

# The Practice of Latin American Studies: Dilemmas of Scholarly Communication

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An on-going debate in Latin America, as elsewhere, is over what constitutes excellence in scholarly research and how to measure its impact. Over the past several decades, the pendulum has swung towards journal articles, with excellence increasingly defined as publishing in “international” as opposed to regional or national journals, and by journal impact factors. International journals are commonly defined in Latin America (and herein, for ease of exposition) as those included in the databases of Web of Science or Scopus.

This trend reflects a convergence in academic practices between North and South, facilitated as much by the reforms of higher education since the 1980s as by the technological and communication revolutions that have spurred the globalization of knowledge. The emphasis on efficiency, accountability, and evaluation have reshaped higher education worldwide. In addition, since the release of the first global ranking of universities in 2003, the competition for excellence has accelerated and become truly universal. Among the criteria employed in the various global rankings<sup>1</sup> of universities is research productivity, with this measure largely focused on the number of publications in international journals and the citations that they garner (Buena-Casal et al. 2007).

As the UNESCO and International Social Science Council (ISSC) *World Social Science Report* (2010) makes clear, a convergence in academic practices does not mean that North-South gaps have been closed or even ameliorated. Persistent asymmetries continue to exist in access to knowledge, in research capacities, and in the visibility of science production. The competition for excellence, driven by the universalization of bibliometrics<sup>2</sup> as an evaluation tool and the commercialization of

scientific knowledge, have strengthened the major players (the United States, the United Kingdom, and the rest of Europe), even if there are a few new ones, such as China and Brazil (UNESCO and ISSC 2010; Beigel 2013).

In trying to understand this debate in Latin America and how it affects the practice of Latin American studies worldwide, a number of initiatives by Latin American governments can be identified that constitute decisive steps to improve the quality and visibility of scientific research. Besides the spread of PhD programs across the region, there are efforts to improve national scientific journals and enhance their visibility through the development of regional information systems and journal databases. Concomitantly, Latin American governments have become global leaders in the open access movement<sup>3</sup> and in the development of national and regional research repositories.

Nonetheless, when it comes to research excellence this seems to be defined quite narrowly, such as by efforts to include Latin American journals in the databases of Web of Science and Scopus, or, in the case of evaluations of faculty research, by the number of publications attained in these international journals and their rankings. This leads to several questions: Are these pursuits—quality and excellence—compatible? To paraphrase Vessuri, Guédon, and Cetto (2014), will the pursuit of excellence, “the best,” undermine “the good”? In addition, will these quests contribute to closing the knowledge divide between North and South? Consider the following, five dilemmas.

The first is that Latin American scholars often face a trade-off in terms of where to publish, captured by the saying “publish globally and perish locally”

(Beigel 2013). While the rationale behind improving Latin American journals and expanding open access is to promote the visibility of Latin American science production, at the same time, the incentive system favors publishing in the international journals. In some Latin American universities, publishing a certain number of articles in these international journals is required for promotion or a salary raise, or faculty receive financial bonuses for such publications. These practices may likely encourage Latin American authors to send their best articles to international rather than national or regional journals, making it all the more difficult to improve the quality and visibility of Latin American journals (Vessuri, Guédon, and Cetto 2014).

In addition, the vast majority of international journals are commercial ventures published under restricted access. Their high price often means that few Latin American libraries, outside of the elite universities, can afford to carry the package subscriptions required to access these (Reygadas 2014). Moreover, to publish internationally generally means to publish in English, the dominant language in international scholarly communications. As Fischman and Alperin (2015) note, the higher the impact factor, the higher the journal cost and the likelihood that the journal is in English. This means that the best scholarship published by Latin America-based authors may not be accessible to their students nor to policy makers.

A second, related dilemma regards the content of research (Gingras 2016; Gudynas 2017). The topics and themes addressed in the international journals may not necessarily be the pressing or relevant issues in Latin America. Moreover, Latin American issues may be marginal in the international journals, particularly in the mainstream disciplinary journals that tend to be the highest ranked. Thus, the incentive system may steer Latin American academics towards fashionable topics and methodologies, perhaps of little local relevance.<sup>4</sup>

The medium of scholarly communication presents the third dilemma. Refereed journal articles are not necessarily the most appropriate means of communication, which depends on the topic and the audience. It is well known that books play a much more important role in the humanities

and social sciences than in the hard sciences. Moreover, publications in the hard sciences are much more likely to cite journal articles than are those in the social sciences, and particularly, those in the humanities (Archambault and Larivière 2010; Gingras 2016).<sup>5</sup> This has important implications for journal impact factors, rendering comparisons across fields generally inappropriate, and poses particular problems for multidisciplinary journals.

A fourth dilemma is in terms of the funding model (Reygadas 2014). In Latin America, research endeavors have traditionally been considered a public good. Research is most often produced at public universities or institutes with public funding. This is one of the reasons behind the leadership of Latin American governments in the open access movement. However, the incentive system geared around publishing articles in international journals implies that regional research, paid with regional funds, ends up in the private domain and is not available locally. Moreover, efforts to improve Latin American journals so that they meet the international standards sometimes end up with these journals being acquired by private, commercial publishing houses and becoming restricted access (Alperin and Fischman 2015).

Finally, a fifth dilemma regards how to measure the impact of scholarly production. The dominant model has focused almost exclusively on journal rankings, based on the number of citations by other academics in the same international journal databases. This raises at least two problems: first, whether the quality or excellence of an individual article can be judged by the ranking of the journal in which it appears. There is growing recognition that this practice is inappropriate for a number of reasons, as developed below. A second, perhaps more profound problem is that measuring the impact of articles by their influence only on other academics is a rather limited definition of impact. As Fischman and Alperin (2015), Reygadas (2014), and others argue, what about their impact on public policy, use in teaching, or role in promoting public debate? In other words, their impact on society, culture, and development.

In this essay, I develop these propositions in more detail, focusing primarily on the first and last dilemmas. After summarizing what these international journal databases consist of, I illustrate some of the challenges that Latin American scholars face in terms of publishing in these journals. I then turn to developments in Latin America, describing the regional and national journal information systems and their uses. Next, I explore some of the problems in the Latin American pursuit of excellence, such as the push to “upgrade” national journals and the reliance on journal impact factors for academic evaluations. Here I use the multidisciplinary Latin American studies (LAS) journals published in the North as a point of comparison. After considering how the LAS journals are addressing some of the concerns around the knowledge divide, I conclude by highlighting the implications of this analysis for the practice of Latin American studies.

