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The transformative relation between publishers and editors: research quality and academic autonomy at stake.

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Abstract

The prevalence of scientific journals amid the expansion of digital platforms and mega-infrastructures features the persistent will of scholars to give part of their time to this endeavor, which is frequently a thankless task and subject to intense pressures. In this paper, we focus on scholarly editorship and the existing commercial interferences to explore whether this has an equal incidence in publishing circuits outside the mainstream. For this purpose, we describe the case of Latin America, where a parallel value system is observed through indexation criteria focused on academic quality and independent editorship. We examined 1,971 Scielo and Redalyc journals stressing the features of editorial teams, publishing institutions, and calibrating the penetration of the APC business model. We argue that the development of this regional publishing circuit, along with the value system that explains its survival, finds its main strength in its public nature and the crucial role of universities' autonomy, although its main weakness in the absence of an interoperable infrastructure capable of broadening its circulation. Eventually, we discuss the idea of predatory publishing and its evolution from the representation of journal backwardness to fraudulent for-profit publications, proposing to reorient the value of scientific journals onto their academic autonomy.

Keywords

Scholarly editorship, research quality, Latin American indexing services, university publishers, academic autonomy.

Scientific journals have represented academic quality by communicating the most original contributions, subject to the exigent scrutiny of peers. For the scholarly communities that created journals, the increasing citation scores were a natural result of their scientific merit and strict academic procedures. This is why many researchers have historically given part of their time to scholarly editorship, an endeavor that was frequently a thankless task. The continuous growth of manuscripts, a trend that was further accelerated by the growing demands of digital editing, forced the progressive delegation of management procedures to commercial publishers. This was especially the case of STEM, where a decline in the learned societies' publishing role was observed, different from the SSH and the journals edited at universities, which found institutional support to prevail over time (Late et al. 2024).

Today's everyday life of journals and editors is all about the demands of authors, the search for reviewers, the seek for research excellence and editorial quality, the risks of predatory practices and detection of plagiarism, the concern over financial sustainability, and other time-consuming demands. What changes significantly among them, beyond the editors' control, is that the journals in the Web of Science (Clarivate) and Scopus lists are better recognized in research assessment and highly rewarded in career promotion¹. On the contrary, the journals outside these indexing services are devalued and conceived as of scarce impact, thus identified by many peers as low-quality output.

¹ There are several bibliographic and indexing services such as DOAJ, Dimensions, Crossref, Open Alex, and various disciplinary indexes. Also, there are four Latin American services that will be analyzed in this paper. But none of these are used globally as extensively as WoS and Scopus for research assessment or University Rankings.

Several studies have observed how the Journal Impact Factor became a measurable indicator of excellence, fostering the accumulation of scientific centrality and the consolidation of a dominant value system. Notwithstanding the fact that it was not created for this purpose, its increasing use for research assessment led to geographical, disciplinary, and language asymmetries (Hicks et al., 2015; Ràfols, Ciarli & Chavarro, 2015; Marginson, 2021). In non-hegemonic countries, the performative effect of these ranked lists of journals was to create a symbolic border to separate the marginal (local) production from the papers to be considered excellent (international) scientific output (Guédon, 2011). At the individual career level, this distinguishing line of valuation was established through several means, including salary incentives, career promotion, and other symbolic rewards given to the researchers, driving them to publish in “high-impact journals” as a secure path for tenure. Not only material incentives drove researchers to choose these journals. Most of them deeply believe that these represent their “best-career contributions” because quality is defined by this measure of excellence, and articles published in first-tier journals are, in fact, a way of reaching the highest scientific prestige (Beigel, 2017).

Progressively integrated into the mainstream circuit, scientific elites emerged in every latitude, including in the peripheral and semi-peripheral countries, where the incentives were compelled by the goal of internationalization, understood as a road to the “gold Medal” fueled by the journal rankings (Vessuri, Guédon & Cetto, 2014). Soon enough, WoS and Scopus became the sources for all kinds of studies and reports based on counting papers to represent the state of national scientific development. University rankings and bibliometric reports were critical components of the current research ecosystem,

providing the basis for segmenting the existing publishing circuits. The representation of “mainstream” excellence in the sphere of circulation became, in turn, a universal pattern of value in the sphere of production, depreciating the output published in other circuits.

This landscape has been changing for many reasons, including the advocacy of a more qualitative research assessment and the market shift towards open access. The commercial publishers find a door for significant revenues in the APC business model increasing the prices of these charges and transformative agreements². The pledge for fast-track peer review and continuous publication on its part fosters the expansion of mega-journals that blur the original interaction between a given scholarly community and the audience of the journals. Additionally, the homogenization and automatization of editorial management is displacing editors from leading academic decisions. In parallel, the proliferation of predatory publications presents a severe crisis when numerous cases of for-profit publications or fraud journals are denounced, and many of them are de-listed from the collections of Clarivate and Scopus. As a result of this phenomena, we argue that a global dispute of classifications is undergoing the definition of the academic editors’ place in scholarly publishing, the establishment of the institutional owners of the journals, and the limits of the role played by the publishers.

