

Norma Aída Manzanera Silva\*

# The CISAN, a Global Community in The Digital World

“We, we who were, we are the same no longer.”<sup>1</sup>

*Poem 20, Pablo Neruda*

Since it was founded, the Center for Research on North America (CISAN) has set itself the goal of recording its activity as a producer of scientific knowledge through printed publications and in-person events. Little by little, but steadily, however, it has also moved into the digital sphere. Also from its inception, the CISAN has distinguished itself for building bridges and increasing relations and collaborative, mutually beneficial links to the rest of the university community and other institutions.

The center’s national and foreign followers have increased; among them are academics, students, and other interested parties like journalists, public decision- and policymakers; government officials, popular representatives, and NGOs, as well as the public in general. The element they all have in common is their interest in studies about the interactions of Mexico, the United States, and Canada, and their impact in the world. While we can identify certain assiduous followers, we do not have a full register of all of them or their characteristics, although, as will be clear further down, we have some data to form an idea about who has shown an interest in the CISAN’s production. CISAN researchers also participate in about eighty-four research networks that belong to associations, universities, government bodies, and national and international civil society organizations.

As soon as it was able, the CISAN’s Digital Services Area began streaming live and recording its academic extension activities, thus reaching a wider audience. In 2018, it also began offering the complete texts of its collections of books, notebooks, magazines, reports, and theses on MicISAN, its institutional repository, which is open access.<sup>2</sup>

What we know about the center’s number of followers is only that it is not very large, since their area of interest is very specific: the North American region. We do have indicators of its expansion and contraction according to the context or relational element (migration, drug trafficking, security, etc.), as well as due to technological facilities. Plus, we have a directory of academic bodies that study our region, undoubtedly our target audience.

Based on the reports of activities by the current CISAN administration, we have detected an upward trend in the number of followers on social media. (see graph 1)

In addition, the section on academic dissemination of the academic year 2019-2020 report states, “Despite the obligatory move to distance-based work, this year we report sixteen more activities than the previous year.”<sup>3</sup> And by the year 2020-2021, the advantages of virtual activities meant that we had an extraordinary record number of participants. This illustrates a transition in the way of perceiving non-in-person activities, going from surprise at the increase in their use to being sure of their benefits. (see table 1)

## The Redan

In 2019, the CISAN created the Network of Researchers on North America (Redan), whose main goal is to join forces to socialize scholars’ results and share their experiences, as well as to include different sectors of both national and international society to open up a dialogue and inter-institutional links. Although the network’s by-laws do not mention digital media and virtual activity, they have become very important as the following will show.

One of Redan’s fundamental events is its bi-annual international congress, a space for dialogue which has been held twice. In 2021, during the pandemic, it held the First Virtual North American Studies Congress, with 760 participants; the theme was “Are we a region?” In 2023, we held the Second Biennial North American Studies Congress with 900 participants, 256 online and 644 in-person.

\* Norma is an academic and manager of MicISAN, our institutional repository; you can contact her at [normanza@unam.mx](mailto:normanza@unam.mx).

In 2021, Redan had 153 members, and by the end of 2023, it had 270. Using the registration packet, we gathered their full names, e-mail addresses, organization, nationality, telephone number, gender, age, highest level of study, topics and lines of research, disciplines and subdisciplines, the institutions they worked in, other academic organizations they belonged to, and their most important publication. This allowed us to create a data base that can exactly tell us the community’s characteristics.

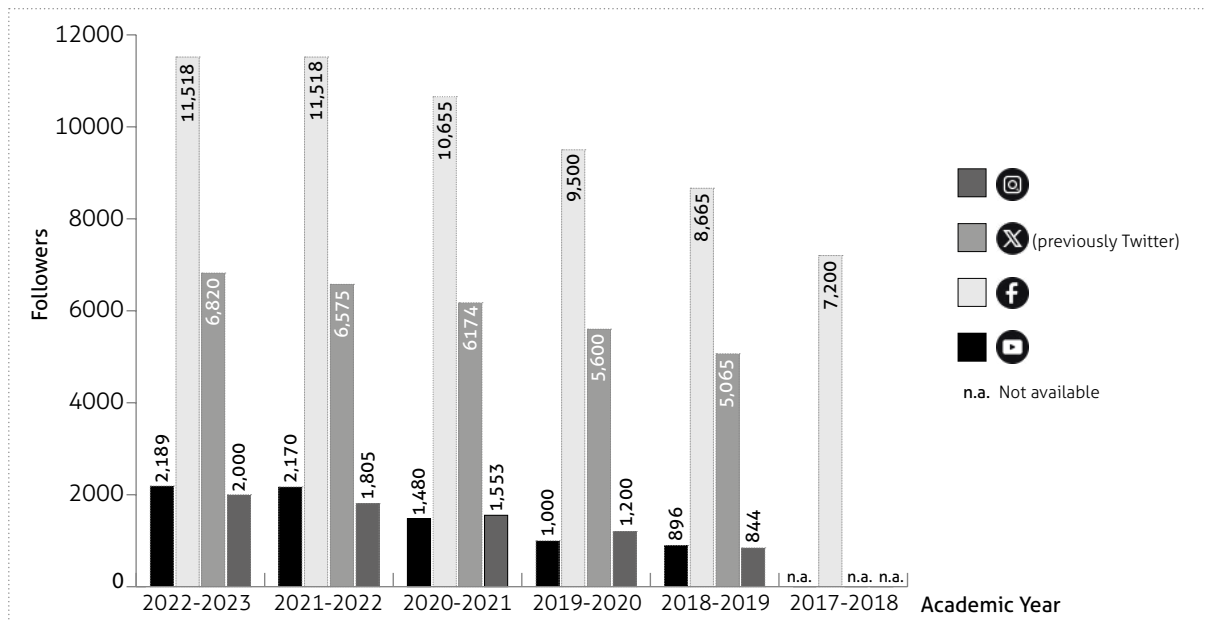
Here, it is relevant to underline that two of Redan’s specific aims are to 1) put together mechanisms for disseminating knowledge about North America produced in different places, and, 2) position itself as a reference for the

The virtual interinstitutional OpenAIRE-NEXUS-CISAN-UNAM collaboration tightened its links in an egalitarian way among organizations totally different in size and areas of influence.

exchange of information and dissemination of national and international academic activities.