### A Brief on the International Journal Databases of Web of Science and Scopus

The antecedents of the Web of Science date from 1963, when the Institute for Scientific Information (ISI) released the first Science Citation index. It expanded to include the Social Science Citation Index (SSCI) in 1972. Thomson Reuters purchased ISI in 1993 and, after several name changes, and the addition of the Arts and Humanities Citation Index (A&HCI), it became the Web of Science. Clarivate Analytics purchased the company in 2016. The Web of Science pretty much had a monopoly on the release of journal rankings based on citation analysis until Elsevier, an international publishing house based in the Netherlands, introduced Scopus in 2004. Since then, the competition between them has brought about a notable expansion in the size of their respective databases, particularly in terms of the inclusion of journals published in countries other than the United States and Europe.

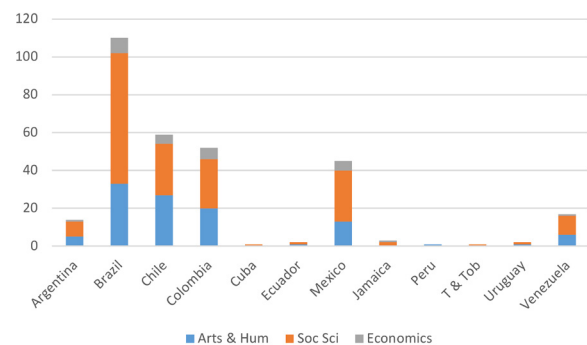
In 2017 the Web of Science included 12,089 journals, with 3,254 of these pertaining to the SSCI (26.9%) and 1,788 to the A&HCI (14.8%).<sup>6</sup> Scopus is much larger, including 22,856 journals, with 4,828 in the social sciences (21.1%), 853 in economics and business (3.7%), and 3,359 in the arts and

humanities (14.7%).<sup>7</sup> Hence, irrespective of recent efforts to expand these databases beyond the hard sciences, the latter continue to constitute the majority of its holdings.

The number of journals from Latin America and the Caribbean has also increased in recent years, although they still represent a miniscule share of the total holdings. In the Web of Science, journals published in the region make up only 1.8% of the SSCI and 2.2% of the A&HCI, totaling only 100 journals in both categories. In Scopus, where there are three times as many Latin American journals from these fields, these make up 3.6% of those in the social sciences, 3.2% in economics and business, and 3.3% in arts and humanities.

Figure 1 shows the distribution of the Latin American journals included in Scopus by country of publication and category. While 12 Latin American and Caribbean countries are represented, the vast majority are published in only 6: in descending order, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Mexico, Venezuela, and Argentina. Argentina is the real underachiever in this group, with a population only slightly less than Colombia’s but a much higher GDP per capita, factors often associated with a country’s scholarly international visibility. As discussed in the next section, their relative positions can largely be attributed to differing state policies, with Colombia having a much more proactive policy regarding the inclusion of national journals in these databases. Only seven Latin American countries

**Figure 1. Latin American journals in Scopus by country and subject category**



Source: Calculated by the author from the Scopus database, 2016, accessed January 5, 2018.

**Table 1. Latin American Web of Science journals by country of publication and language (SSCI + A&HCI only)**

COUNTRY	TOTAL	LANGUAGE OF PUBLICATION			
		SPANISH	PORTUGUESE	ENGLISH	MULTILINGUAL*
Argentina	7	6		1	
Brazil	32		25	1	6
Chile	33	27		2	4
Colombia	8	8			
Mexico	16	11		1	4
Peru	1	1			
Venezuela	3	3			
<b>Subtotal, LA</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>56</b>	<b>25</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>14</b>
Spain & Portugal	113	87	2	9	15
US, UK, & the Netherlands	21	5		NA	16
<b>Total by language</b>		<b>148</b>	<b>27</b>	<b>14</b>	<b>45</b>

Source: Compiled by the author from the Web of Science Source List 2017, Social Science Citation Index, and Arts & Humanities Citation Index, accessed December 20, 2017.

\*Publish articles in Spanish and/or Portuguese and English within the same journal issue.

are represented in the Web of Science database, with two-thirds of the journals produced in just two, Brazil and Chile (Table 1).

The pool of potential outlets for a Latin American scholar seeking to publish in an international journal in Spanish or Portuguese expands by considering the journals published in Spain and Portugal as well as multilingual journals published elsewhere. Table 1 provides a detailed breakdown by country and language of publication for the relevant journals in the SSCI and A&HCI of Web of Science.<sup>8</sup> It shows that once Spain is included, as well as the journals published elsewhere in Spanish, the number of potential outlets in Spanish increases to 148 journals; an additional 45 are multilingual, that is, they publish articles in Spanish, Portuguese, or English. The importance of English as the language of international scientific communication, however, is apparent in that there are already at least five Latin American journals (and nine in Spain) which only publish articles in English.

The main point I want to emphasize here is that the Latin American academic who wants to demonstrate excellence in research by publishing in one of these international journals has relatively few options if s/he cannot write well in English

or afford a translation. There are certainly more options than ten years ago, when the emphasis in publishing in the journals included in Web of Science or Scopus gained momentum. However, once the very narrow subject scope of many of these journals is considered, the options are quite limited.

### Developments in Latin America: Regional and National Journal Information Systems

Since the mid-1990s, there have been concerted efforts in Latin America to develop regional journal information systems and, in many countries, national journal databases, with the explicit aim of enhancing the quality of Latin American journals and giving visibility to Latin American knowledge production. At the national level, these information systems also serve other purposes, such as to evaluate the quality of academic research and to rank universities and their programs.

The main initiatives at the regional level include Latindex, SciELO, and Redalyc. Latindex, developed by UNAM (Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México) in 1995, is the oldest and largest initiative.<sup>9</sup> Its network currently includes 23 Latin American and Caribbean countries plus Spain and Portugal. Its registry encompasses 25,894 journals, in all fields,

and includes journals that appear in paper and/or electronically. Latindex has also been the leader in developing journal editorial standards. Journals that meet at least 25 out of its 36 quality indicators are classified as being *de catálogo*, a listing that includes 9,294 journals. Its database provides detailed information on each journal (including the quality indicators that each meets), and can be searched by subject or discipline.