Compared to the commercial nature of the “mainstream” indexing databases mentioned above, the Latin American publishing circuit comprises four indexing services with a long-standing tradition initiated by mid-20th century. These regional open infrastructures acquire renewed interest because they evolve in a non-commercial environment.

² This situation has been observed by the promoters of the European Plan S, and as a consequence, the original enthusiasm over the APC model is now moderated by actions in favor of diamond journals and a growing interest in the Latin American publishing environment. See <https://globaldiamantooa.org/en/home-2/>

However, explaining how this parallel value system survived is still necessary, given the magnitude of the permeation of the high-impact metrics in research assessment. Currently, 4,077 active scientific journals are included in the collections of SciELO, Redalyc, Latindex, and BIBLAT, most of which are published by universities, and a minimal share is indexed in WoS or Scopus (Beigel et al., 2023). In contrast with the increasing number of journals with APC proliferating in the commercial indexing systems, these services were born in diamond open access. The great majority of these journals are supported by public institutions.

In the first part of this paper, we discuss the crisis of the dominant values endowed by the mainstream publishing circuit and the pervasive effects of the recent transformations towards commercial open access. We revisit the controversial “blacklist” built by Beall (2012) and its specter still haunting the multiple current existent classifications for dubious journals such as “predatory”, “questionable”, “spurious”, “high-jacked” or “fraudulent”. In the next section, we analyze the evaluation criteria applied by the Latin American indexing services for admitting journals into their collections and the procedures created to prevent spurious publications. Finally, we describe 1,971 journals indexed in Redalyc and SciELO, arguing that the academic quality of these journals is related to the role played by academic editors and the institutional anchorage in public universities. We analyze the editors and publishers of these journals to explain how academic control in editorial decisions is preserved and the challenges faced by this alternative circuit of recognition. This is not a typical quantitative analysis, although we quantify the journals to inform their main features and problematize the established relations between visibility, international impact, and scientific quality.

1. Segmented circuits of quality: the role of the editors in the value of a journal

The long-standing process of scientific internationalization has intensified globally since the 1990s, and incentive systems were installed in most countries to spread new criteria for the external evaluation of research, pushing for the use of global standards. In previous studies (Beigel, Almeida, Gallardo, et al. 2023), we have observed how, in Latin America, the national systems for classifying researcher-professors fostered the standardization of mainstream publishing as the key to academic promotion. The individual's "category" conferred by these devices conquered great scholarly community support. Still, several value systems persisted at the universities, and the struggle between opposite legitimation principles continuously fed diverse recognition circuits. With standard features and national specificities, these academic communities negotiated unstable equilibriums between global and local criteria, enabled by the room for maneuver provided in a strong tradition of university autonomy (Beigel, 2013). To understand this historical struggle between autonomy and heteronomy, we use a combination of the field approach (Bourdieu, 1999) and the sociology of valuation (Lamont, 2009) paved by the Latin American concept of structural heterogeneity (Beigel 2014). Our research aims to contribute to a Sociology of Excellence under construction in the last decade (Vessuri, Guédon y Cetto, 2014; Paradeise & Thoenig 2015; Kraemer-Mbula et al., 2020).

Within this framework, we have observed the coexistence of several principles of legitimation that explain the multi-scalar publishing circuits that have developed in Latin America. The development of internationally integrated researchers was paired with nationally oriented professors, which gave the university journals a regular flux of manuscripts and academic figures available for the tasks and engagement involved in running a scholarly journal. The local value of these publications for teaching competitions, their inclusion in regional indexing systems, and the prestige of the editors created segmented value systems with institutional support.

One event that highlighted the relationship between visibility and scientific quality was the inclusion of many journals indexed in Scielo and Redalyc in the predatory list created by Jeffrey Beall. Most journals in this list were published in peripheral countries. Still, doubling down, the American librarian published a piece arguing that Scielo and Redalyc were “publishing favelas” because an American researcher would never hear of them. These Open Access platforms were doing “a poor job” because their content was unavailable in the high-quality indexing services. Finally, he predicted that much of this kind of journal would disappear over time (Beall, 2015). Thus, in a simplistic and ethnocentric judgment, he classified everything outside the mainstream collections as dark, underdeveloped, and of low quality, as criticized timely by Mounier (2018). Interestingly, the director of SciELO, Abel Packer, remembers that Beall’s intervention occurred in an attempt by commercial publishers to enter the Brazilian publishing market, and to do so, he said, they would benefit from the disqualification of SciELO (Packer, Interview, 2023)³. Eventually, it was not the SciELO affair that made Beall shut

³ <https://www.revistahcsm.coc.fiocruz.br/abec-brasil-e-scielo-requerem-da-capes-reformulacao-de-edital/>

down the blacklist, but the pressures received after he included Frontiers as a potential predatory publisher (Koerber et al., 2023)⁴.

