

# Social Network Researchers in South America: The Chilean Society for Social Network Science (ChiSocNet)

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## INTRODUCTION

JOAQUÍN TORRES GARCÍA has an iconic image called “*Inverted America*”, in which he emphasized the privileged position of the Latin American continent. Why does the continent have a privileged position? In which sense does the continent become an essential actor in this interconnected world? According to Torres García, ‘the tip of America, from now on, extending, insistently points to the South, our North’. In this context, a new kid on the block, the Chilean Society for the Social Network Science (ChiSocNet), aims to develop Social Network Science in Chile to be in the next decade an international group of reference from Ibero-America and the International Community of the Social Network Science. What has been done in the last years? In this editorial, we will review ChiSocNet’s role in helping organize the community in South America.

Social Network Science is an exciting area of knowledge, highly interdisciplinary, and in increased development. Moreover, it is part of a broad community where the research issues are any dimension in which the society is enacted, and relationships are a constitutive analysis entity (Mullins & Mullins, 1973; Freeman, 2004; Scott, 2000). Also, it is an area of research heritage of the tradition of the social network perspective institutionalized in the International Network of Social Network Analysis (INSNA),

congregated mainly in the SUNBELT conference, that has as reference a set of high-impact journals of the international community (Social Network Journal; Connections; Journal of Social Structures; Network Science Journal; Applied Network Science), and that tends to prefer listening to the podcast “Knitting Networks/Tejiendo Redes” that has chapters in English and Spanish (hosted by Francisca Ortiz Ruiz and Alejandro Espinosa-Rada, sponsored by INSNA).

In the last decade, the development of social network science in Ibero-America has been present in Europe and Latin America. Where the Hispanic Social Network Science community promoted most of the development in Ibero-America through the academic journal “REDES – Revista Hispana para el Análisis de Redes Sociales”, the mailing list “REDES”, and in which the Latin American had recently published the handbook “Redes Sociales: teoría, métodos y aplicaciones en América Latina” (Ortiz Ruiz & Espinosa-Rada, 2023), funded the journal “AWARI, de la Red Latinoamericana de Analistas de Redes Sociales”, organized the conference RLARS, LANET, REDES, and has a community of practitioners with a strong presence in Argentina, Brazil, Colombia, Chile and Mexico (Ortiz *et al.*, 2021; Vélez *et al.*, 2021; Espinosa-Rada & Ortiz, 2022; Ortiz Ruiz & Espinosa-Rada, 2023). Within this context, the Chilean Society of Social Networks Science was founded.

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## CHILEAN SOCIETY OF SOCIAL NETWORK SCIENCE (CHISOCNET)

The Social Network Science in Chile has its antecedents in the seminal work of CEPAL (Espinoza, 2005), by important researchers in the field during the '70 (e.g., Larissa Adler Lomnitz or Milan Stuchlik) and has grown in the last decades on more than 17 universities from around the country (Gaete Fiscella & Pino Ibáñez, 2014). Until recently, there was no formal Professional Society of the Social Network Science in Chile or a postgraduate program with an emphasis exclusively on these topics.

ChiSocNet was informally founded and coordinated by Alejandro Espinosa-Rada through a Facebook group called "ORS - Observatorio de Redes Sociales en Chile" (ORS-Chile) in 2016. ChiSocNet was created through the mailing list of ChiSocNet in 2017 by recruiting researchers working and/or interested in this area of research within Chile. During this period, different initiatives were already considering the social network perspective. For example, some network research questions appear in questionnaires within Chile (González *et al.*, 2023). There was an interest in ego-networks investigated through the Chilean Longitudinal Social Survey (ELSOC) survey that was designed by researchers from the Centre for Social Conflict and Cohesion Studies (COES), the consolidation of the Centro de Investigación en Complejidad Social (CICS) which offers a PhD in Science of Social Complexity emphasizing some of the developments of the network science, the Millennium Institute for Foundational Research on Data (IMFD) interested on computational social science, the History & Social Networks (HISONET) group, among many others. However, in 2024, ChiSocNet, as a scientific society, is now in the process of consolidation in collaboration with the council formed by Alejandro Espinosa-Rada, Francisca Ortiz Ruiz, Diego Palacios, George Vega Yon, Karina Arias, and Ignacio Toledo. ChiSocNet aims to become a group of reference during the 2020-2030 decade.

