner and competitor in relation to Germany's *Kulturpolitik*.

¹¹ Between 1929 and 1930, this kind of propaganda can also be found in Chile's participation in the Ibero-American Exposition in Seville (Scheel, 2012). Saltpeter was one of the main targets of trade relations between Germany and Chile in the period (Rinke, 1998).

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