It is not an easy task to define predatory journals because it is a practice in progress and frequent change. Pölönen & Sivertsen (2021) argue that the idea of predatory as simply fraudulent journals or scams to collect money is not helpful because there is a wide range of intermediate cases. A recent research field of studies explores in depth what type of authors publish in these journals and with what mechanisms they reach their “victims”. Most of them state on their website that they are indexed in international databases and, therefore, present themselves as legitimate. They offer a fast and straightforward experience with an affordable APC or even waivers that other journals do not provide (Boukacem-Zeghmouri et al., 2023). Strikingly, many of the journals considered predatory today were once included in mainstream collections and reached high-impact performance. This means a radical change to Beall’s argument because we are not talking about non-visible journals, assuming that visibility is supposedly guaranteed by making part of the Wos or Scopus collections.

This was the case of MDPI and the 82 journals expelled from Web of Science in March 2023. Petrou (2023) argues that this event affected the careers of the individuals who published their articles in these journals and signified the expenditure of public funds by millionaires in countries such as Spain, where most papers were collected. On its part, OMICS has been thoroughly discussed as a large-scale predatory publisher that hosted willing and unwilling editors. Two years after the US Federal Trade Commission filed its

<https://blog.scielo.org/blog/2015/08/02/mocao-de-repudio-ao-ataque-classista-do-sr-jeffrey-beall-ao-scielo/>
<https://blog.scielo.org/es/2015/08/25/nota-de-repudio-al-articulo-is-scielo-a-publication-favela-de-autoria-del-sr-jeffrey-beall/>

⁴ Beall’s list has been highly influential, and after its closure some attempted to continue the list. Nelhans & Bodin (2020) proposed a methodology for detection of predatory journals based in a combined set of blacklists.

complaint, the articles published by OMICS fell by 40% (Downes, 2021; Siler, Larivière, Vincent-Lamarre & Sugimoto, 2021). These cases suggest that the reputation of these journals was provided by the indexation in WoS or Scopus and not built by the journal itself. In fact, many spam e-mails with publishing proposals received by the author of this paper repeat similar highlighted subjects: "A prestigious publication listed in top databases such as Web of Science is excited to receive your manuscript." Accordingly, it also leads us to ask what type of evaluation these indexing services make. Rather than a new definition of predatory, a more accurate definition of a quality academic journal seems critical.

Guédon (2023) argues that how editorial boards and editors are selected by commercial publishers and how much they are paid remains in the dark corners of scientific publishing. Some publishers invoke the existence of a "firewall" between editorship and the financial side of a journal. Still, the resonant cases of resignments of entire editorial boards suggest that the transfer of the editorial management from learned societies or research institutes to commercial companies faces a critical point. The controversies that occurred in *Infometrics* (now QQS) and *Lingua* (now Glossa) show that Elsevier's interference in the process of selecting content and reviewers was forcing academic editors against the trends developed by the discipline (Enis, 2019; Rooryck, 2020; Waltman & Larivière, 2022). One of the primary technical means to produce these intrusions is in the journal's publishing flux, when the standardized platforms replace the previously used, taking control of the entire editorial process. Taubert (2012) had already observed that the so-called 'online editorial management systems' contribute to the expansion of the publisher's power into the offices and minds of editors and, to a lesser

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degree, even into authors and reviewers, causing a “clash of scientific and economic rationalities.” This increasingly tends to endanger the academic autonomy of journals and may thicken the grey zone around predatory publishing.

2. A classification in dispute: who are the publishers?

The link between publishers and journals has changed and differs significantly according to the region⁵. During the pre-internet stage, the technical tasks used to be in the hands of the printer. At the same time, the “editorial page,” along with the framework of each issue, was the editor's responsibility. An essential part of the scientific journals was created by learned societies, but the transition to commercial publishing left little part of these journals within the societies' control (Taşkın, Pölönen, Kulczycki and Laakso, 2023). The university journals can be published by commercial companies or the University Press but are more frequently managed by academic institutions through the Library or the Repository⁶.

De Moya-Anegón (2020) suggests that it is necessary to differentiate the academic team (editor) from the technical team he calls the publisher. The editor is responsible for attracting or filtering submissions, finding peer reviewers, and managing the relationship

⁵ In Latin America, *editorialism* appeared in the second half of the XIXth century within cultural journalism and fostered by the artistic avant-garde in the 1920s. It was by then that the editor as an intellectual figure appeared. With the development of the scientific field, a new generation of professors-editors emerged with the creation of academic journals at the public universities. After the digitalization and the creation of the regional portals and indexing services the editors of scientific journals played a critical role in the journal projects in dialogue with the platforms and institutional libraries, while preserving a strong engagement of the journal with the research field and its audience. Cfr. Beigel, F. (2004) “El editorialismo programático [programatic editorialism]”, en Hugo E. Biagini y Arturo A. Roig (Dir.), *El pensamiento alternativo en la Argentina del Siglo XX*. Tomo I. Identidad, utopía, integración, Editorial Biblos: Buenos Aires.

