Open Access in Latin America: a Paragon for the Rest of the World

Juan Pablo Alperin[1], Dominique Babini[2], Leslie Chan[3], Eve Gray[4], Jean-Claude Guédon[5], Heather Joseph[6], Eloy Rodrigues[7], and Hebe Vessuri[8]

[1]The Winnower
[2]CLACSO, Argentina
[3]University of Toronto Scarborough, Canada
[4]University of Cape Town, South Africa
[5]University of Montréal, Canada
[6]SPARC, United States
[7]University of Minho, Portugal
[8]Instituto Patagónico de Ciencias Sociales y Humanas, Argentina

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JUAN PABLO ALPERIN [1 2 3] DOMINIQUE BABINI [4] LESLIE CHAN [5] EVE GRAY [6] JEAN-CLAUDE GUÉDON [7] HEATHER JOSEPH [8] ELOY RODRIGUES [9] KATHLEEN SHEARER [10] HEBE VESSURI [11 12]

1. Public Knowledge Project, Canada
2. Simon Fraser University, Canada
3. The Winnower
4. CLACSO, Argentina
5. University of Toronto Scarborough, Canada
6. University of Cape Town, South Africa
7. University of Montréal, Canada
8. SPARC, United States
9. University of Minho, Portugal
10. COAR, Canada/Germany
11. Universidad Nacional Autonoma de Mexico, Mexico
12. Instituto Patagónico de Ciencias Sociales y Humanas, Argentina

Latin America is one of the world's most progressive regions in terms of open access and adoption of sustainable, cooperative models for disseminating research; models that ensure that researchers and citizens have access to the results of research conducted in their region.

SciELO is a remarkable decentralized publishing platform harboring over 1,200 peer-reviewed journals from fifteen countries located in four continents - South America. Central-North America, Europe and Africa. Redalyc, based in Mexico, is another extraordinary system hosting almost 1,000 journals from fourteen Latin American countries plus Spain and Portugal. Governments around the world spend billions of dollars on infrastructure to support research excellence; platforms such as SciELO and Redalyc are extensions of this much larger investments in research. They reflect an enlightened understanding in Latin America that the wide dissemination of and access to research results is as important as the research itself. The rest of the world would do well to take note.

In a recent blog post, these two initiatives were discredited by Jeffrey Beall. In the post, Beall compared the two publishing platforms to favelas, resulting in a mean-spirited insult to both favela dwellers on the one hand, and SciELO and Redalyc on the other. Rather than maligning these initiatives, they should be held up as examples of best practice for the rest of the world.

Furthermore, just because some in North America do not know about SciELO and Redalyc does not render them irrelevant. This is an extremely elitist and narrow view of the world. Although these platforms may not be well known in some places, SciELO and Redalyc do raise the visibility and accessibility of the journals they host, particularly with their local communities. If these journals were published by the big commercial publishers, the vast majority of researchers in Latin America would simply not have access to the articles in those journals. What value is visibility, if people cannot access the articles?

One of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals, which were finalized on August 1, 2015, is to "Build resilient infrastructure, promote inclusive and sustainable industrialization and foster innovation". Both Scielo and Redalyc are excellent exemplars of this type of infrastructure. These types of networked meta-publishers allow for central governance of policies, procedures and controls, but are intentionally decentralized to support the development of local capacity and infrastructure ensuring greater sustainability and alignment with local policies and priorities. What Beall advocates for, namely to let powerful foreign players come in and take over local capacity building, is exactly the opposite of what sustainable development is about.

For these reasons, we believe that SciELO and Redalyc are very nice neighbourhoods indeed!