



**5th Latin American Regional Conference of the International Association for
Cross-Cultural Psychology (IACCP)**

Martes 16 de Julio de 2019, 9:00 a.m. (Plaza de la Autonomía)

On behalf of the University of Costa Rica – and I may add, from all the Latin American institutions bound to the International Association for Cross-Cultural Psychology – I give you the most heartfelt welcome to our country and our institution.

Having more than 300 people from 43 countries in the world makes honor to this year's theme for our regional conference – Building bridges among diversity. It is a very significant theme since we stand in a nation which recently added into its Magna Carta to be multiethnic and pluricultural. To be recognized as a country cradle of multiple cultures and ethnic groups is a major effort that, nevertheless, took more than fifteen to be a reality. How come a country acknowledge the need of declaring itself in this way, amongst a general background of xenophobia and racism that we keep reading in the international news, every day?

Diversity is much more than just representations. To be diverse in the current conjuncture should be interpreted as being oneself, without worries about the mainstream or going against the current. One's plenitude should always be boosted by the freedom that letting loose the strings of appearances give. Appearances could mean being someone different at work, instead of feeling free to maintain one's integrity, by fear of losing its job and family support. It could mean behaving in a contradictory way when exposed to certain people or situations, by fear of being harmed. It could mean keeping distances from who we deeply feel to be, and who we actually want people to see in us, because of the fear of being pointed at.

This is not a contemporary feeling. This is not just about sexual orientation, gender identity, or any disability one may have. Since colonization processes began



centuries ago, entire nations have been subjugated by conquerors and colonizers, having their faith, their customs, and cultures imposed over theirs. While we could theorize about this processes, the truth is that they also left us with a cultural syncretism that has lasted to this day, enriching our daily life and making us stand out amongst the rest of the world.

This cultural merging is what makes us out, and still does: migration processes have reshaped our current cultures, making us citizens of the world. Sadly, such a natural and social phenomenon (which has also been going on also for centuries) is now in the eye of the storm of several governments, focusing on the economic impact of millions of migrants already in dangerous journeys, instead of focusing on the most urgent and humanitarian reasons for their displacements.

Our community's culture is part of our identity and therefore understanding it is a way of understanding one's behavior and psychological variables. Recognizing that diversity means equality, equity, fairness, and most of all, right to participate, is the first step to acknowledge that everyone has the right to be listened to, no matter who he or she is, no matter how he or she looks, and no matter where he or she is from.

Our Latin American countries have been shaped under a smokescreen, making us believe we are all shaped white, heterosexual, male, cisgender, and capitalist, with the ideal of becoming more and more Americentric or Eurocentric. With no means of discrediting whoever comes from the Global North, this extended belief has debunked autochthonous cultures from the Global South and set the roots for homo and transphobia, xenophobia and racism. It has devastated any hopes for equality in diversity since minorities (and not so minority) have been left aside for public policies and development.



Our aim is to raise our children learning from this past errors, and from acknowledging that people are different – and that it is just fine. Diversity should embrace difference, leaving behind any negative perspective, but instead welcoming more inclusive points of view to address social and individual problems.

The concept of intersectionality is powerful these days, showing us that diversity is not defined by single oppressions. Cross-cultural psychology should aim to understand the role of these cultural and historical factors, along with the personal experience, in order to interpret human behavior. Latin America is known for a rich variety of cultures, political processes, religions, and overall transformations. Our region is full of ancient history, and modern role models that reclaim them. It is time to set aside any prejudices that may lead us far from the true understanding of the people, and this means actually building bridges among diversity.

The University of Costa Rica is honored to host this regional conference, and I personally hope it will be full of experiences that deserve to be treasured and shared. Thank you very much, and welcome to Costa Rica.