⁶ A relevant fact contributing to the growing grey zone around predatory publishing is the inconsistency found in the available databases to clarify who the publishers are. Gu & Blackmore (2017) built a dataset crossing Ulrich's, JCR, SJR, GS, and Cabells, showing that several key attributes are not well captured in the existing bibliographic sources and observing high inconsistency across the names of agencies and organizations.

between reviewers and authors until an accepted text is stabilized. The technical staff is in charge of the treatment of the texts (style correction, choice of fonts, layout, object/institutional and author identifiers, links, and references). He argues that the lack of distinction between the two does not allow the necessary professionalization of scientific publishing to be achieved. De Moya-Anegón refers to artisan journals edited by a single person, where the lack of professionalization conspires against rigor or visibility. But what happens when we see exactly the opposite? That is, journals in which the figure of the editor merges, voluntarily or involuntarily, with the commercial publisher and the said guarantor of the professionalism of the edition in turn deteriorates its academic practices. We see this more and more frequently when a journal is “sold” or delivered to a commercial publisher in exchange for an annual payment, which increasingly distances the editorial process from the academic institution, scientific society, or research center. This is why the English word “publisher” is somewhat tricky. It refers to an organization with publishing functions that range from a) portals in academic institutions, libraries, or repositories; b) non-profit University Press or for-profit producing at a market scale, c) specialized publishing houses, and d) oligopoly companies that publish journals, books, and other products. In b), c), and d), the publisher is increasingly intertwined or overlapped with the “academic editor”, who is supposedly a scholar or an academic team in charge of the contents and disciplinary scope of a journal. In a) the journal is published in the same environment as the editor, and the publishing function of the institution (at the library or the repository) is fulfilled based on the decisions of the professor or editorial team that leads each magazine.

Ulrich's database includes two different information on the publishers: the "commercial publisher" and the "corporate author," which is the scientific society or university that owns the journal. For a significant part of the journals, there is no information on the "corporate author", which verifies the growing control by the commercial publisher. Apart from the well-known oligopolies (Larivière, Haustein & Mongeon, 2015) Ulrich's highlights the relevance of various University Press that work as commercial publishers, such as Oxford or Cambridge. Finally, a new category of "owners" can be observed: Chinese companies that buy journals and leave editorial management to another service provider⁷.

It is nothing new if we consider that scientific journals have been part of a profitable business for a long time. But, as Shaw and Penders (2018) argue, a second quality value system has come to the fore in the mass-medialization of science. "Especially in the context of the 'big journals,' how they establish themselves in the face of scientific and media scrutiny is thus subject to two potentially and probably very conflicting sets of criteria": a) the scientific relevance of the content of a contribution against b) publication based in its adjustment for media expectations. Both systems have possible biases. Regarding a) internal review and re-evaluation over the judgment of the peers may overtly politically preselect the quality contributions (Shaw and Penders, 2018). However, in b), the valuation of status and impact seems to be increasingly dependent on commercial interests, particularly when the publishers overtake control of editorial processes -such as the capacity to select the manuscripts that will be evaluated. The extent

⁷ In between, we should mention two cases that can be classified as "learned publishing companies", such as the Royal Chemical Society and the American Chemical Society. Noël (2020) analyzes the Journal of the American Chemical Society from a diachronic perspective (1879–2010), describing how it gradually entered the commodity market, first with the page-charge mechanism up to the emergence of the Article Processing Charge (APC).

to which these interferences meddle with the assessments traditionally performed by editors and peers puts in question scholarly editorship and the quality of these judgments.

3. Who publishes the journals indexed in Latin America?

Scientific journals were developed primarily for professional associations or academies in Latin America during the 19th century⁸. With the development of higher education, scientific societies lost prominence while universities and research institutes started to play a central role in fostering scientific communication (Cetto and Alonso Gamboa, 1998). By the mid-1950s, intergovernmental organizations fostered scientific information management as a milestone for development. This milieu collaborated decisively in training librarians, cataloging, and constructing bibliographic indexes to boost the dissemination of the scientific knowledge produced in the region (Beigel, 2013). The efforts to professionalize scientific publishing led to the creation of indexing systems such as Clase (1975), Periodica (1978), Latindex (1994), and Biblat⁹ at the National Autonomous University of Mexico. With the appearance of Scielo in Brazil in 1998 and Redalyc in México by 2003, these digital open-access platforms became the pillars of a communication infrastructure publicly funded and governed through regional networks with national headquarters. The extensive use of the Open Journal System (OJS-PKP) allowed for the digitalization and professionalization of the journals. Latindex and

⁸ The first scientific journal was the weekly periodical *Mercurio Volante. Important and curious news on various topics in physics and medicine*, created in Mexico in 1772.

⁹ The Latin American Bibliography (BIBLAT) reunites Clase and Periodica in one active catalogue. Recently, Biblat defined a “Core collection” that includes only journals with five years of continuous indexing of articles (2018-2022) through an online tool that evaluates the consistency and completeness of the journals' metadata with scores. Therefore, it is expected that the number of documents with complete metadata will increase. <https://biblat.unam.mx/es/nucleorevistas>

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Redalyc journals and most University portals are currently managed in OJS. However, some use Content Management System (CMS), Eprints, Wordpress, or other local systems created by the universities. Scielo journals use OJS extensively, but Scholar One (Clarivate) is also growing.

There are many common journals between Scielo and Redalyc, while Latindex includes an essential group of journals not indexed in the first two. However, all these journals are not available in an interoperable platform. Within the frame of the project OLIVA¹⁰, we have created a research database that includes the documents' metadata, and the description of the journals indexed in Scielo, Redalyc, Latindex, and Biblat without overlapping. We identified 4,077 journals, of which 2,899 are included in two or more indexes. 82 journals are only in Web of Science or Scopus, while all the rest are multi-indexed (Beigel, Packer, Gallardo & Salatino, 2022; Beigel, Sánchez, Alonso Gamboa, Salatino et al. 2024).