SciELO (Scientific Electronic Library Online) and Redalyc (Red de Revistas Científicas de América Latina, el Caribe, España y Portugal) focus only on open access journals and are digital repositories with search engines that lead to individual articles. SciELO was initially developed in 1998 by FAPESP (Fundação de Amparo à Pesquisa do Estado de São Paulo) and BIRAME (Regional Library of Medicine of the Pan American Health Organization), focusing on Brazilian open access journals in the health sciences. It has since expanded so that it currently includes 1,285 journals in all fields.<sup>10</sup> The SciELO network includes 13 Latin American countries plus Spain, Portugal, and South Africa, with each country having a relatively autonomous governing board overseeing its national collection, while adhering to its relatively selective inclusion standards. It also publishes journal impact factors, based on the number of citations relative to the number of articles published per journal. Since 2014, it has collaborated with the Web of Science so that its collection is directly searchable through that international database, from which it also draws citation counts (Packer 2014).

Redalyc was an initiative of the Universidad Autónoma del Estado de México that began in 2003 around open access social science journals.<sup>11</sup> Currently, 13 Latin American countries plus Spain and Portugal are part of its network, and its database hosts 1,258 journals, the majority still in the social sciences, but with growing representation from the humanities and hard sciences.<sup>12</sup>

The trend has been towards a convergence in journal editorial standards across Latin America because of the criteria required for inclusion in these journal information systems (Oliveira Amorim et al. 2015; Packer 2014).<sup>13</sup> A number of these criteria

are stylistic, such as the front cover information a journal should include, the use of abstracts, a searchable bibliography, etc. They are also converging in the indicators used to signify journal quality, such as external peer review and standards regarding the composition of the editorial board, peer reviewers, and the authors published. For example, Latindex-Catálogo requires that 66% of the members of the editorial board be external to the institution that publishes the journal; Redalyc requires that 75% be external. SciELO, given its particular interest in raising the profile of its journals internationally, takes this requirement a step further, requiring international scholars (external to the country of publication) to make up a minimum of 15% of editorial board members in the journals it lists, and recommends that they aim for 25%.

With respect to authors published, Latindex-Catálogo requires that 50% be external to the publisher's institution and Redalyc, 70%; SciELO requires that, in addition, a minimum of 20% and a recommended 25% of the authors published be based in a country different from that hosting the journal. Moreover, SciELO requires that 25% of the articles published in its journals be in English (aiming for 30%), again signaling its intent of reaching an international audience. These requirements have already had the impact of transforming many Latin American journals from "in house" publications, designed to display the research of their own researchers, to more of a means of national and regional scholarly communication.

The national journal information systems have similar aims to the regional systems, to enhance the quality of national journals and increase their visibility. Some also try to facilitate the incorporation of national journals into the Web of Science and Scopus and other indexing services. Oliveira Amorim et al. (2015) classify the national journal information systems into three types: those that produce their own journal rankings; those where the inclusion of a journal in a national listing certifies its quality; and those that rely on regional criteria to signify quality.

Brazil and Colombia are the two main countries that produce their own rankings of national journals through Qualis<sup>14</sup> and Publindex,<sup>15</sup> respectively. In both, disciplinary-based panels of invited scholars evaluate journals in their field according to an agreed upon set of criteria and assign them a grade: A1 or A2 for top quality, down to B2 or C. Journals ranked A1 or A2 are usually those that are included in the Web of Science, Scopus, or SciELO.

Argentina's Nucleo Básico de Revistas Científicas<sup>16</sup> and Mexico's Sistema de Clasificación de Revistas Mexicanas de Ciencia y Tecnología<sup>17</sup> are examples of the second type of system, where journals are evaluated for inclusion in a national listing of journals of quality, but without individual grades or rankings. Mexico's is the more selective, since it sets a limit on the number of journals it includes (only 100), in addition to those already included in Web of Science or Scopus. In support of open access, it includes only journals that circulate electronically. Similar to Brazil and Colombia (Packer 2014; Colciencias 2016), Mexico actively promotes the incorporation of national journals into Web of Science and/or Scopus.<sup>18</sup> Argentina does not appear to do so.

Finally, the third group includes those where their national scientific councils or other instances have not developed their own unique national journal information system, but rather have joined SciELO to develop a national collection of journals of quality. SciELO Chile in 1998 was the first to do so, inaugurating the SciELO network with Brazil, subsequently followed by Costa Rica, Cuba, Venezuela, Peru, and Uruguay; in Paraguay and Ecuador these collections are in development.<sup>19</sup>

These national and regional journal information systems serve a range of purposes, including their use in evaluating faculty and research appointments and promotions as well as annual raises and salary supplements; academic research grant competitions; the evaluation of graduate programs and their funding; and finally, in determining university rankings and funding.

For example, Argentina and Mexico both have national systems of recognized researchers, where scholars receive national appointments as researchers independent of universities and receive salary supplements. To qualify, researchers must have at least five publications, but the type of publications required differs by country and discipline. In Argentina, in the hard sciences, the five publications must be articles in journals included in the Web of Science or Scopus. In the social sciences and humanities, the five publications must be in journals included in the country's Nucleo Básico (Beigel 2014). In Mexico, there appears to be greater flexibility as to the type of publication. In the social sciences or humanities, a minimum of one book is required or five articles in journals included in the Sistema de Revistas Mexicanas and/or in peer-reviewed book chapters.<sup>20</sup>

In some countries, the journal information systems of the national scientific councils are designed as an input into academic evaluations, although individual universities and faculties determine the criteria for appointment, promotion and raises. In Colombia, for example, public universities use the Publindex rankings to evaluate faculty publications (Delgado and Weidman 2012). The extreme case, represented by Ecuador, is where the national scientific council, SENECYT (Secretaría de Educación Superior, Ciencia, Tecnología e Innovación), sets promotion standards for both private and public universities.

Ecuador seems to be an outlier in several respects, since it does not have a national journal information system, is just beginning to develop a SciELO collection, and it relies primarily on whether an article is published in a journal included in the Web of Science or Scopus to judge the quality of publications. For example, to reach the top category of principal investigator (corresponding to a full professor), an academic must have 20 articles in journals included in these international databases with at least 5 of these in journals ranked in the top half,<sup>21</sup> a rather exacting requirement as I will show below. Moreover, a book published by a press that utilizes peer review, and not of the scholar's home institution, is considered the equivalent of one article in Web of Science, irrespective of the field.



