

# The movement towards open access and open science in Latin America: the view from CLACSO

Dominique Babini\*

May 2023

To this call in celebration of the [25th anniversary of SciELO](#), to share in this Blog our personal experiences in the movement towards open access and open science in our region, I add my story as part of the [CLACSO team](#), with whom I have traveled that path in the last 40 years, starting in 1983, and am still traveling today.

It was the early 1980s, when some of our Latin American governments were restoring democracy after several years of dictatorship during which the social sciences and critical humanities were systematically persecuted and made invisible. While I was doing my doctorate in political science in Argentina, and preparing my thesis on national information policy, I was invited by Jean Meyriat from the Fondation Nationale des Sciences Politiques, who later guided me in my thesis, to collaborate as a volunteer in the collection of bibliographic information from Argentina for the International Bibliography of Social Sciences, which at that time was distributed by UNESCO every year in printed format. One day, a few months before the return to democracy in Argentina in 1983, at my job at that time, I received a visit from the person who directed CLACSO at that time, Francisco Delich, who was interested in my work. I explained to him that the purpose of my task was to give international visibility to the production of social sciences, made invisible in the times of dictatorship. I was immediately invited, initially as a volunteer until we got funds, to join the CLACSO project to restart the activities of its own library after the return to democracy that year.

Since CLACSO is a network of research centers distributed throughout Latin America and the Caribbean, I accepted the invitation and proposed that new technologies be used to create databases that would give regional and international visibility to information on the social sciences and humanities in the region (institutions, researchers, publications) for which we joined the IDIN-International Development Information Network project (1988-1995), which resulted in several years of collaboration with similar projects of social science networks in Europe, Africa, Arab countries, and Southeast Asia.

The publications database allowed us to access the bibliographical references, but the difficulty continued to be how to access the full text of the publications, at that time still printed, and the costs to send the printed version between cities and countries in the region were very high. There were also delays of several weeks, and even months, to receive the printed publications, be they purchased or borrowed via interlibrary loan, in

the post. Driven by the need to innovate in order to increase the circulation of knowledge generated in the social sciences, we at CLACSO began to experiment with sending digital texts via the Internet through the recently created email that was inaugurated at CLACSO using experience gained in the library. Later, with the creation of the Web, many opportunities opened to think about how to share complete digital texts in the modality that was later called open access.

In the 1990s, various regional scholar-led projects were developed in Latin America and the Caribbean to give visibility and access to the scientific publications of the region, a region that did not outsource the management of scientific communications to the commercial sector. At the National Autonomous University of Mexico-UNAM, [Latindex](#) was created, whose databases provide information on journals published in the Ibero-American region, and at the same university, from the PERIÓDICA and CLASE databases of journals, [BIBLAT](#) was later developed to provide access to full text and indicators. Also in that decade, several thematic networks in the region created their digital libraries that initially provided access to the bibliographical references of the publications, and little by little added links to the digital full texts in open access. Examples are the Virtual Health Library ([Biblioteca Virtual de Salud-BVS](#)), the Agricultural Information System ([Sistema de Información Agrícola-SIDALC](#)), and from CLACSO the Network of Virtual Libraries of Social Sciences in Latin America and the Caribbean ([Red de Bibliotecas Virtuales de Ciencias Sociales en América Latina y el Caribe](#)), as a subject repository of social sciences and humanities, an initiative that allowed us to be part of a regional movement to promote a cultural change in the way of communicating and accessing knowledge produced by the social sciences of the region in a diversity of formats, including open access to academic books, a joint activity of CLACSO's network of editorial and library teams that together have built one of the most important [social sciences books collection with more than 4.000 open access books](#).