The concern for editorial quality, indexation, and visibility is old standing in Latin America. The four regional indexation systems constitute restrictive collections based on numerous criteria regularly revised (Merlo Vega y Montoya-Roncancio, 2023). Latindex was particularly active in framing the discussion over the difference between « excellence » in terms of impact factors, as it was understood and fostered by Web of Science, and « quality » in relation to the academic contributions made by a journal (Cetto et al., 2011). Latindex Catalogue 2.0 is currently based on 38 criteria that are evaluated through the network of 24 Latindex nodes existent in Ibero-America¹¹.

¹⁰ For more details on the OLIVA project see <https://cecic.fcp.uncuyo.edu.ar/en/oliva-the-latin-american-observatory-of-research-assessment-indicators/>

¹¹ <https://www.latindex.org/latindex/postulacion/postulacionCatalogo>

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The Red de Revistas Científicas de América Latina y El Caribe (Redalyc) performs a rigorous process of evaluation of each journal that includes 60 criteria, classified in 2022 in 3 different modules: a. Basic admission; b. Qualitative criteria; and c. Quantitative criteria. Redalyc does not accept journals that charge APC¹². On its part, the Scientific Electronic Library Online (SciELO) is a network of 15 national collections with national headquarters in a public agency or Science ministry of each country. Each collection has a national autonomy, but the central headquarters is in Brazil. It has a set of general guidelines, including 40-45 criteria to be met for successful indexation¹³. An example of autonomy is the percentage of original papers that are mandatory in English: Scielo Brazil recommends 15%, but its office in Argentina at CONICET diminished this requirement for its national collection.

The uniqueness of the journals indexed in Latindex, Biblat, SciELO, and Redalyc is that they guarantee not only the editorial quality required to be listed but also the control of the journal by an academic institution. To ensure quality standards, Latindex elaborated a Guide for Editors that classifies “spurious” journals of dubious quality and detects these through a special committee that operates in its network for a contextualized case examination. This Guide (2022, second edition) sets out the criteria for identifying bad editorial practices that can affect the credibility of the collection, harming authors, reviewers, and other good-willing participants from the scientific community. In the case

¹² https://www.redalyc.org/redalyc/documentos/Criterios_Categorias_diciembre_2020.pdf

¹³ <https://www.scielo.org/es/sobre-el-scielo/metodologias-y-tecnologias/criterios-politica-y-procedimientos-para-la-admision-y-la-permanencia-de-revistas-cientificas-en-la-coleccion-scielo/criterios-scielo-brasil/> In 2014 the Scielo citation Index joined into WoS' interface, with the expectation that having access to Scielo journals from WoS would give them more “visibility”. However, the Scielo Citation Index is not available, and it is a contested issue in the region in which we cannot delve here.

the journal or its editor is finally considered to violate ethics or good editorial practices it will be de-listed and unable to apply to the Catalog for five years.

These bad practices are explained in six sections that appear ordered from high to less critical: 1. Spurious commercial practices, 2. Editorial body, 3. Peer review 4. Website 5. Publication practices 6. Indexing and metrics. The Guide mentions the usual scams, such as hijacked or fake journals, among the spurious practices. Special attention is given to journals that are not transparent on APC costs or charges before the article is accepted. Precise information on the publishers is vital. Those who “claim to be a non-profit organization when they are for-profit companies” or “hide associated for-profit companies” will be de-listed¹⁴. It gives particular importance to the role of academic editors and the peer review process, preventing journals with editorial bodies that include prominent people in their field of research but exempting them from any contribution to the journal, except using their names or photographs (Latindex, 2022).

The guide also includes, among “spurious” practices, those actions that distance a journal from its academic purposes and bring it closer to mere commercial entrepreneurship. In this sense, for-profit companies and individuals who perform as publishers without institutional anchorage or disciplinary background are observed. These publishers are providers that sell indexing services, perform editorial tasks, proofread, revise articles or translations, and publish fast. Relevantly, they include those who do not allow authors to retain authorship rights. Accordingly, even if aimed mainly at detecting cases of publishing practices closer to fraud, the Latindex Guide advances on a terrain of relevance for our discussion: the increasingly significant separation between a commercial journal

¹⁴ See https://www.latindex.org/lat/documentos/Revistas_espurias-Guia_para_editores_definitiva.pdf

and an academic journal. The dispossession of the author's copyrights as contrary to the prescribed values of quality, along with the control of the institutional affiliation of the journal and the editors, is particularly relevant to Latindex in determining the academic nature of a journal.

4. Who are the editors in Latin America?

The threat of commercial co-optation of journals and predatory practices also stalk Latin America. However, this autonomous and resilient regional circuit favors the close relationship between the journals and the publishing institution, their insertion into public universities, and their management in public infrastructures. The editors are normally professors with a teaching position and a central role in all editorial decisions of the journal. Very few independent journals are published by a sole editor, the journals published by learned societies are run by researchers or professional leaders. The majority of the journals indexed in the region represent academic groups, research institutes, faculties, or public organizations, and these publishing institutions provide support for publishing and indexing processes. In many cases this support is not sufficient as observed in the *LatinREV* survey to editors¹⁵.

