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LATIN AMERICAN SPACE ACTIVITIES IN THE 21ST CENTURY: TO WHAT MUSICAL BEAT,
SAMBA OR SALSA?

Abstract

This paper will review some of the major space-related accomplishments that have taken place in Latin America since 2000. Significant among these have been the launch of several large communication satellites, two manufactured and launched by the Chinese for Venezuela and Bolivia, respectively, and a satellite manufactured by a native Argentinean corporation, and launched by Arianespace. Several smaller, ‘cubesats’ were manufactured in Brazil, Ecuador, Colombia, and Peru, and orbited by different launch service providers.

In addition to technical advances, such as the orbiting of satellites and sounding rockets, several international, regional, and national conferences related to space activities were held in Latin America, with the aim of developing space policies, and eventually establishing a regional space agency.

Certain measures have been taken toward achieving this goal, notably setting up national space agencies or commissions in each of the South American countries, in some of the Central American nations and in Mexico. Some of these national space agencies were created as a result of the Space Conferences of the Americas (CEA-Conferencia Espacial de las Américas). The CEAs have been instrumental in fomenting interest and involvement in space activities since the first one was held in Costa Rica in 1990, and the most recent one, VII CEA, held in Nicaragua in November 2015.

Despite all these meetings and activities, are the Latin American countries closer to achieving their goal of establishing a regional space agency? What steps could they take, at the national level and regional levels, to attain their objective? Are there models from other regions that they could emulate, or set aside? What measure could be taken to ensure that space activities in Latin America will be viable as well as productive in the short- and long-term?

Would ratifying the principal space treaties be a good starting point? Alternatively, would drafting national sector-specific legislation, based on the international instruments, be a better starting point? This paper aims to address some of the issues that stand in the way of regional cooperation, and offer recommendations to overcome them. Perhaps dancing to the same musical beat would help!