In Chile, the number of publications in highly ranked journals in Web of Science or Scopus weigh heavily in the measurement of the productivity of scholars in the national research grant competitions of CONICYT (Comisión Nacional de Investigación Científica y Tecnológica). To give an example, in the analysis of the curriculum vitae of a principal investigator in political science, articles in journals included in the Web of Science or Scopus receive 14 points; if the journal has an impact factor equal or greater than 1.0, it receives 22 points. Articles in a journal included only in SciELO receive seven points, and those in other journals, three points (CONICYT 2018). The number of publications in these databases as well as the number of grants obtained also figure prominently in university rankings determining funding levels from the Ministry of Education (Delgado and Weidman 2012).

One of the consequences of the development of the global university ranking systems is that an increasing number of universities are using financial incentives for faculty to publish in the journals included in the international databases. Some universities in Chile, for example, pay a direct bonus for faculty publications in Web of Science, Scopus, or SciELO, with the amount scaled to reflect their relative prestige (Ramos Zincke 2014), a practice also followed by private universities in Mexico and Colombia (Altman 2012).

### **Problems in the Pursuit of “Excellence”**

Besides excluding or devaluing other forms of scholarly communication, such as books or edited collections, there are a number of problems in defining research excellence in terms of publications in the journals included in the Web of Science or Scopus databases. A major problem is assuming that the quality of an article can be judged by where it is published, and specifically, by the ranking of the journal. There is undoubtedly prestige attached to having an article accepted in a journal with a high rejection rate, since this signifies that it has passed through a process of rigorous peer review. However, this does not necessarily mean that the article will be read and cited, making solely its inclusion in such journals a poor measure of its impact. According to Gingras (2016), citations tend to follow the “20-80 rule of thumb:”

20% of articles typically generate 80% of a journal's citations. Hence, just because an article appears in a journal in the Web of Science or Scopus does not mean that it has garnered attention or been considered influential by other scholars.

It is useful to consider some of the factors that influence a journal's ranking. The simplest and most frequently used ranking is the journal impact factor (JIF), which measures the number of citations to the articles published in a journal in a given period, divided by the number of citable articles published in the same period. The JIF depends critically on two factors: the database upon which it is drawing its citations and the period considered. The standard practice has been for the Web of Science or Scopus to draw upon the citations included only in the journals in their respective databases, excluding other forms of scholarly communication. Thus, at its best, this is a very limited definition of impact.

The Web of Science publishes two JIFs, one based on a two-year period and another on five years. The latter JIF tends to be higher for most journals for obvious reasons; over a five-year period a journal issue has more time to circulate and its content read and cited by a larger number of scholars in their subsequent publications. Given the amount of time that it takes to have an article reviewed, accepted, and published, it is not surprising that two-year JIFs for what are considered very good journals in the social sciences rarely exceed 1.0, meaning that the average journal article has received only one citation over the preceding two years. Moreover, journal rankings often differ by less than one-tenth of a point. This seems an absurd manner to judge the quality of a journal, let alone articles. The competition over rankings among journals, however, has led to some positive practices, such as the availability of an online version of an article (to subscribers) before it appears in print. This is expected to increase its circulation and hence, citations in the two-year window.

Scopus ranks journals according to a slightly different measure, the Scimago Journal Ranking (SJR), which is basically the JIF for a three-year time period, but one where the citations are weighted

by the prestige of the journals in which the citations appear, in an iterative process, based on their impact factors. I focus on SJR rankings in my examples below simply because Scopus includes a larger number of Latin American journals, not because the SJR is a preferred measure of impact.

Table 2 presents the most recently available data (for 2016) on the ranking of Latin American journals by SJR quartiles and category. Notable is that the journals published in Latin America are concentrated in the lower half. Interestingly, the arts and humanities journals position themselves somewhat better than those in the social sciences or economics. This data helps put into perspective the challenges faced by an Ecuadorian scholar aspiring to reach the top academic rank if s/he cannot publish in English, given that attaining that position requires publishing in journals in the upper half of the rankings.

**Table 2. Latin American journals by Scimago Journal Ranking (SJR) quartiles**

	ARTS & HUMANITIES		SOCIAL SCIENCES			
		%		%	%	
Q1	6	5.6	4	2.3	0	-
Q2	29	27.1	27	15.6	2	7.4
Q3	27	25.2	72	41.6	9	33.3
Q4	45	42.1	70		16	59.3
<b>Total</b>	<b>107</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>173</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>27</b>	<b>100</b>

Source: Calculated by the author from the Scopus database, 2016, accessed January 5, 2018.

Moreover, a 2013 study of Scimago rankings finds that the majority of Latin American social science authors included in Scopus publish in Latin American journals; only 23% have published in journals produced in the US or the UK and which are likely in English (Buquet 2013, Table 4). The relatively low rankings of the Latin American journals also suggests that the noted increase in the number of Latin American journals included in Scopus has provided an international outlet for national scholars, following the incentive systems, but that this has not necessarily increased their global visibility or impact.

What explains the relatively low rankings of the journals published in Latin America? I would venture that this has relatively little to do with their quality or that of the articles published therein, but rather reflects the relatively limited global readership of journals published in Spanish or Portuguese. The main readers of Latin American journals in Spanish or Portuguese outside the region should be, of course, Latin Americanists. This raises another question, whether Latin Americanists in the North are in fact reading and citing articles in these Latin American journals in our own publications, an issue that remains to be investigated.

Most of the Latin American social science journals in Scopus primarily publish authors based in their own countries, in the case of Brazilian journals, 95%, and of Argentine journals, 92%. The authors published in Mexican and Chilean journals are slightly more diversified, 82% and 74%, respectively (Buquet 2013: Table 4). These Latin American journals may be the exception to my dilemma two, discussed earlier, regarding the content of articles published in international journals. They may continue to address primarily a national audience, focusing on local issues and problems. At the same time, this may also provide another explanation, besides language, of why these journals garner fewer international citations.

One might expect Latin American authors to be more likely than others to cite authors from their own country, if not the region. However, when Latin American authors publish in the international journals they do not seem to be much more likely than scholars in the North are to cite other Latin American authors. A study of citation practices among social scientists who published in journals in the Web of Science from 2003–2005 found that North American-based authors tended to overwhelmingly cite other North American authors, followed by Europeans. Similarly, European-based authors predominantly cited other Europeans, although they were less androcentric, citing North American authors at almost the same rate. Neither North American nor European authors cited Latin American-based authors and citations to authors based elsewhere were negligible. In contrast, the majority of Latin American-based authors in the



Web of Science cited North American authors, followed by Europeans; fewer than 10% of their citations were to other Latin American-based authors or those from other countries (Mosbah-Natanson and Gingras 2014: Table A2). Moreover, comparing data from 1983–1985, 1993–1995, and 2003–2005, a period over which the number of articles by Latin American-based authors in this database grew, they became even less likely to cite other Latin American-based authors.

