

Open access initiatives in the Global South affirm the lasting value of a shared scholarly communications system.

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Developing countries stand to benefit greatly from a more open and equitable international scholarly communication system, but [Dominique Babini](#) argues new commercial enclosures to access are also emerging. The international community would do well to follow the examples of initiatives in Latin America, where open access is already the norm and where costs are shared among members of scholarly communities to ensure lasting impact.

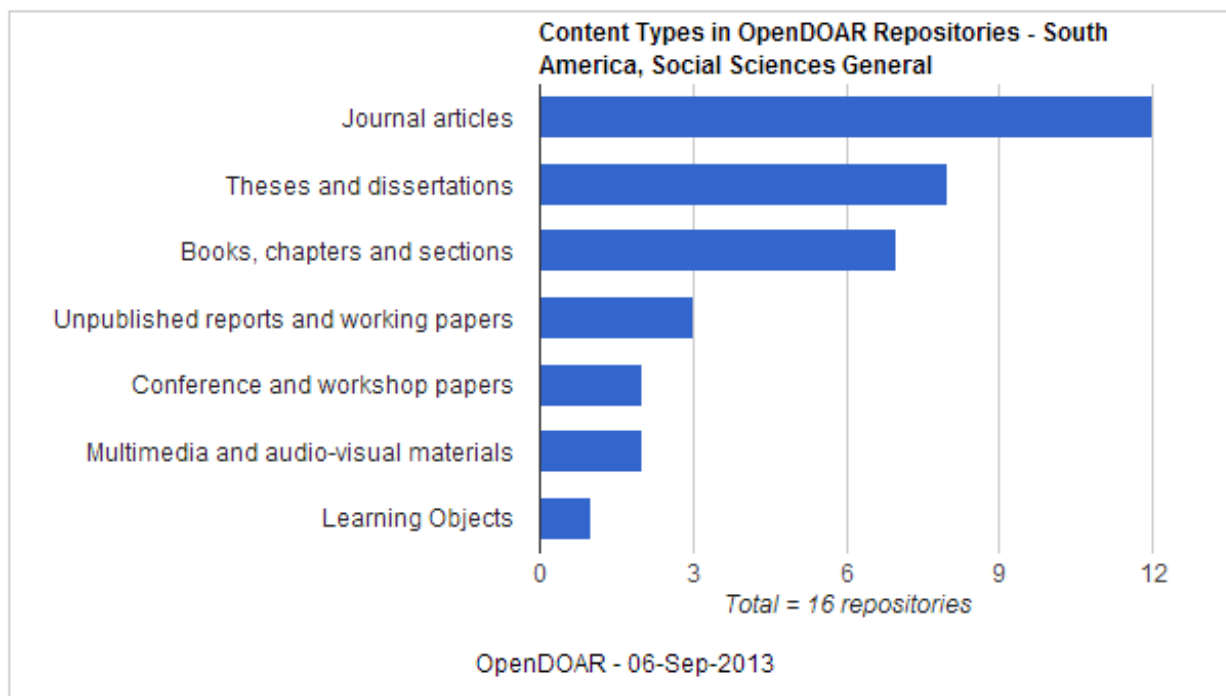


Open access and digital social sciences provide unique opportunities but also great challenges for the Global South social sciences to be more active participants in global conversations concerning sustainable development issues. Opportunities have grown because developing regions with growing internet connections can access worldwide research results without the [paywalls imposed by commercial publishers](#), giving [visibility and access to its own research output](#). Great challenges exist because to avoid new enclosures resulting from commercial open access proposals based on article processing charges (APC), the international research and scholarly community needs to address the issue of sharing costs to build a worldwide open access scholarly communications system supported by interoperable institutional, national and international digital repositories as a public good, retrieving the concept of [knowledge as a commons](#). More of a [SHARE](#) approach than a [CHORUS](#) approach to the open access future, as I have recently mentioned in [Richard Poynder's interview](#).

For regions such as Latin America, where research is mainly government-funded (either through local government funds, or through international cooperation funds from foreign tax-payers) and commercial publishers are absent, publishing costs have always been part of the cost of research, and journals and academic books have been published by universities and societies. And more recently, State funds with international cooperation support have been the great enablers of open access, as I have described in the [Latin America section of UNESCO's Global Open Access Portal \(GOAP\)](#). Open access national legislation has been approved in Peru, and is being debated in congress in Brazil (since 2007), in Argentina (since 2011, approved by Deputies and in debate in Senate) and in México (since 2013). In all cases, legislation requires that government-funded research results be available in open access digital repositories.

