

In memoriam



Oscar Altimir
(1935–2018)

As we prepare this edition of *CEPAL Review*, our editorial team wishes to express its deep sorrow upon the death of Oscar Altimir on 27 September in Santiago. His departure is deeply felt by the ECLAC community, especially by those of us involved in the production of *CEPAL Review*. We acknowledge the intellectual legacy of Altimir, who directed this publication between 1996 and 2008, succeeding its first two directors: Aníbal Pinto Santa Cruz (1986–1996) and founder Raúl Prebisch (1976–1986). This editorial is intended to convey our heartfelt homage to Altimir's academic figure and distinguished career as a leading development economist in the region and as one of the most prominent thinkers of the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC) over the past 40 years.

Born in Argentina, Oscar Altimir joined ECLAC in the mid-1960s, taking on academic and training roles in planning and development at the Latin American and Caribbean Institute for Economic and Social Planning (ILPES). In the early 1970s, he served as an adviser to the Ministry of Economic Affairs of Argentina, and from 1969 to 1973 he chaired the country's Institute for Economic and Social Development (IDES). After performing regional advisory roles at various international organizations, in the mid-1970s he began his stellar career at ECLAC, where he held senior management positions.

Altimir served as Chief of the Statistics Division from 1976 to 1983, and as Chief of the Joint ECLAC/UNIDO Industry and Technology Division from 1984 to 1988. Subsequently, between 1989 and 1993 he was Chief of the Economic Development Division, and from 1994 to 1996 he spent his final years at ECLAC as Deputy Executive Secretary, under former Executive Secretary Gert Rosenthal. After his retirement, he assumed as Chief of the *CEPAL Review*.

During his tenure as Editor, the *Review* achieved major milestones that propelled it to its current standing as one of the foremost academic publications specializing in development issues in the region and beyond. Under the direction of Oscar Altimir, editorial standards were improved, researchers increasingly sought to have their manuscripts reviewed by our referees and to publish their articles in the *Review*, and its editorial line was broadened to more clearly reflect emerging trends in regional development.

In a special insert, published in the ninety-sixth edition of the *Review* (in December 2008) after André Hofman had taken the helm of the publication, we noted that during Altimir's tenure "...many of the articles published during this stage incorporated leading-edge analytical tools (econometric analyses, computable general equilibrium models, more refined sectoral analyses, etc.), and as a result our publication has been listed since December 2007 in the Thomson ISI Social Sciences Citation Index

(SSCI)".¹ Indeed, indexation has been an extremely important milestone in raising quality standards and achieving greater dissemination of *CEPAL Review* over the past 10 years.

As regards his contributions to the analysis of development issues in Latin America and the Caribbean, Oscar Altimir was known for his systematic study of poverty and income distribution in the region. He devoted over 30 years of his career to understanding these topics and their impact on the region's socioeconomic development and was a pioneer in the development of quantitative methodologies for their measurement. The foundations of the Commission's rich tradition in the analysis of poverty and distribution, embodied in publications such as *Social Panorama of Latin America*, hark back to the first works published by Altimir from the second half of the 1970s onward.

One of the most prominent pieces he produced on these topics was the article entitled "Income distribution and poverty through crisis and adjustment", published in the *Review* in 1994, in which he analysed the social costs of Latin America's external debt crisis in the 1980s and the subsequent adjustment policies, specifically in terms of the rise in the number of people living in poverty and the deterioration of income distribution.

Those of us devoted to social sciences and to the crucial task of studying and attempting to broaden our understanding of economic and social development are fully aware of Altimir's enormous contribution towards the achievement of these goals. The precipitous events of recent years —characterized by the complex tensions brought about by economic hyperglobalization— suggest that inequality, coupled with other global phenomena, severely hinders development.

Long-run studies on the nature of distributive inequality have enjoyed a significant boom in the first two decades of the twenty-first century, not only in our region, but also in academia and politics worldwide. In this regard, it would be fair and accurate to say that the seminal contributions of Simon Kuznets, Angus Deaton, Anthony Atkinson and, more recently, José Gabriel Palma, Branko Milanović and Thomas Piketty, could not be fully understood from a Latin American perspective without Oscar Altimir's outstanding contributions.

In closing, the editorial staff of *CEPAL Review* conveys its deep solidarity to the family, friends and colleagues of Oscar Altimir who were privileged to have known him. As Editor of the *Review*, I am compelled to record my immense gratitude to Oscar Altimir as a person, for his human qualities, for his wisdom and for his generosity in sharing his vast and varied knowledge with the new generations of economists concerned with development issues at ECLAC and throughout the region. His legacy is and will remain a source of constant inspiration to the editors of *CEPAL Review*.

The Editor

¹ See A. Hofman and M. Torres, "ECLAC thinking in the *CEPAL Review* (1976-2008)", *CEPAL Review*, No. 96 (LC/G. 2396-P), Santiago, Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC), December 2008. This was a transitional issue published jointly by the team headed by Oscar Altimir, together with Reynaldo Bajraj (who joined the *Review* in 2003 as Deputy Editor) and the new team made up of the authors of this note, respectively, as the Chief and Technical Editor, together with Osvaldo Sunkel as Chair of the Editorial Board of the *Review*, appointed under the current mandate of Alicia Bárcena as Executive Secretary of ECLAC.