Scientific committees indeed appear in journals around the world. They can fulfill a real mission or have a decorative function. Still, they can reveal pernicious intentions in predatory journals when they publish an academic committee with false names or

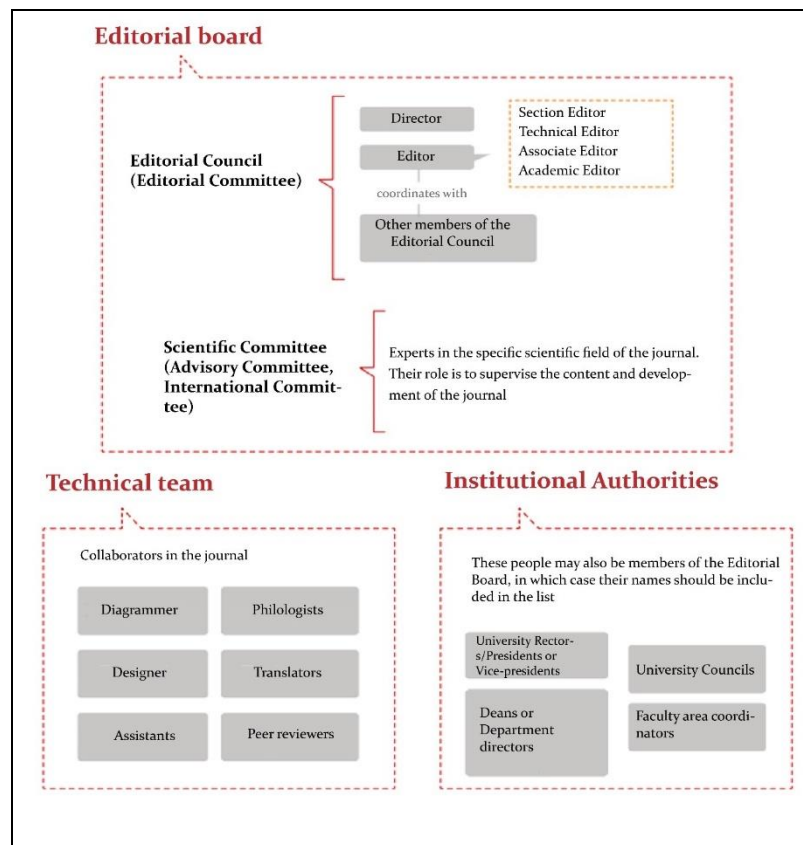
¹⁵ The survey was performed in 2020. See the full report in: https://www.flacso.org.ar/wp-content/uploads/2020/07/Resultados-de-la-encuesta-de-LatinREV_Informe-01.pdf

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deceased scholars (Ruiter-Lopez, Lopez-Leon, & Forero, 2019; Downes, 2021). In the journals indexed in LA, these committees are part of the academic credibility of the journals. Their integrity is part of the evaluation made by the four indexing systems to accept a journal in the collection. To describe the characteristics of the editorial staff, we observed each of the 4,077 journals indexed in Latindex Catalog 2.0, Biblat, Scielo, and Redalyc, based on the database available in the OLIVA Project. 99.9% make public and have a verifiable academic director/editor, and 93,4% have academic committees with reliable institutional affiliations and e-mails. Latindex considers the existence of the scientific responsible editor as the first and most relevant characteristic for a journal to be accepted in Catalog 2.0. However, it also includes in its evaluation criteria the revision of the names of the people who make up the academic editorial bodies (See Diagram 1). Members of the editorial bodies must be listed by name. The technical team is conceived separately.

Diagram 1

The composition of editorial boards acceptable for Latindex Catálogo 2.0



Source: Latindex, Version 6 (September 2023) <https://www.latindex.org/latindex/postulacion/postulacionCatalogo>.

Translated to English by the author.

Trzesniak (2009) distinguished the tasks developed by the editors from the role played by advisory committees. The *Editor* and the *editorial team* are in charge of the editorial policy, the daily publishing decisions, and the journal's editorial profile, while *academic committees* provide a scientific reputation for the journal and may interact with the editors as counselors. It is the director (the “editor” is more typical in English) he argues, who is essential to guarantee the credibility of a journals indexed in Latin America. The

journal's credibility depends also on the reviewers, and their selection is in charge of the editors. These advisory committees are composed of researchers who have accepted this role; however, our inquiries indicate that sometimes they are merely formal. "It is mandatory to have an academic board, but we don't know to which extent they have meetings or participate actively in each journal" (Packer, interview, 2023). Concerning the role of the technical team mentioned in Diagram 1, a significant part of the 4,077 journals analyzed here are published by a University Portal, so these tasks are developed by the professional staff of the library or the institutional repository. The editorial boards accepted by Latindex include the institutional authorities.