Today, [open access in Latin America is the standard](#). Outstanding initiatives are the regional peer-review journal portals [SciELO](#) and [Redalyc](#), which provide visibility, open access and indicators for a growing collection of 822 Iberoamerican social science journals, from a total of 2,874 peer-review social science journals in Latin America as estimated by [Latindex](#). More recently institutional and national digital repositories, as well as [Open Journal System](#)-based peer-review journal portals are growing.

This [OpenDOAR](#) chart shows usual contents in open access social science digital repositories in South America:



N.b. Most repositories hold several Content Types.

And 9 countries of the region have agreed to build a federation of national systems of digital repositories, called [La Referencia](#), which acts as regional harvester and links worldwide with the [Confederation of Open Access Repositories](#) (COAR).

In another developing region, [The Africa Journals Online](#) (AJOL) provides open access to 461 peer-reviewed African-published scholarly journals in all subjects. And [SciELO](#) has a digital collection of open access journals from South Africa.

These open access initiatives reflect possible ways of sharing costs for building sustainable open access platforms without the need to build new commercial enclosures to access knowledge with APCs. For this to happen in other contexts, there is a great need to rebuild the peer-review process within the international scholarly community, which in any case today pays the costs of authors' and peer-reviewers' salaries for their contribution to journals behind paywalls. An international peer-review system, independent from commercial journals, would provide means to ensure quality of open access contents within digital repositories, from where journals can select contents and develop value-added services they can charge. Another international challenge is the development of [open access indicators from developing regions](#), and alternative indicators, to complement the international indicators presently used to evaluate researchers worldwide, [based on a collection of journals that so poorly reflects research output from developing regions](#).

For the social sciences, these opportunities and challenges of open access are of utmost importance because of the need to renew, in the open and digital environment, traditional strong links between social sciences and diversity of social actors, requiring communications that often do not follow the traditional peer-review journal format. As is the case of diversity of research output formats from the [Latin American Council on Social Sciences \(CLACSO\)](#) –an academic network which brings together 345 research centers and 649 post-graduate programs in social sciences and the humanities, located in 25 countries in Latin America and the Caribbean, United States and Europe. The Council aims at promoting and developing research and training in social sciences, contributing with analytical inputs and prospective views to political and social actors and policies, as well as strengthening social sciences exchange and cooperation among academic institutions and researchers within the region and with other regions. As a way to increase the use of CLACSO's network research results -among researchers, students, policymaking, civil society organizations and the general public- the Council started in 1998 an open access [digital repository](#) that

has today 35,000 full-text journal articles, book contributions and diversity of research output formats, a growing collection that receives 850,000 requests each month. Concerning social science books, CLACSO has one of the most important [social science catalogs](#) from Latin America with 750 books, all available in open access in the digital repository.

The links between social science research and policies in Latin America are strong. Among former presidents that have been previously very active members of CLACSO's research network, are Fernando Henrique Cardoso (Brazil), Ricardo Lagos (Chile), and actual president and vice-presidents of Bolivia (Evo Morales and Álvaro García-Linera) and vice-president of Uruguay (Danilo Astori), as well as an extensive list of Executive Officers, Ministers and Parliamentarians from Latin America and Caribbean countries.

These links between research and policy, and research and society, require rethinking open access and digital social sciences so they can better serve building bridges and conversations among them.

The academic output of our universities cannot be subordinated to the interests or fluctuations of the publishing market. Society pays for the work done by the academics in Latin America, not companies or the private sector. All (within or outside the university) should be entitled to free access universities and research centers outputs. This is not generosity. It is an obligation of a minimum commitment to the defense of public space. Simply because knowledge, in a democratic society, should be a common good. – Pablo Gentili, CLACSO Executive Secretary

This post is part of a wider collection on [Open Access Perspectives in the Humanities and Social Sciences \(#HSSOA\)](#) and is cross-posted at [SAGE Connection](#). We will be featuring new posts from the collection each day leading up to the [Open Access Futures in the Humanities and Social Sciences](#) conference on the 24th October, with a full electronic version to be made openly available then.

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.

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