



SHARING EXPERIENCES ABOUT DEVELOPING A REGIONAL SOCIAL SCIENCE VIRTUAL LIBRARY - *The Latin America and the Caribbean Social Science Virtual Library*

By Dominique Babini

Availability of social science publications

Access to social science publications from Latin America and the Caribbean, as also happens with social science publications from other developing regions, has always been a nightmare for institutions within the region and from other regions of the world. Many reasons contribute to this situation: very low number of copies printed of each academic book or journal; no international distribution and/or interlibrary lending because of excessively high costs of postal services in the region; discontinuity of social science library collections due to discontinuity in support to social science research and teaching institutions; very few good social science libraries located outside main cities.

Internet impact on social sciences publication and dissemination

Internet is changing the formats of edition, distribution and access to scientific results. In developing regions the Web provides a unique opportunity to challenge the difficulties mentioned above and explore new ways of edition, dissemination and access to research results. An example is the virtual library started in 1998 by the Latin American Council of Social Sciences (CLACSO), a network gathering 159 social science research and teaching institutions in 21 countries of Latin America and the Caribbean (see map). Today, the Reading Room of CLACSO's Virtual Library gives **open access to more than 4.000 full-text books, periodical articles and papers**. Visitors to the virtual library can download the full-text of books and articles, print them, and visit the bibliographic database to learn about other publications which do not yet have the full-text in the Reading Room. Soon, the Reading Room will have a search facility to help users find a concept within the field of metadata, the field of abstract and also within the full-text itself.

Building cooperative virtual libraries requires training librarians and editors

To have a cooperative virtual library with full-text books, periodical articles and papers published by a network of academic institutions distributed in many countries requires training staff at the coordinating office (in this case CLACSO's library and

editorial staff in Buenos Aires) and training a group of librarians and editors from participating institutions in different countries. CLACSO, with support from SIDA (Sweden) and INASP (Great Britain) has invited editors of social science journals in the region to attend e-publishing events in Guadalajara (México), Valparaíso (Chile) and Buenos Aires (Argentina) to encourage editors to develop Web access to their publications. In the past two years CLACSO has used a virtual campus platform to deliver a course to train librarians, editors and webmasters in basic services of virtual libraries and practice online input to existing virtual libraries. The experience of choosing a virtual campus platform, building teams for teaching and learning, working the design of the course content and managing the course has been described in an article recently published in *Library Management* (vol.25, number 1-2, 2004, pp.72-78).

More information from

Dominique Babini
Latin American Social Science Council – CLACSO
e.mail: dbabini@campus.clacso.edu.ar
www.clacso.org/wwwclacso/espanol/html/biblioteca/fbiblioteca.html