In ChiSocNet, a Chilean researcher is considered as any researcher who works in a Chilean Institution (such as a University, Research Centre, Research Institute, or any national institution), has Chilean funding from the

Agencia Nacional de Investigación y Desarrollo (<https://www.anid.cl/>), with Chilean nationality or a permanent residence in this country dedicated to investigating in areas related to the Social Network Science. However, any researcher interested in participating actively in the development of the Social Network Science in Chile or Ibero-America is more than welcome to become an international associate member of this group.

Some of the society's main objectives are to congregate, broadcast, and support the researchers actively working in social network science within Chile, Ibero-America, and abroad. Concretely, ChiSocNet would organize biannually the Chilean Social Network Conference (ChiSocNet), in between years, would also organize (biannually) the Chilean Summer School about Social Network Research (first version in January 2024 [<https://snlab-cl.github.io/summerschool/>]), and during each year some workshops are expected to be offered to the community. The following section will present our experience organizing the first Chilean Social Network Conference.

## I CHILEAN SOCIAL NETWORK CONFERENCE (CHISOCNET)

From January 4 to 6, 2023, the I Chilean Social Network Conference (ChiSocNet) occurred in Santiago, Chile, at the Universidad Mayor. For the first time in the country, the conference brings together researchers and practitioners working within the social network perspective to discuss theories, methods, and applications. The conference was hybrid since it was held on-site (Santiago) and online. This conference also had a special issue in the AWARI journal, coordinated by Francisca Ortiz Ruiz. We expect this issue to help spread some of the work done in Latin America and promote the consolidation of similar initiatives around the continent.

The conference was organized by Alejandro Espinosa-Rada (Social Networks Lab, ETH Zürich), Francisca Ortiz Ruiz (Millennium Institute for Care Research MICARE), and Diego Palacios (Universidad Mayor). Seven institutions sponsored the conference: 1) International Network for Social Networks Analysis INSNA. 2) Vicerrectoría de Investigación "Centro de Investigación en Sociedad y Salud", Universidad

Mayor. 3) Instituto Milenio Fundamento de los Datos. 4) Centro UC, Estudios de Políticas y Prácticas en Educación – CEPPE. 5) Centro de Estudios de Conflicto y Cohesión Social COES. 6) Social Sciences and Arts Faculty, Universidad Mayor. 7) Millennium Institute for Care Research (MICARE), Santiago, Chile.

On the first day, there were six workshops (presented in the following section). On the second day, January 5th, there were some words in the inauguration, an expert panel, and a national keynote. The expert's panel was called "The social impact of the social networks", and the intention was that central theme was to discuss how the use of social networks as an approach/perspective/method can have a public impact. The purpose here was for everyone to talk about their own experience and themes. That is why we tried to ensure they all have as many themes as possible. We discussed three questions: 1) How relevant is social impact in research today? What do you understand by social impact? 2) Does the use of social network analysis (ARS in Spanish) help generate research with high social impact? How? Could you give examples of this in your own research areas? 3) How do you think that future research (with ARS) could have a more significant social impact? And what are the challenges that this could present? The panel was moderated by Francisca Ortiz Ruiz and was composed of four speakers: 1) Magdalena Magdalena Saldaña, Assistant Professor, Pontificia Universidad Católica de Chile School of Communications; Associate Director, Center for the Study of Media, Public Opinion, and Politics in Chile (MEPOP); Associate Researcher, Millennium Institute for Foundational Research on Data (IMFD). 2) Paula Luengo Kanacri, Associate Professor, Director of the Doctoral Program in Psychology, P. Universidad Católica de Chile / Centre for Social Conflict and Cohesion Studies. 3) Álvaro Castillo Carniglia, Director, PhD program in Public Policy, Director, Millennium Nucleus for the Evaluation and Analysis of Drug Policies (nDP), Associate Professor, Society & Health Research Center, Universidad Mayor. 4) Cristóbal Villalobos, associated researcher and subdirector of the Centro de Estudios de Políticas y Prácticas en Educación in Pontificia Universidad Católica de Chile (CEPPE-UC).