To do this, MicISAN promoted the creation of North American Studies (NAS), a portal that gathers studies about the region produced in different parts of the world, and Redan Community, a website that offers the network’s

Graph 1  
Followers on Social Media



Source: Developed by the author based on different institutional reports from the CISAN.

Table 1  
Academic Dissemination

Academic Year	Number of Activities	National Presenters	Presenters from Abroad	Participants
2022-2023	77	346	106	More than 2800
2021-2022	90	279	80	3000*
2020-2021	80	295	92	5600*
2019-2020	55	170	60	n. d.
2018-2019	37	150	40	950
2017-2018	26	115	19	More than 900

Source: Developed by the author based on different institutional reports from the CISAN.

\*This covers the social distancing period imposed by Covid-19.

thirteen bulletins published so far, available to all organizations interested in disseminating news about activities, fellowships, and funding of projects of interest to the members.

Although the project's background and characteristics are detailed in the bulletin's twelfth issue,<sup>4</sup> I should mention here how, at the same time that NAS was being built, the virtual interinstitutional OpenAIRE-NEXUS-CISAN-UNAM collaboration tightened its links in an egalitarian way among organizations totally different in size and areas of influence. For example, OpenAIRE is a European Commission agency in charge of open science, with a powerful infrastructure that includes 5,622 repositories worldwide. The digital sphere and the iron will to collaborate have made possible equity in accordance with UNESCO recommendations about open science.<sup>5</sup>

The arrangement is a win-win: the CISAN enriches the contents of OpenAIRE with simultaneous intercommunication of the resources stored in MiCISAN; the other side of the arrangement is that OpenAIRE offers amenities such as, for example, software and technological advisory services. In addition, MiCISAN contributes the identification of key words, projects, sources, and several resources for developing and perfecting the algorithm and configuration and management of the NAS platform.

Redan Community is a platform housed on Zenodo, a repository that contains different organizations' content, plus space for work by independent researchers who want their documents to be published in the communities or spaces Zenodo offers, which accept or reject the documents depending on their profile. If they are rejected, the papers are published directly by Zenodo. In short, the Redan Community platform operates as a means of dissemination for academic activities, fellowships, and funding, but not research papers.

The OpenAIRE work log registers e-mail comunicués, the use of virtual platforms for meetings to reach agreements, workshops, and community calls for updates about the ecosystem we're members of now. That is, the digital medium and virtuality have also contributed enormously to operational management.

I should mention that the creation of NAS simultaneously and collaterally allowed for forging strong links to fundamental actors in the global open science ecosystem. One example was the North American Studies Gateway virtual panel in the framework of the Open Science Inter-

national Cooperation, presented during the Second Biennial North American Studies Congress "Globalization in Crisis?" Panel participants were Ana Persic, UNESCO chief of science policy; Kathleen Shearer, executive director, Confederation of Open Access Repositories (COAR); Natalia Manola, CEO of OpenAIRE; Alessia Bardi, OpenAIRE product manager; Lautaro Matas, executive and technical director, LaReferencia; and myself, Norma Manzanera, manager of MiCISAN.

Lastly, I should underline that an academic institution like the CISAN, both during and after the pandemic, has demonstrated the benefits of the digital medium and virtuality for formalizing, strengthening, and configuring the identity of an entire community, specialized in the North American region: the Redan. **MM**

## Notes

- 1 Translation by Stephen Tapscott, [https://www.babelmatrix.org/works/es/Neruda%2C\\_Pablo-1904/Poema\\_20/en/32895-Poem\\_20](https://www.babelmatrix.org/works/es/Neruda%2C_Pablo-1904/Poema_20/en/32895-Poem_20).
- 2 See <https://ru.micisan.unam.mx/>.
- 3 Graciela Martínez-Zalce Sánchez, "Tercer informe de labores, 2019-2020," CISAN, UNAM, September 2020, p. 69, [http://www.cisan.unam.mx/InformesGMZ/Informe\\_2019\\_2020.pdf](http://www.cisan.unam.mx/InformesGMZ/Informe_2019_2020.pdf). [Editor's Note.]
- 4 Redan, *Boletín Informativo/Newsletter* no. 12 (August 2023): 13, <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.8291595>.
- 5 For further information about this, visit <https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000379949>. [Editor's Note.]



The graphic features a world map with a focus on North America, overlaid with a network of lines and nodes. The MiCISAN logo, consisting of three stacked 'M' shapes, is positioned to the left of the text 'MiCISAN REPOSITORIO INSTITUCIONAL'. Below this, the text reads: 'Todas las publicaciones del Centro de Investigaciones sobre América del Norte (CISAN), UNAM, a tu alcance.' A list of collections follows: 'Colecciones: • Libros • Norteamérica, Revista Académica del CISAN-UNAM • Cuadernos de América del Norte • Voices of Mexico'. At the bottom left, the slogan '¡Ciencia abierta en movimiento!' is displayed. A QR code is located at the bottom right, and the URL 'https://ru.micisan.unam.mx/' is printed at the very bottom.