

# PUTTING LOCAL KNOWLEDGE ONLINE: DOES IT BECOME INTERNATIONAL?

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Access to scientific information and knowledge in the framework of the Internet has steadily grown in recent years, with special advantages for the information generated in developed countries. In other parts of the world a number of factors are influencing the capacity to generate and use scientific information online, *i.a.* connectivity problems, lack of financial resources, weak institutional support and infrastructure, and poor training in the electronic publishing and dissemination tools.

Latin America (including the Caribbean) has been relatively slow in adopting the Internet: our users represent today 3.6% of the world's total, against 36.9% from North America, 30% from Europe and 27% from Asia and the Pacific. The Internet infrastructure shows even lower figures: only 1.6% of the world's total corresponds to Latin America, with 2.4% of the domains [5]. As a result, only 3% of webpages offer contents in Spanish and 1% in Portuguese, against 75% in English [2].

Against this background, it should be noted that also in Latin America, universities and higher education institutions, as well as national research councils, are active promoters of the web as an ideal means to put local information and knowledge online. Is this purpose being successfully achieved? In partial answer to this question; the present paper refers to a specific experience that has developed on the basis of regional cooperation among national institutions involved in scientific publishing.

## COOPERATION AND TECHNOLOGY

Latindex ([www.latindex.org](http://www.latindex.org)) was created nine years ago as a regional information system, based on a coordinated network of national resource centers that gather bibliographical information on serial scientific publications. Since its beginnings, the mission of the system has been to integrate the efforts made in the various countries concerning production and dissemination of scientific literature, as well as to create and develop an information system that would register and provide access to the relevant journals published in the region.

The development of Latindex is based on the coordinated participation of 16 of the most competent and experienced national centres of scientific information in Ibero America:

1. Centro Argentino de Información Científica y Técnica (**Argentina**)
2. Universidad Mayor de San Andrés (**Bolivia**)
3. Instituto Brasileiro de Informação em Ciência e Tecnologia (**Brazil**)
4. Comisión Nacional de Investigación Científica y Tecnológica (**Chile**)
5. Instituto Colombiano para el Desarrollo de la Ciencia y la Tecnología “Francisco José de Caldas” (**Colombia**)

Country	Journals	Country	Journals
1. Antigua & Barbuda	2	17. Haiti	1
2. Argentina	2,026	18. Honduras	11
3. Bahamas	3	19. Jamaica	8
4. Barbados	10	20. Mexico	1,392
5. Belize	1	21. Nicaragua	7
6. Bolivia	19	22. Panama	22
7. Brazil	3,068	23. Paraguay	6
8. Chile	1,316	24. Peru	77
9. Colombia	307	25. Portugal	966
10. Costa Rica	82	26. Puerto Rico	128
11. Cuba	387	27. Spain	2,458
12. Dominican Rep.	13	28. Trinidad & Tobago	10
13. Ecuador	74	29. Uruguay	71
14. El Salvador	18	30. Venezuela	233
15. Guatemala	28	Intl. Organisations	41
16. Guiana	2	<b>Total</b>	<b>12,787</b>

Source: Latindex (www.latindex.org) consulted May 28 2004.

The System uses an IT platform that is uniform and compatible among the participating institutions, thus ensuring a sustained day-to-day input and continuous update of data. For those institutions that already had journal databases and automated catalogues, joining this centralized data compiling system has been rather straightforward. However, other countries in the region, especially those not having a proper infrastructure in place, have initially faced various difficulties.

On one hand, this experience shows that the use of electronic tools for scientific information purposes is in quite different stages of development across the region. But in addition, there is in some countries a lack of systematic compilation of data and information on scholarly publications, and even of experience in bibliographic control; most often the existing compilations are partial and their responsibility is distributed among several institutions. As a result, information on the journals produced in these countries is underrepresented in the System.

This, however, does not appear to be an isolated phenomenon. For example, of the 22 national libraries in Ibero American countries listed by ABINIA (Asociación de Estados Iberoamericanos para el Desarrollo de las Bibliotecas Nacionales de Iberoamérica, <http://abinia.ucol.mx>) only 11 have a website and offer online access to their national catalogues. The national libraries having automated catalogues happen to be in those countries that are more strongly represented in the Latindex databases.

### IMPACT OF THE ELECTRONIC TOOLS ON THE ROLE OF LATINDEX

Since its inception, Latindex has been electronically based. Despite its brief existence in comparison with other directories and information systems specialized in journals (*e.g.* the Ulrich's Directory is 73 years old and ISSN is 30), the System has started to become a standard reference for those interested in scholarly serial publications, as shown in a recent study on sources of information and access to electronic journals across the world [3].

#### NOTES AND REFERENCES

<sup>1</sup> In a recent paper that analyzes the visibility of web sites, Latindex was ranked among the most visible at UNAM [4].

<sup>2</sup> Proenza, Francisco J.; Roberto Bastidas-Buch y Guillermo Montero. (2001). *Telecentros para el desarrollo económico y rural en América Latina y el Caribe*. Working document. Washington: FAO; UIT; BID. Available at: [www.iadb.org/regions/telecentros/index.htm](http://www.iadb.org/regions/telecentros/index.htm) (consulted on 28 May 2004).

<sup>3</sup> Martín González, Juan Carlos y José Antonio Merlo Vega (2003). Las revistas electrónicas: características, fuentes de información y medios de acceso. *Anales de documentación*, (6): 155-186.

<sup>4</sup> Aguillo, Isidro (2004). *Cibernetría básica y aplicada*. Presented at the Centro Universitario de Investigaciones Bibliotecológicas, UNAM. México, D.F., April 2004.

<sup>5</sup> Petrisans Aguilar, Ricardo (2002). La brecha digital: situación regional y perspectivas. *Estudios internacionales*, 35 (138): 55-70.