A survey of Latin American social scientists carried out in the early 2010s by Buquet (2013: Table 17) revealed that the literature that they were most likely to use in their research was by scholars in the US or the UK (44.5%). This was followed by literature produced in Latin America or Spain (26.8%), their home country (13.6%), other European countries (7.6%), and diverse sources (7.6%). Economists were more likely than political scientists and particularly, sociologists, to rely on the Anglo-Saxon literature. Not surprisingly, those who earned their Ph.D. in the US or UK were more likely to rely on this literature than those trained elsewhere, were more

likely to aspire to publish in journals included in the Web of Science or Scopus, and more likely to be successful in publishing in English (Ibid.). This raises the issue of whether the incentive systems that favor publishing in international journals in English are exacerbating a status hierarchy among Latin American-based academics; that is, generating a new divide.

To place the rankings of Latin American journals into perspective, it is useful to consider those of the multidisciplinary Latin American studies (LAS) journals which are published in the US or UK. For purposes of this analysis, multidisciplinary journals are defined as those categorized in more than one subject category in Scopus, as determined by their editors. Keep in mind that a journal will generate only one SJR score in any given year; however, that score may result in different quartile rankings in the different subject categories to which it ascribes, depending on the SJR of the other journals in that category. In this sample of 10 journals, as Table 3

**Table 3. Multidisciplinary Latin American studies journals published in US/UK and SJR quartiles by subcategories, Scopus database, 2016**

	Development	Geography, planning & development	Sociology & political science	Political science & international relations	History	Anthropology	Cultural studies	Arts & humanities (misc)
Bulletin of LA Research	Q2	Q2						
Canadian J of LA & C Studies	Q4	Q4		Q4				
European Rev of LA & C Studies			Q3		Q1			
Hispanic Am Historical Review					Q2		Q2	
J of LA Cultural Studies					Q3		Q3	
J of LA Studies		Q3	Q2					Q3
LA & C Ethnic Studies			Q2			Q2	Q1	
Latin American Perspectives		Q1	Q1					
LA Politics & Society		Q1	Q1	Q1				
LA Research Review		Q2	Q2					

Source: Compiled by the author from the Scopus database, 2016, accessed January 5, 2018.

shows, most retain the same ranking across subject categories while three appear in different quartiles, depending on the category.

It is generally to the advantage of Latin American scholars for a multidisciplinary journal to appear in several categories. For evaluation purposes, they can usually report the subject category in which the journal in which they published has the highest rank. Nevertheless, the placement of multidisciplinary journals in multiple subject categories also produces some anomalies, such as in the relative rankings for history. This is because different disciplines have quite different citation practices. As noted earlier, scholars in the humanities are more likely to cite books than articles, whereas social scientists tend to cite both. If historians cite journal articles sparingly, then the mean citations received by history journals will tend to be lower than in other fields. Thus, a journal that predominantly publishes social science articles with an occasional history article will likely end up in a higher SJR quartile in history than in the social science subject categories.

In addition, journal rankings often vary from year to year.<sup>22</sup> This is another reason that it makes little sense to judge the quality of an article by the ranking of the journal in which it appears. An author may intend to publish an article in a journal ranked in the top half when submitted, to find that the year in which their article appeared was a “bad” year, when the journal rank fell below this threshold due to no fault of their own.

The SJR often differ from JIF rankings, since each is drawing on a different citation database and using different measures. Seven of the ten LAS journals in Table 3 are also included in the Web of Science database. As Table 4 shows, while the relatively high ranking of *Latin American Politics and Society* (LAPS) in Scopus is consistent with that of Web of Science, for other journals there is considerable disparity between the different ranking systems. *Latin American Perspectives* (LAP), for example, performs relatively better when measured by the SJR as opposed to the JIF, probably because Scopus includes a much larger number of journals, and many more from Latin America where its articles are more likely to be cited.

As expected, the five-year JIF for these journals is generally higher than the JIF based on only a two-year citation window. The exception is the *Bulletin of Latin American Research* (BLAR), whose JIFs suggest that there was an abrupt increase in its average citation count in 2014 and 2015. This may have happened, for example, if issues in those years included a few “blockbuster” articles.<sup>23</sup> Alternatively, a change in the disciplinary orientation of the articles included in those years could have prompted such a shift, such as a move away from history and towards articles in fields with a higher likelihood of citing journal articles.

How quickly articles generate citations and the average number of years over which they continue to do so also differ across disciplines. Papers in the social sciences generally take much longer

**Table 4. Multidisciplinary Latin American studies journals by Journal Impact Factor and H5-Index**

JOURNAL	2-YEAR JIF (SSCI)	5-YEAR JIF (SSCI)	H5-INDEX (GOOGLE SCHOLAR)
Latin American Politics & Society	1.046	1.106	16
Bulletin of Latin American Research	0.885	0.662	13
Journal of Latin American Studies	0.568	0.814	14
Hispanic American Historical Review	0.517	0.649	8
Latin American Perspectives	0.487	0.659	18
Latin American Research Review	0.252	0.464	16
Journal of Latin American Cultural Studies	0.078	0.181	6

Source: Compiled by the author from the Social Science Citation Index, 2016 Journal Impact Factors, and Google Scholar, accessed January 6, 2018 and February 4, 2018, respectively.

to be cited than those in other fields; according to Archambault and Larivière (2010), they only reach their peak number of citations ten years after publication. At the same time, articles in the humanities tend to be cited over more years than those in other fields. These factors make it not only unwise to compare measures across disciplines (Gingras 2016), but also present particular difficulties in evaluating multidisciplinary journals, such as those in Latin American studies.

The H-index, employed by Google Scholar, has been designed to deal with another problem, the skewedness in the distribution of citations to articles in any given journal and year. To give an example from Table 4 on how to read this index, the highest H5-index in February 2018 in Google Scholar was for LAP. Its score of 18 means that at least 18 of its articles published in the previous five years received at least 18 citations in that period. In other words, the majority of articles published received fewer citations than this number, illustrating Gingras' 80-20 rule.

Google Scholar's H-index can be calculated not only for journals, but also for individual scholars, and its use has been gaining in popularity. However, this measure has been criticized on a number of fronts, first, because it is highly correlated with the total number of articles published, mixing productivity and impact (Gingras 2016). And second, the Google Scholar citation data is not very clean, thus this source needs to be used with great caution and does not offer a preferred alternative in the evaluation of individual scholarly research.

