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Open access to closed journals: A case on content narrowness

Acceso abierto a revistas cerradas: un caso de estrechez de contenido

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Open access is currently one of the most booming topics and a movement with great transformation potential in scholarly communication. It has been approached from several perspectives such as: the political economy of science,¹ the asymmetry between central and peripheral science (Guédon, 2011), and the democratization of science in Latin America (Banerjee et al., 2015). Scholarly communication is a wide term “that refers to the *many different ways* [emphasis added] in which authors and creators of scholarly and scientific work share information” (Anderson, 2018, para. 1) with everyone—inside and outside academia—about the work they are doing and their findings. It is important to note that the system of creation, evaluation, dissemination, use, and preservation of writings that comprises scholarly communication (Wright, 2019) is *diverse* and *inclusive*.

The diversity and inclusiveness of scholarly communication must be appreciated and featured in the contents of scientific journals, which are the main support for the dissemination of research results (Luchilo, 2019). This is not always the case as many journals limit their content to original research articles in the traditional format (introduction, methodology, results,

¹ There is vast literature on this subject in various aspects (e.g., the scientific journal market, the oligopoly of commercial publishers, and the organization of scholarly and scientific production). The article by Luchilo (2019) included in the references offers a panoramic view of this topic.

discussion, and conclusion). Internationally renowned journals publish content in a variety of formats, such as theoretical articles, software tool articles, review articles, studies of observations, short reports, research notes, posters, letters, descriptions of research methodology, datasets, perspectives, interviews, conference materials, commentaries, and case studies. The many different types of scholarly articles and contents can contribute knowledge to numerous fields and be useful to readers of peer-reviewed research and technical-professional journals.

Data articles, for example, are documents that inform the academic community of research conducted and make the data available, so that it can be used by other researchers. They are relevant and valuable to the extent that there are journals exclusively dedicated to publishing datasets. Moreover, several of the major funding agencies have policies “that require or promote data sharing” (Walters, 2020, p. 2); consequently, researchers should not only be encouraged but also incentivized to share their work and results with each other and with the rest of the world. Data journals and journals, in general, that publish data reports are essential in this aspect of scholarly communication; however, these magazines are scarce or even non-existent in many places like Latin America. An informal survey among editors of 225 Latin American social science journals recently found that none of them publish datasets.^{2, 3}

What alternatives do Latin American researchers have to publish their data, if the journals of their region do not accept them? They could draft their datasets in another language—most likely English—and submit them to journals—most likely commercial—that consider them (and charge author processing charges for doing so). They would have the option to share them in funder-specific repositories, as well as general, cross-disciplinary data repositories recommended by the funding agencies or hosted by universities. They could also publish them as preprints on one of the open-access public servers for the rapid dissemination of scholarly research, as well as on academic social networks devoted to connecting scientists and making research open to all. In

² The survey was carried out among two groups of editors from different countries using the freeware, cross-platform centralized instant messaging and voice-over-IP service WhatsApp, in October 2021. If any reader knows or collaborates in any Latin American journal that publishes datasets or other content (apart from original research articles and book reviews), the author would appreciate receiving this information (at carriona@ilepr.org), for future research on this topic.

³ The narrowness of content found in social science journals was not observed in Latin American humanities journals; many of the latter feature diverse and inclusive content, as found in research conducted by the author in 2021.

addition, there is the possibility of publishing their work as articles and reports through some websites of universities, study centers, and think tanks.⁴

Finding data articles written by Spanish-speaking authors in English-language commercial journals⁵ can cause mixed feelings to those of us who work for the development of scholarly editing and publishing in Latin America. On the one hand, it is significant that the science produced in this region is disseminated in quality journals published in other parts of the world. On the other hand, it is unfortunate that the journals of the countries where this literature is written do not compete in content openness with others in various places. Opening the content to the diversity and inclusion that characterizes scholarly communication could be an equalizer for journals and would not affect their financial sustainability.⁶ Why then is there so much narrowness of content? This is a question for reflection and research; and it is exposed here to the intellectual curiosity of the readers. The issue is raised and *open*—as is the *access* to which many of us aspire.

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⁴ Some of these are “Perspectives” of Harvard Business School Publishing (<https://hbsp.harvard.edu/inspiring-minds/categories/perspectives>), “The Latin American Diaries” of The Centre for Latin American and Caribbean Studies (<https://latinamericandiaries.blogs.sas.ac.uk>), and “Blog” of Bruegel (<https://www.bruegel.org/blog/>).

⁵ An example is Acevedo et al. (2020).

⁶ The opening of journals to the diversity and inclusiveness of scholarly communication is a cultural and volitional matter that overcomes the “asymmetric relationships, of dependency and unequal exchange that have limited” (Banerjee et al., 2015, p. 13) the development, legitimation, and visibility of academic publications in Latin America.

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