Concerning scientific journals, innovative developments emerged in Latin America to give visibility, open access, and indexing services to peer-reviewed journals published in the region ([SciELO](#), [Redalyc](#), [Latindex Catálogo](#)). And, starting in the new millennium, universities were encouraged by open access policies to create institutional repositories that reflect their own production published in open access, later allowing the creation of national repository systems in 12 countries that today make up the regional network of repositories [La Referencia](#). The first national open access policies approved in Peru (2013), Argentina (2013) and Mexico (2014) prioritized repositories to implement open access.

In each of these pioneering initiatives in the path to open access and open science in Latin America and the Caribbean, there is a mixture of institutional visions and individual passions that, collaborating with other initiatives, built a regional vision of community-led open access implemented with collaborative models.

This regional movement that sought to promote and implement open access in the region, was supported by several declarations on open access and open science, from [SciELO](#) (2005), [CLACSO](#) (2015), [Latindex-Redalyc-CLACSO-IBICT](#) (2017), and more recently the Declaration of Panama on Open Science ([Declaración de Panamá sobre Ciencia Abierta](#), 2018) and the declaration of [Latindex-Redalyc-AmeliCA-CLACSO-La Referencia](#) (2022) in support of the [UNESCO Recommendation on Open](#)

[Science](#) (2021) approved by the governments of 193 countries in 2021. In 2022 Colombia approved a National Open Science Policy ([Política Nacional de Ciencia Abierta](#)) and Argentina carried out the Diagnosis and Recommendations for Open Science Policies ([Diagnóstico y Recomendaciones para Políticas de Ciencia Abierta](#)).

This background characterizes Latin America and the Caribbean as an example of an international region that supports knowledge as a public good, and the management of open access as a common good, without profit, with collaborative models, with shared costs and in-kind contributions. It is a great achievement for the region, and a significant contribution to the international debate on how to accelerate open science and open access at the global level in a participatory, equitable, and sustainable manner.

One of the main pending challenges for open access in the region is to advance the regional and international interoperability of the initiatives mentioned above in order to generate consolidated indicators of scientific and academic production published in the region, indicators that can be used in the research assessment processes in the region, a process today dominated by the WoS and Scopus indicators that very poorly reflect the wealth of knowledge published in the region. CLACSO contributes to this objective and these debates with the [Latin American Forum on Research Assessment \(FOLEC-CLACSO\)](#), created in 2019, and with its [Declaration](#) (2022) and [documents](#).

One of the biggest frustrations of this path towards open access, I would say, has been to observe in the so-called international “mainstream” publishing circuit a sustained advance over the past decades of the commercialization of scholarly communication and its evaluation indicators, and in the relentless transformation of this sector into a large, increasingly consolidated market, dominated by a few international corporations and among the most profitable in the world. That commercialization is continuing in open access publishing by charging APCs (article processing charges) and BPCs (book processing charges).

In this sense, one of my greatest hopes is to see greater investments and public policies committed in all regions to strengthen community-led open access initiatives in open infrastructures, with collaborative, mutually supportive, and inclusive working modalities for diversity of knowledge and communication formats and providing non-for-profit services. This approach to manage open access to knowledge as a commons that prevails in Latin America and the Caribbean – and has a growing presence in other regions – seems to us the most appropriate one to contribute in moving forward with each of the [Sustainable Development Goals](#), with the [UNESCO Open Science Recommendation](#), and with other priority agendas at the global and local level, which require both international and local knowledge. We must take care that it is the community, and not the market, who defines the needs and priorities for research, for open access to publications, and for the evaluation of science. I had the privilege of representing CLACSO in the group of specialists that have drafted the new international [open access recommendations \(BOAI20\)](#) where open access publication and distribution channels are recommended that are inclusive and do not exclude participation for economic reasons. Where it is also recommended to move away from commercial models that charge APCs for publishing in open access and that propose transformative agreements that only benefit the permanence of a commercial system that has already shown that its decisions respond more to commercial needs than to those of open science. To help the move away from increased commercialism,

CLACSO has also joined the organizing committee of the [Global Summit on Diamond Open Access](#).