All of these considerations have led to a growing consensus among many scholars, journal editors and some publishers, primarily in the North, that journal rankings based on citations should not be used to evaluate the quality of academic publications in personnel decisions or in grant competitions. Faculty research needs to be assessed on its own merits, based on informed judgement, with bibliometrics used only sparingly (UNESCO and ISSC 2010; DORA 2012; Hicks, et al. 2015). Yet university administrators in both North and South seem undaunted by such assessments,

perhaps because of the ease of using quantitative indicators and the pressure exerted by global university rankings.

### Latin American Studies Journals and the Knowledge Divide

The multidisciplinary LAS journals published in the North tend to be more inclusive than is the norm in at least four ways. Their language policies tend to ameliorate the language barrier; their editorial boards increasingly include scholars based at Latin American institutions; and scholars residing in Latin America author a growing number of published articles. In addition, some of the journals are taking decisive steps to increase access to their publications in Latin America by going partly or fully open access.

Table 5 summarizes the language policies of these journals. All accept submissions in English, Spanish and Portuguese, and a few in French. They thus contribute to expand the pool of journals, beyond those published in Latin America, Spain or Portugal, where Latin American colleagues may submit papers in their native language. Only three of these journals are multilingual in terms of the language of publication, including the *Latin American Research Review* (LARR), the flagship journal of the Latin American Studies Association (LASA).

This raises the question of who pays the translation costs into English once a paper is accepted. LAP is the only one of these journals with a long-standing policy of assuming the translation costs of articles accepted in another language. In most cases, these costs fall on authors and/or their institutions. Irrespective of the emphasis of the various Latin American national scientific agencies on increasing the visibility of Latin American science production in the international journals, I found no evidence on their respective websites that they are defraying the translation or editing costs of scholars publishing in English.

There are benefits as well as costs to producing multilingual journals. Since Latin Americanists in the North tend to be bilingual, these offer Latin American scholars who are not an outlet to an international audience, potentially raising

**Table 5. Language policies of the multidisciplinary Latin American studies journals**

	SUBMISSIONS	PUBLICATION	WHO PAYS FOR TRANSLATION?
Bulletin of LA Research	E, S, P	English	Author (exceptionally defrays costs)
Canadian J of LA&C Studies	E, S, P, F	E, S, P, F	NA
European Rev of LA&C Studies	E, S	E, S	NA
Hispanic Am Historical Review	E, S, P	English	Can help defray costs
J of LA Cultural Studies	E, S, P	English	Author
J of LA Studies	E, S, P	English	Author
LA&C Ethnic Studies	E, S, P	English	Author
Latin American Perspectives	E, S, P, F	English	Journal
LA Politics & Society	E, S, P	English	Author
LA Research Review	E, S, P	E, S, P	NA

E = English; S = Spanish; P = Portuguese; F = French

Source: LASA (2015) and journal websites.

the visibility of their scholarly production (and qualifying them for promotion, etc.). However, by publishing in Spanish or Portuguese the international reach will be limited, since it will still exclude non-Latin Americanists. Multilingual publishing may also reduce the readership of a journal among those who engage in comparative analysis across the global South, such as in development studies or comparative policies, for example. For journal editors, whose measure of success may depend on journal impact factors, there is the additional consideration of how publishing articles in multiple languages may affect citations, a topic on which there is little research.

Regarding the composition of the editorial teams producing the LAS multidisciplinary journals, since its founding Latin Americans have been part of LAP's editorial team (Chilcote 2013). While its editorial collective is US-based, in 2017, 25% of its 20 associate editors and 45% of its 60 participating editors are based at Latin American institutions.<sup>24</sup> LARR has consistently also had significant Latin American representation on its editorial advisory board. Under its new editorial structure, implemented in 2017, two-thirds of the six associate editors are based in Latin America; 23% of the 26 members of the editorial advisory board are based in the region, 12% in the UK, and another 12% are at European institutions, with the remainder US-based. Moreover, the associate editors have considerable decision-making power,

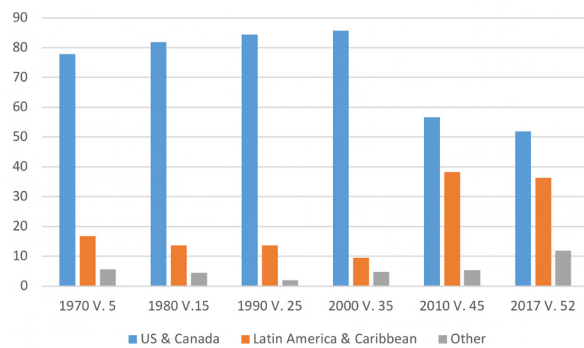
having responsibility for choosing reviewers and making final decisions on manuscripts in concert with the editor. The new editorial structure reflects the changing composition of the LASA membership. Whereas in 2008 only 22% of the membership resided in Latin America, in 2016, 50% of LASA's membership of 12,000 did so (LASA 2017).

The editorial boards of the UK journals, BLAR (the journal of the British Society for Latin American Studies) and the *Journal of Latin American Studies* (JLAS), tend to be composed of scholars at UK institutions. The Latin American representation is primarily at the lowest editorial level, on the advisory boards, which may not have much more responsibility than serving as frequent peer reviewers for these journals. In 2017, only 5% of the 19 editorial advisory board members at BLAR were based in Latin America; the corresponding figure for JLAS was much higher, 29% of 17. The UK journals also tend to have higher participation by European-based scholars than the US journals. Of course, all of these figures probably underestimate the true participation of Latin American scholars, since information on the nationality or country of origin of those on the editorial teams is not available from a review of the journals' websites.

To test my intuition that the share of articles published by Latin America-based scholars has increased in recent years, I sampled the issues in the decennial volumes of LARR going back to 1970.

Graph 2 suggests that the significant increase in the number of articles by scholars at Latin American institutions is largely a product of the past decade, which coincides with the push for Latin American scholars to publish internationally. JLAS reports a similar trend (Miller 2016).

**Figure 2. Distribution of authors' institutional affiliation by region, *Latin American Research Review***



Source: Author's compilation based on LARR Notes on Contributors, various volumes.

Notes: Other includes authors from Europe and Asia. The sample is based on citable articles. In the few cases that the author's institutional affiliation was not reported, these have been excluded from the analysis.

