

This presentation of issue 72 of *Educational Innovation*, whose thematic section is dedicated to the *Relevance and future of academic journals*, will analyze two aspects that help explain the current conditions of academic journals and, from that perspective, will propose alternatives for their future. A general Latin American vision of the topic will be presented, but with a special focus on the Mexican situation. The first aspect is the evolution of journals, highlighting their conditions before and after the spread of the Internet; the second, in general terms, is related to governmental scientific policies and their effects on the development and recognition of regional publications.

In general terms, Latin American academic journals began a new era when they uploaded their first issues to the Internet towards the end of the 1990s. Prior to this, the conditions for publishing and distributing printed journals were precarious and limited. A large portion of the print run, which was sometimes over 1000 issues, were left in storehouses due to the lack of funds for shipping. The sale of subscriptions was not an option due to, among various other factors, the lack of personnel in charge of this process; therefore, a business tradition was never created, although this probably implied other sociological questions that are important to analyze. Many of the journals were produced with a team comprised of no more than two part-time members, and this situation still continues in many cases. The best and almost sole option to reach readers was through libraries. In this way, the edition and publication of an academic journal in Latin America was, and in many cases still is, an act of heroism to which only a few dedicate themselves, perhaps as heirs to some kind of quixotic tradition. Despite these conditions and in order to overcome them, projects such as BIREME (OPS/OMS) (1967), CLASE (1975), Periódica (1978) and Latindex (1997) were created that initiated the task of compiling and systematizing Latin American scientific production.

On the other hand, before the Internet, the business of large commercial publishing houses, mainly European and North American, was very successful in the number of titles as well as issues sold. In this way, the possibility of online publishing provided the opportunity for Latin American publications to reach readers

more widely, and at relatively low costs. Towards the end of the 1990s, very few editors considered that using the Internet could create commercial business models for their journals. Thus a kind of publishing supported almost completely by public funds was constructed, without generating costs for authors or readers. It is important to clarify that, despite the tools and benefits offered by the Internet, the majority of journals, individually, did not have the necessary and immediate technological resources to upload their contents online, or if they were able to, it was still difficult to reach the necessary audiences. Therefore as a continuation of the Latin American efforts started in 1967, in 1998, after a period of planning and preparation, Brazil uploaded the collection of SciELO journals, with open and free access. In 2003, the project RedALyC, directed by the Autonomous University of the State of Mexico, also initiated its collection of Latin American and Caribbean journals with open and free access.

At the same time, in reaction to the hegemony and excess of European and North American commercial publishing houses, in 2002, the *Budapest Initiative for Open Access* was started, promoting free and open access to scientific literature worldwide. As a result of this movement, in 2003 the Directory of Open Access Journals (DOAJ) was created, intending to bring together all the open access journals throughout the world. In addition to the DOAJ, other initiatives were created to promote open access and are now defining the desirable characteristics of this format, such as with the Sherpa-Romeo project, the Open Access Spectrum Evaluation Tool or HowOpenIsIt? by PLoS. This is not the venue to analyze each of these programs in detail, but as a general summary it can be said that open access, which we can call “European” in its origins, is characterized by the emphasis it places on making published material available without restriction, and it strongly recommends that the authors of scientific articles should be the sole owners of the rights to their work. Additionally, it recommends that journals locate alternative sources of financing in order to reduce costs and, ideally, charge neither authors nor institutions for publishing their work.