About the national keynote, his presentation was titled "El análisis de redes en América Latina. Historia y desafíos." [Networks analysis in Latin America. History and challenges] done by Vicente Espinoza. He is an Associate Researcher of the Geographies of Conflict and Cohesion line at COES. He has a Ph.D. in sociology from the University of Toronto, Canada. Principal researcher of Fondecyt No 1171426, "The structure of sociability in Chile and its consequences for our coexistence. Longitudinal analysis of social networks" (2017-2022), using the Longitudinal Social Study of Chile (ELSOC) of COES; and co-researcher at Fondecyt Regular (2021-2024) "No, those are not counted." Informal institutions and social cohesion: legitimation, criticism, and disputes in the normative order in current Chile.". Diego Palacios moderated the presentation.

On the third day, the international keynote and a business meeting of the CHISOCNET group were held. The International keynote was a presentation by the Stephen Borgatti with his presentation entitiled "Malentendidos y unas críticas en el análisis de las redes sociales" ["Misunderstandings and criticism in the analysis of social networks"]. Steve Borgatti is a professor and chair at the University of Kentucky in the Department of Management, Gatton College of Business and Economics. His research focuses on social networks. In the United Kingdom, he hosts the LINKS Center research institute, which focuses on studying social networks in business environments. He is currently an associate editor at Computational and Mathematical Organizational Theory and the Journal of Supply Chain Management and on the board of directors of Field Methods. He is the former editor-in-chief of Connections, senior editor of Organization Science. He served on the boards of several journals, including Administrative Science Quarterly, Journal of Management, Sociological Methodology, etc. He is the author of several well-known programs, including UCINET, Anthonpac, and E-NET. Alejandro Espinosa-Rada moderated this presentation.

During the business meeting, we discussed the future of this organization, with all that may entail, and the next CHISOCNET conference in two more years. All speakers and conference participants were welcome. The

coordinator of CHISOCNET, Alejandro Espinosa-Rada, Social Networks Lab, ETH Zürich, moderated the session. On this occasion, one of the major decisions was to create a group of people to act as a council of the organization to formalize the association and its future activities, such as the 1st Chilean Summer School about Social Network Research.

The program was composed of 13 sessions covering nine different topics. More than 80 presentations and 180 participants attended the conference (including speakers and general audience). The sessions were: 1) Personal networks, ego networks, and case studies I and II, moderated by Francisca Ortiz Ruiz. 2) Networks in educational settings I and II, moderated by Lorena Ortega. 2) Sustentatibily, socioecology, and governance, moderated by Julien Vanhulst. 3) Networks in the world of art, moderated by Roberto Velásquez. 4) Patricio Padilla and Jorge Gilbert moderated Science and Bibliometrics I and II. 5) Diego Palacios and Guillermo Beck moderated political networks I and II. 6) Politics, economy, and inequality, moderated by Gabriel Otero. 7) Networks in the urban settings, moderated by Catalina Careaga Diaz. 8) Internet, social media, and software development, moderated by Catalina Careaga Diaz. 9) Methodological advances in networks, moderated by Alejandro Espinosa-Rada.

