

Exploring the publishing model of the Open Library of Humanities: A view from Latin America

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This week marks the launch of the greatly anticipated open access mega-journal, the Open Library of Humanities. **Francisco Osorio** provides a brief overview of what sets this journal project apart from the rest and how the new funding model offers an economic, social and technological platform for the humanities and social sciences to transition to open access. At the heart of the matter is the forms of communication in humanities and social sciences as distinctive from the natural sciences.



The Open Library of Humanities is no longer a project. On September 28th 2015 the mega-journal for humanities and the social sciences came into existence, and at the same time a new funding model.

The screenshot shows the homepage of the Open Library of Humanities. At the top, there is a navigation bar with links for Home, About, Journals, Publishing, and Research Integrity. Social media icons for Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, and Email are also present. Below the navigation bar is the Open Library of Humanities logo and the text "Open Library of Humanities". There are two buttons: "Publish with us" and "Get involved!". A "Part of" badge is also visible. The main banner features a colorful background of vertical lines and a silhouette of a person holding an umbrella. The text on the banner reads: "SEPT. 2015 OLH Launches The Open Library of Humanities has launched!". Below the banner is a "Featured Journals" section with a "All Journals" button. Six journal covers are displayed: ASIANetwork Exchange, Journal of British and Irish Innovative Poetry, The Comics Grid, 19: Interdisciplinary Studies in the Long Nineteenth Century, Open Library of Humanities, and Studies in the Maternal.

Four models for open access journals

As we know the funding models for academic journals were: (a) the reader pays, (b) the author pays and (c) nobody pays. The new model of the Open Library of Humanities is that (d) the libraries pay. Models (a) and (b) are quite familiar to students and lecturers. It is based on charging one end of the spectrum: either the creator pays upfront or the end user does so. Model (c) is common in Latin American open access journals because either an author pays the journals to publish or the reader is charged to access the content they are interested in. But the sentence

'nobody pays' is misleading. The cost of running the journal is absorbed by someone: the editor's own pocket, the research centre, the university, a private company, or even the State.

Bearing this in mind, the Open Library of Humanities came up with a different proposal: to charge libraries. It is defined as a collective funding model. When the proposal came forward in 2013, it was based on the following supposition: Consider a journal publishes 250 articles in a year – If 100 libraries were involved, each library should contribute USD\$1850.00 so the cost of the article per institution would be USD\$7.40. If 400 libraries were involved, their contribution would be USD\$462.00 and the cost per article would drop to USD\$1.84.

On the launch day 99 libraries were involved. By libraries they mean those attached to UK universities (mostly), American universities, some Canadian, a few European, one Australian university and some private organisations. In 2015, Open Library of Humanities will be considering publishing 150 articles per year at the cost of USD\$6 per library.

So, is model (d) – library pays – different from model (c) – nobody pays? In one sense, the library pays option falls under the category 'nobody pays' because the cost is absorbed by a university, as per the Latin American open access experience. The difference can be found in their collective approach. As far as I know, you cannot find 100 Latin American universities contributing funding to a single academic journal in humanities and social sciences.

The journal as a platform

As a journal, the Open Library of Humanities published one article in its first day ([3D UK? 3D History and the Absent British Pioneers](#) by Keith Johnston) and one editorial by their creators ([Eve & Edwards 2015](#)). The Chilean Manuel Tapia, or more accurately Manuel Loyola Tapia ('Loyola Tapia' being the surnames as is typical in Spanish naming structures), is the only Latin-American in their editorial team as section editor of cultural studies and critical theory.

As a platform, 7 journals so far exist under the protocol (if I have understood correctly, the 150 articles expected to be published are distributed among these seven journals). In other words, it is an economic, social and technological platform for a transition to open access. Again, Latin American journals that are already open access should ask themselves what they are likely to gain by joining the Open Library of Humanities as a platform.

A nice welcome

I really like this proposal because at the heart of the matter is the question of the forms of communication in humanities and social sciences as distinctive from the natural sciences. In 2015 the newly formed Association of Cultural and Literary Journals of Latin American (called [Latinoamericana](#), with 106 journals, led by the Venezuelan journal editor Jeffrey Cedeño), asked the question: Could the journals themselves be called scientific? Interestingly, some strong opinions were in favour, not because the work resembles the natural sciences but because the concept of science helps to explain how it's undertaken to the government: serious and important thinking. Also in 2015, a statement subscribed to at that time by 92 journals and [published in the journal *Poiesis* \(No. 29\)](#) called 'A statement about the assessment of academic quality in humanities journals', argued against (a) the overall importance of metrics and indicators instead of content and value in humanities journal articles and (b) the overlooking of the differences between practices in humanities compared to the natural sciences. That led to a protocol with five guidelines:

1. Do not promote an article because of its impact factor
2. Do not use the IMRAD journal structure as an obligation
3. Do not consider a journal without impact factor as less valuable
4. Do not close access to journal reading
5. Do not charge authors for publishing

Finally, I very much welcome the debate about academic publishing in the era of the Internet. Our practices indeed are changing and sometimes it's hard to understand where we are going. The question of the forms of communication in humanities remains and perhaps this is a simple yet important lesson from the social sciences: open the debate and compare other practices in a universal dialogue.

Note: This article gives the views of the author, and not the position of the Impact of Social Science blog, nor of the London School of Economics. Please review our [Comments Policy](#) if you have any concerns on posting a comment below.

About the Author

Francisco Osorio *a social anthropologist at the University of Chile and is editor of Cinta de Moebio (Moebius Strip), a journal devoted to the epistemology of social sciences in Latin America. Francisco was a Fulbright Fellow in 1999 at the Annenberg School for Communication, University of Pennsylvania. He was also an honorary visiting fellow at the Anthropology Department, University of Manchester (2007-2010) and a postdoctoral research fellow at the Communication Computing Research Centre at Sheffield Hallam University in 2011.*

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