While editors-directors still have a relevant role, seeing one-person journals or researcher-editor-publishers developing all the tasks is no longer frequent. It is more common in the present day to find journals that have more than one editor working collectively or the director working in pairs with an editorial board. It is also frequent to see invited editors that prepare a special issue. In the case of the SciELO collection, its founder and current director, Abel Packer, believes that «the vast majority of editors-in-chief are active and highly recognized researchers. In some journals, it happens that these researchers ask to include an editor-in-chief, usually younger but equally academically qualified. So, this type of work in pairs seems very good to us, and it also enriches the editorial process" (Packer, Interview, 2023).

We collected all the denominations used to name the editors, advisory committees, and technical staff in 1,971 journals, including Scielo and Redalyc. Great diversity is observed, which is the effect of local decisions made by the learned societies or the universities that publish the journal. This is possible because the indexing platforms have scarce

interference in the editorial process. It is also evident the prevalence of multilingualism because there is a wide range of denominations in each national language for each task. In Table 1, we list the different denominations (in Spanish and Portuguese, depending on the country of the journal). This diversity contrasts openly with the uniformity found in the journals edited by commercial publishers.

Table 1

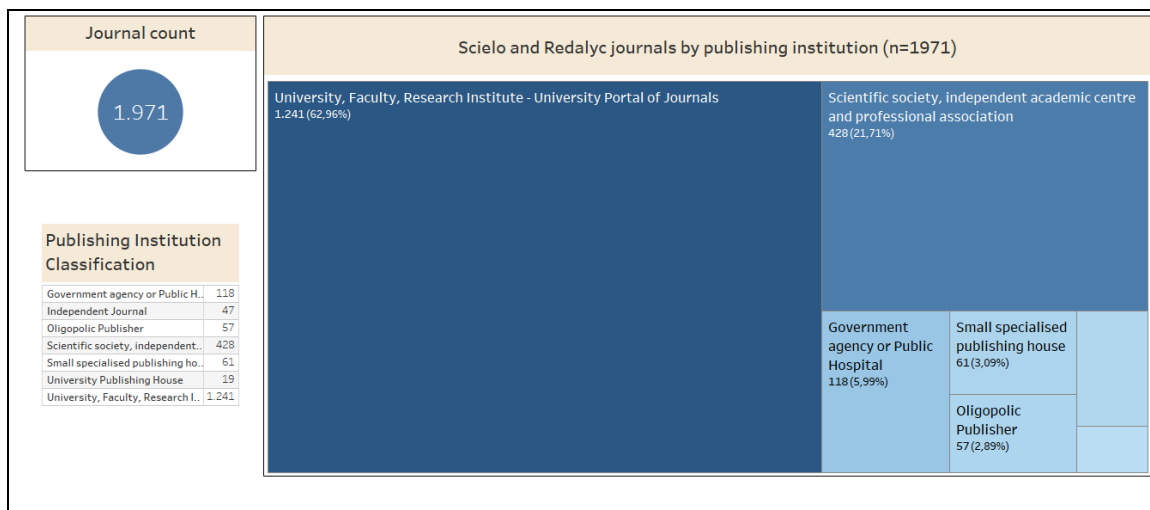
Denominations of editorial boards found in Scielo/Redalyc journals, n=1.971

Director/editor		Editorial Board	Scientific/Academic Committee	Technical staff
Director; Director Responsable; Director Científico, Coordinador; Director editorial; Director/Editor responsable; Director-Editor; Director del Consejo Editorial; Co-directora; Director y Editor; Directores fundadores ; Directores actuales; Director de la Revista; Director-Editor General; Presidente; Director de la revista y presidente editorial; Director general ; Director ejecutivo; Director de Honor; Director Honorífico; Director Honorario; Director Editorial; Directora de la publicación; Directora e editora- chefe; Coordecção editorial; Director en jefe	Editores Adjuntos Editores Asociados; Editor Adjunto; Director Adjunto; Editor Invitado; Editora Auxiliar; Asistentes del editor; Editores Asistentes; Asistentes editoriales; Editor adjunto; Directora asociada; Editor Asesor; Editores consultos; Assistant Editor	Editor; Editor Responsable; Editor em chefe; Editor consultor Editor-chefe; Editor-responsável; Comisionado Editor; Editor-geral; Editor Jefe; Editor-científico; Editor General; Editor Emérito; Editor Ejecutivo; Editores fundadores; Co-editores; Editor Principal; Edición; Editores coordinadores; Coordinación Editorial; Coordinador editorial; Editores honorarios; Editor (rotativo); Editora Académica; Editor-Redactor; Editor Administrativo; Coordinadora editorial; Editor- fundador	Junta editorial Consejo editorial Consejo editor Comité editorial Editorial Board Editorial Committee Consejo científico Comité académico Comité Científico Comité Editor Asociado; Cuerpo de Editores; Comité Editor; Comité Editor Local Conselho editorial Comissão editorial	Editor técnico; Editor de reseñas; Editor de Área; Editor de Producción; Editora de distribución; Editor portugués; Editores-correctores; Director técnico; Editores temáticos; Editor inglés; Editor de reseñas de libro; Editora de Producción; Asesor editorial; Editor de artículos; Editores de revisión; Editor versión electrónica