Considering all this, it is clear that Latin America is a pioneer in open access to scientific information, and that the ideals put forth in the *Budapest Initiative* are a reality in this region with the exception of the copyright recommendations. Why do journals in Latin America retain copyrights? What does this imply? Is it correct? What are the possible reasons? It is clear that a commercial magazine would be interested in maintaining copyrights because, otherwise, how would it generate profits? What, then, is the reason behind Latin American journals maintaining copyrights when they do not seek economic profits? Though a formal analysis is necessary, we have heard the following reasons: journals have the right to maintain copyright given that they have

invested in the production of the final version of the article; in the case of many authors from Latin American institutions, the institutions and journals maintain the copyrights for contractual purposes; it is a way of protecting the integrity of the articles; if the author had all the rights, there would be a possibility for profit, which would be wrong because the financing is public. To clarify this topic, we could ask another question. If the journal maintains the rights, but allows downloading, creating a personal archive and the total or partial reproduction of the work, as long as all cases of reproduction are non-profit, is it restricting open access? For Latin America to be a pioneer in open access, various factors came into play together. First of all was the development of the Internet; secondly the existence of journals and the interest of editors and institutions to reach readers; and finally, the factor that solidified the previous two and made open access a reality in this region was the operation of SciELO, RedALyC and Latindex.

Seeing things from this global perspective makes everything seem relevant and successful. However, the local and regional conditions of Latin American journals in their scientific communities, despite the great progress that has been achieved, are far from ideal. For example, new or developing journals confront problems with financing that hinder the possibility of adequate infrastructure and computer equipment, as well as the integration of an editorial team with appropriately trained members. Established journals, of which there are some examples in Mexico, some with international recognition, may have overcome the previous obstacles, but they are still struggling to obtain the recognition of their communities and the institutions in charge of scientific policies in their countries. On the one hand, it is known that Latin Americans, perhaps Mexicans in particular, rarely quote their colleagues, especially if they have published in regional journals, which is possibly linked with the institutionalization of science in Latin American countries that only began towards the end of the 1960s and that used Europe and the United States as a model. We might believe that this has changed, but that is far from true, as is demonstrated by the systems to stimulate academic productivity that rewards, among other things, the publication in European and North American journals and discourages the publication in Latin American journals. Therefore, the scientific policies related to journals are contradictory. On the one hand, there are diverse financial support programs, but on the other—as was just mentioned—there is a devaluation of what is published in regional journals, while at the same time there is the intention to make them “first world” journals, placed in the top two quartiles of Scopus and Web of Science. To make the situation worse, the aggressive efforts of big commercial publishing houses to control the “Latin American market” are growing fiercely and sometimes even have the support of some of the important institutions of

higher education in Latin America. Furthermore, the governmental science policies of at least Brazil, Colombia and Mexico seem to focus more and more on using the evaluation systems and parameters of the region of the world admired by so many, namely Europe and North America.

Before this situation what actions can the editors and members of interested scientific communities take in order to change the state of affairs? Before presenting a few ideas, it is important to note that, despite the criticisms expressed above, the creation of governmental systems to regulate and support journals has had positive results because many of them have improved and formalized basic aspects of presentation, organization and operation. Thus, the editors need to take care not only to conserve these achievements, but also to stay updated with technological changes and editorial processes. The possibilities for success in the struggle for recognition expand in relation to the efficiency, integrity and commitment of a journal. However, for Latin America, this is not enough because general governmental policies and the position of many members of scientific communities delay and hinder not only the development of their journals, but also the possibilities for this region to evolve in accordance with its own historic characteristics, in order to become a valid scientific voice in Europe and the USA, as well as in other regions of the world.

The ideas that can be expressed and may help us advance towards an ideal should be agreed upon in order to be implemented; however, the work must begin even before reaching global agreements. In the case of academic journals, the following are some ideas with which to begin:

- ▶ Encouraging Latin American researchers and scholars to publish in regional journals, at the level of general laws and particular norms.
- ▶ Continuing the support to already existing journals and supporting the creation of new titles.
- ▶ Consolidating and institutionalizing the Latin American publication model so that it continues to provide free and open access to authors and readers.
- ▶ Making students aware of the existence of Latin American journals and training them to use them as a source of information and as an option to publish their work when the time comes.
- ▶ Supporting the creation of networks of journal directors and editors with a regional scope.

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