Most of the panels and sessions (in Spanish) were recorded, and then all the videos were uploaded to the CHISOCNET YouTube channel ([www.youtube.com/@chisocnet](http://www.youtube.com/@chisocnet)). As a way to promote social network science in the community, it was done six free workshops (not recorded): 1) Introduction to Social Networks Analysis (Francisca Ortiz Ruiz), 2) Mixed Methods in social networks (Francisca Ortiz Ruiz), 3) ERGMs Exponential Random Graphs Models (Alejandro Espinosa-Rada and Diego Palacios), 4) Introduction to Stochastic Actor-oriented Models SAOM (Diego Palacios and Alejandro Espinosa-Rada), 5) Producing papers with the ELSOC-COES survey (Gabriel Otero and Edgardo Cerda), and 6) Link-prediction with social networks using R (Ignacio Toledo). There were between 40 and 100 people registered in each workshop. All the workshops were done on the first day of the conference (Wednesday, 4 January 2023).

## LAST DEVELOPMENTS AND FUTURE OF THE CHILEAN COMMUNITY

Considering that this conference was the first conference of ChiSocNet, we consider the experience a big success. The conference could bring together researchers working on applying social network analysis, discussing theories, or presenting new methods. The program comprised 13 sessions on nine topics, with more than 80 presentations. In addition, 180 people were registered to attend the conference (including speakers and the general audience). Also, six free workshops were done, with between 40 and 100 people registered, depending on the topic.

There are different expected events and milestones for this year. The Hispanic network Lista REDES is organizing its second event, “Jornada de Redes”, to be celebrated on the 19 of March 2024, which is already motivating various people working from different parts of the region. Also, in the conference Sunbelt 2024 (24-30 June), held in Edinburgh, Scotland, there will be a session called “REDES panel: promoting collaboration and new studies in the community” organized by Francisca Ortiz Ruiz, José Luis Molina, and Isidro Maya Jariego to build a community of researchers working in Latin America, Spain, Portugal, and other countries. Also, the journal “REDES” made available data to be analyzed to investigate the bibliometric data available (<https://webs.uab.cat/redes/2023/11/14/como-reportar-datos-reticulares/>). In addition, CHISOCNET is working on institutionalizing the professional association, which will allow it to make more advances to consolidate the Chilean community and disseminate the social network perspective in Chile, Ibero-America and abroad. We also organize in January 2024 the 1st Chilean Summer School about Social Network Research, with 26 participants from different countries (e.g., Brazil, Canada, Chile, France, Panama, Peru, the United States of America), which had as keynote speakers Prof. René Veenstra (University of Groningen) and Prof. Johan Koskinen (Stockholm University), and as convenors Alejandro Espinosa-Rada (Social Networks Lab., ETH Zurich), Diego Palacios (Society and Health Research Center, Universidad Mayor), Francisca Ortiz



(Millennium Institute for Care Research – MICARE), and George Vega Yon (The University of Utah). Also, in November of 2023 was published the edited book “Redes Sociales: teoría, metodologías y aplicaciones en América Latina” [Handbook of Network Science: Theory, methodology, and Applications on América Latina] by the Editorial CIS, Spain. It seems that “noise” has been made through more events, associations, books, and others that we expect would have a promising impact on the national and international community in the short- and long term.

## ARTICLES OF THE SPECIAL ISSUE

This special issue is composed by this editorial, and four articles. First, it is presented “A study of academic cooperation networks in the research function of Literature studies at the Universidad Nacional de la Patagonia Austral (1996-2016)” by María Verónica Forchino and Alejandro Fabian Gasel (2023). Second, Gonzalo Franetovic and Arturo Bertero (2023) published “How do people understand inequality in Chile? A study through attitude network analysis”. Third, it is the article “Narrative display of the ‘I’ through the visualization of narrative graphs: the case of four women who lost their spouse due to unexpected death” authored by Jennifer Castillo Ospina and Margarita Rosa Losada Medina (2023). Finally, Bey Jamelyd López Torres and Humberto Martínez Bautista (2023) co-authored the article “SENTIK: Web module for the systematization of information in social networks analysis”.

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## Conflict of interest

The author(s) declare that there is no conflict of interest.

## Statement of data consent

No data have been generated during the development of this study. ●

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