Finally, with respect to the issue of access, the *European Review of Latin American and Caribbean Studies* is open access, and in 2017, LARR became so. LAP now provides open access for a limited time period for five to ten articles monthly.<sup>25</sup> In addition, if an article was translated from Portuguese or Spanish, a link is provided to the article in its original language. Moreover, it is collaborating with CLACSO (Consejo Latinoamericana de Ciencias Sociales), a major promoter and publisher of open access academic research in Latin America, to publish a dozen or so articles from recent issues electronically on a periodic basis as *Latin American Perspectives en Português y Español*.

### Concluding Thoughts

This article has focused on the problem of defining research excellence as publishing in the journals included in the international databases of Web of Science and Scopus and by journal rankings. On the one hand, Latin American policies to promote

the inclusion of Latin American journals in these international databases and to encourage their scholars to publish in the international journals would seem to ameliorate the global knowledge divide. On the other hand, these policies also strengthen hierarchies across Latin America and within countries.

As I have shown, not all Latin American and Caribbean countries are in a position to participate in this global race for academic excellence. Moreover, these policies would seem to increase the divide between universities that are able to do so versus the majority that cannot, in some cases (but not always) along public-private divides. They also favor scholars who are able to publish in English at the expense of everyone else, which in turn favor those who have been trained in the US or UK versus those who have earned their PhD in Latin America or elsewhere. The cost is probably born by the quality of Latin American higher education as a whole, particularly, the average student in the average Latin American university who does not have access to these international publications nor reads English. However, it may also have broader social costs, to the extent that academic research is diverted from serving broader societal or developmental purposes.

I have raised a number of dilemmas and unintended outcomes. Among them is that policies to include Latin American journals in the international databases and to encourage faculty publications in the international journals do not automatically increase the visibility and impact of Latin American research. This is apparent in the relatively low ranking of most of the Latin American journals included in these databases, which means that their articles are not being cited in other international journals nor probably read much internationally. This raises the question of whether the pursuit of inclusion in Web of Science and/or Scopus is worth the effort.

The language barrier is a difficult one to overcome easily. One obvious solution, to publish Latin American journals simultaneously in both Spanish or Portuguese and English, while technically feasible given electronic publishing, still involves high costs, both in terms of paying translators

(whose training would generally have to improve) and the time that it takes (both of authors and editors) to edit translations.<sup>26</sup>

There are also benefits to Latin American scholars publishing in the international English-language journals, besides the potential visibility garnered by being read by a broader audience. The exacting peer-review process of many of these journals is undoubtedly a learning experience for first-time authors, but one that tends to make authors better reviewers themselves. This may have potential ripple effects on the quality of Latin American journals, assisting in their improvement.

One of the consequences of the upgrading of many Latin American journals to meet international editorial standards is that many of them now only accept original manuscripts for review. This means it is increasingly difficult for Latin Americanists in the North who are committed to making their research accessible in Latin America to publish translations of their work in regional journals, if initially published in English. This has perhaps put scholars located in the North or South on more equal footing in that the only way to reach both audiences—at home and internationally—is by writing two different articles based on the same research. A specific problem faced by Latin Americanists in the North is that university tenure and promotion committees oftentimes discount scholarship published in a language other than English.

Latin Americanists, wherever we are located, increasingly share other problems, such as the priority placed on journal articles over other forms of scholarly communication such as books and edited collections, and the tyranny of being evaluated according to journal impact factors. Although there is increasing consensus in the global academic community that it is inappropriate to evaluate individual scholarly production according to the ranking of the journal in which an article appears, this practice continues unabated. This provides a good issue around which Latin Americanists globally might join ranks to explore alternatives and to promote best practices.<sup>27</sup>

There are great benefits to the global field of Latin American studies from the Latin American initiatives to improve the quality and visibility of their scientific production, particularly of their journals. The fact that a majority of Latin American journals are now published under open access combined with the growth of regional information systems and electronic repositories has vastly increased the potential access of Latin Americanists in the North to Latin American research. Academics in the North need to reciprocate by promoting the visibility of the scholarship produced in Latin America as well as by making our own more accessible.

We need to be more self-conscious in our citation practices and more aggressively promote the norm among students and colleagues that an acceptable article on Latin America must include citations to Latin American authors, and to those publishing in Latin American journals. Among other steps that we could take to facilitate the broader circulation of our research in the region is to make broader use of repositories such as Academia and Research Gate and university institutional repositories so that articles (including prepublication versions) are made available open access as soon as current restrictions allow.<sup>28</sup> Another action is to lobby collectively so that commercial publishers reduce the time that it takes published articles to become available under open access.

The multidisciplinary LAS journals are doing their part to further the globalization of the field through inclusionary policies concerning the language of submission, the composition of editorial teams, and by publishing an increasing percentage of Latin America-based scholars. Most of the LAS journals, nonetheless, are published by restricted-access commercial publishers, which limits their circulation in Latin America and contributes to the “publish globally, perish locally” dilemma. LASA’s decision to offer LARR under open access, and LAP’s new initiatives to increase access are steps in the right direction.

Several Latin American governments, including Argentina, Mexico, and Peru, have already challenged the restrictive practices of the global publishing industry. They have passed legislation



requiring authors of academic articles funded publically and published in restricted access journals to make a copy available in a Latin American regional or national repository. Mention should also be made of the La Referencia project that, with support from the Inter-American Development Bank, is creating a Latin American network of repository systems (Alperin and Fischman 2015).

The Latin American national scientific councils, nonetheless, could do more to equalize the playing field within their own countries in terms of academics publishing in the international journals in English by supporting the costs of translation and upgrading the training of translators. They could also lessen the “publish globally, perish locally” dilemma by encouraging that when their academics publish in English, that either the original language version be deposited in a national repository, or, if written in English, by subsidizing the translation costs so that a citable copy is always available in Spanish or Portuguese. Maintaining and enhancing the quality and dynamism of global Latin American studies will likely depend on a combination of all of these initiatives.

## Notes

At the 2018 Barcelona Congress, a featured session chaired by LASA past president Joanne Rappaport was held in Deere's honor, entitled “Gender, Land and Wealth: Looking Backwards, Moving Forward.” The panelists included Lourdes Benería, Karen Graubart, Magdalena León, and Jennifer Twyman. Deere's closing comments drew upon the following essay.

An earlier version of this essay was presented as the Keynote Lecture at the Society for Latin American Studies Annual Conference, University of Southampton, Winchester, March 22, 2018. The author is grateful for the very helpful comments from Emilio Bruna, María Cuví, Cristóbal Kay, Paul Losch, Ana Margheritis, and Lars Schoultz, which much improved the paper, and to numerous colleagues who replied to my email queries. The usual disclaimers apply.

- <sup>1</sup> These include the Academic Ranking of World Universities (the “Shanghai ranking”), the Times Higher Education QS Top University Rankings, and the Times Higher Education Thompson Reuter World University Rankings; see Hazelkorn (2013) for a brief history.
- <sup>2</sup> Bibliometrics refers to the analysis of publications and their characteristics, and is a subset of scientometrics, the quantitative measurement of scientific activities of all types (Gingras 2016).
- <sup>3</sup> By open access, I am referring to the electronic publication on the Internet of peer-reviewed articles in academic journals without charge to the user or usually to the author. See Alperin (2014).

- <sup>4</sup> This is among the reasons some Latin American scholars strongly prefer to publish locally and are resisting these general trends. For example, see Pereyra-Rojas and Mu (2015).
- <sup>5</sup> While there are efforts under way to incorporate books into bibliometrics (Luccisano, Cop, and Packer 2014; Giménez-Toledo, Tejada-Artigas, and Mañana-Rodríguez 2012), there is a long way to go before this can be done adequately (Gingras 2016).
- <sup>6</sup> Drawn from *Source Publication List for Web of Science* of May 2017, [www.mjil.clarivate.com](http://www.mjil.clarivate.com). Accessed December 15, 2017.
- <sup>7</sup> Drawn from Scimago Journal & Country Rank, [www.scimagojr.com](http://www.scimagojr.com) for 2016. Accessed January 21, 2018. About one-third of the economics journals are double-listed in the social sciences and in the economics and business categories, so these percentages cannot be summed.
- <sup>8</sup> The language of publication is reported in the source list for Web of Science, but is not easily available for the journals included in Scopus without examining each separate journal entry.
- <sup>9</sup> Its full name is the Sistema Regional de Información en Línea para Revistas Científicas de América Latina, el Caribe y España y Portugal. The data presented is drawn from [www.latindex.org](http://www.latindex.org), accessed December 20, 2017.
- <sup>10</sup> SciELO (Scientific Electronic Library Online), [www.scielo.org](http://www.scielo.org), accessed December 20, 2017. See Packer, Cop, and Santos (2014) for a detailed history.
- <sup>11</sup> Sistema de Información Científica Redalyc, [www.redalyc.org](http://www.redalyc.org), accessed December 21, 2017.
- <sup>12</sup> See Miguel (2011) for a more detailed analysis of the subject composition of these journal information systems and for how they compare in terms of overlap with the journals in Scopus. Packer (2014) provides a similar analysis for Brazil.
- <sup>13</sup> See Gudynas (2017) for a critique of the trend toward the journal style of writing of the North, which is displacing the traditional Latin American essay as a means of scholarly communication.
- <sup>14</sup> Qualis is administered by CAPES (Coordenação de Aperfeiçoamento de Pessoal de Nível Superior) of the Ministry of Education. For the criteria and latest rankings, see [www.sucupira.capes.gov.br](http://www.sucupira.capes.gov.br), accessed April 18, 2018.
- <sup>15</sup> Publindex (Sistema Nacional de Indexación y Homologación de Publicaciones Especializadas de Ciencia, Tecnología e Innovación), is administered by Colciencias (Departamento Administrativo de Ciencia, Tecnología e Innovación). See [www.scienti.colciencias.gov.co](http://www.scienti.colciencias.gov.co), accessed April 18, 2018.
- <sup>16</sup> Nucleo Básico de Revistas Científicas is administered by CAICYT (Centro Argentino de Información Científica y Tecnológica), a dependency of its national scientific council, CONICET (Consejo Nacional de Investigación Científica y Técnica). The listing includes all the journals in the SciELO Argentina collection and those in Latindex-Catálogo, with those included in the former, selected from the latter. See [www.caicyt-conicet.gov.ar](http://www.caicyt-conicet.gov.ar), accessed January 20, 2018.
- <sup>17</sup> Mexico's system is administered by CONACYT (Consejo Nacional de Ciencia y Tecnología). See [www.revistascytconacyt.mx](http://www.revistascytconacyt.mx), accessed January 20, 2018.

- <sup>18</sup> The national SciELO collections of Mexico and Colombia are also managed by their respective national scientific councils; in Brazil, it is administered by a separate entity, but financed by CNPq (Conselho Nacional de Desenvolvimento Científico e Tecnológico).
- <sup>19</sup> Drawn from Packer, Cop, and Santos (2014) and updated according to [www.scielo.org](http://www.scielo.org), accessed April 19, 2018.
- <sup>20</sup> See "Criterios SNI," <https://www.conacyt.gob.mx/index.php/el-conacyt/sistema-nacional-de-investigadores/marco-legal/criterios-sni>, accessed February 2, 2018.
- <sup>21</sup> The requirements for appointment at the entry level (as *investigador auxiliar* or assistant professor) include only one article in a journal listed in at least Latindex-Catálogo or an edited book, and scale up rather rapidly. SENESCYT, Acuerdo No. 2013-157 as amended by No. 2014-132, *Registro Oficial* No. 433 of February 6, 2015.
- <sup>22</sup> Comparing the 2016 rankings of the journals in Table 3 with those of 2014 resulted in five journals attaining a higher quartile in at least one category, three appearing in a lower quartile, while two maintained the same ranking.
- <sup>23</sup> There are certain types of articles, such as literature reviews and comparative as opposed to country case studies that tend to generate more citations since they are useful to a broader audience. In addition, articles based on international collaboration are cited more frequently than are those written by authors from just one country, at least in the hard sciences (Smith et al. 2014).
- <sup>24</sup> The following data on the composition of the journal editorial teams is based on the author's study of their respective websites in December 2017.
- <sup>25</sup> Communication from Ronald Chilcote, managing editor of LAP, June 10, 2018.
- <sup>26</sup> Among the only social science journals in the Web of Science or Scopus of which I am aware that publish simultaneously in both languages are *Cepal Review/Revista CEPAL*, an open access journal funded by that United Nations organization, and *Problemas del Desarrollo*, published by UNAM in Mexico.
- <sup>27</sup> See Alperin (2014) and Reygadas (2014) for a discussion of altmetrics, literally, the alternatives to journal citation-based metrics.
- <sup>28</sup> See SHERPA/RoMEO, "Publisher copyright policies and self-archiving" for a list of current journal restrictions: [www.sherpa.ac.uk/romeo](http://www.sherpa.ac.uk/romeo).

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