Let's now return to the difference between editors and "publishers," which in English refers to the company that is responsible for the publication of the journal and, many times, does not have a different "corporate author," for example, in the case of mega-

journals such as PLOS One, Frontiers. On the contrary, the journals indexed in the Latin American systems mostly have a “publishing institution” (and not a “commercial publisher”); this is a public university, a research institute, or a learned society that provides the academic staff and fulfills the editorial processes. Besides, this institution is also the “corporate author”. We did a case-by-case verification within the journals indexed in Scielo and Redalyc to observe the publishing institutions of 1,971 journals. As can be seen in Figure 1, 1,241 are published by universities, 428 by learned societies, 118 by public agencies or hospitals, and 61 by independent academic groups. This means that 94% of all the journals are published by the institution that owns the journal, without the mediation of commercial companies. There are only 57 edited by oligopoly publishers (2.96%) and 61 by small, specialized publishing houses (3.17%).

Figure 1- Scielo/Redalyc, by publishing institution. N=1,971



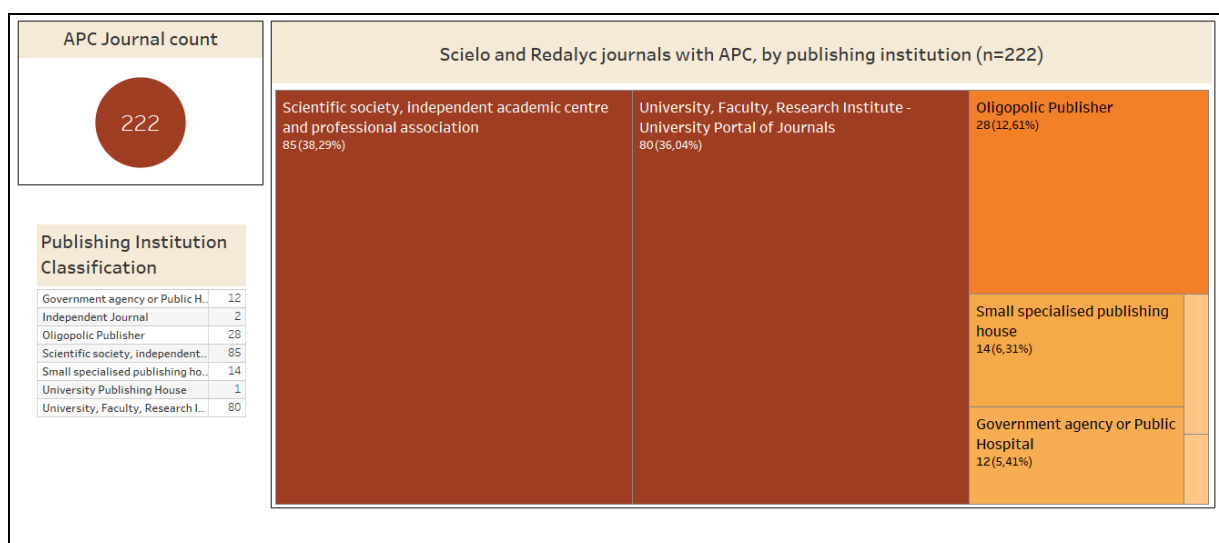
Notice that only 19 journals are edited by university publishing houses, and again, the classifications differ significantly from those of the mainstream circuit. In LA universities, there is a traditional division of labor. Journals are usually published in OJS journal portals -some research universities have more than 100 journals each (e.g., UNAM, USP, UChile, UBA)- and are managed by the institutional repository. Instead, books are edited by the University Press (“Editoriales-Editoriais Universitarias”) on paper and/or digital and sold in the book market. A study on the management of Argentina’s scientific journals shows that only 5 of the 60 public universities manage their journals through the University Press. The rest are developed directly by the regional journal platforms or through university portals linked in different degrees to institutional repositories (Di Domenico & Zo, 2023). The management of the journals by University Portals deserves more detailed studies to calibrate to which extent volunteering is the main feature of diamond publishing, as argued in the OPERAS report (Bosman et al. 2021).

The great advance of open access in journals is not followed by books in Latin America. A survey of 140 university presses in Latin America showed resistance from the publishers to abandon paper print and distribution, as well as the author’s fear of the loss of intellectual property (Giménez Toledo y Córdoba Restrepo, 2019). As a result, when we use the denomination “university publishing institution,” this must be understood as different from a University Press.

It is also helpful to examine different management models for open-access journals, with or without APC, along with the advantages and problems this entails according to the support received by the publishing institution. Another English word under scrutiny here is “business model”. When translated to Spanish, it openly refers to commercial

vocabulary. Since most Latin American journals are edited by academic institutions and do not charge for reading or publishing, the concept more frequently used is “management”. In English, such expressions surreptitiously and almost subliminally lead the casual reader to believe that all management matters can be handled only in one way: commerce within a market. Still, the institutional environment is highly influent of the tendency to use a journal as a for-profit venture or, in contrast, to defend its academic autonomy. Figure 2 shows that 222 of the total 1,971 journals studied charge APC, but only 42 are managed by commercial publishers. A significant part of this sub-universe of gold journals is edited in Brazil (130/222).

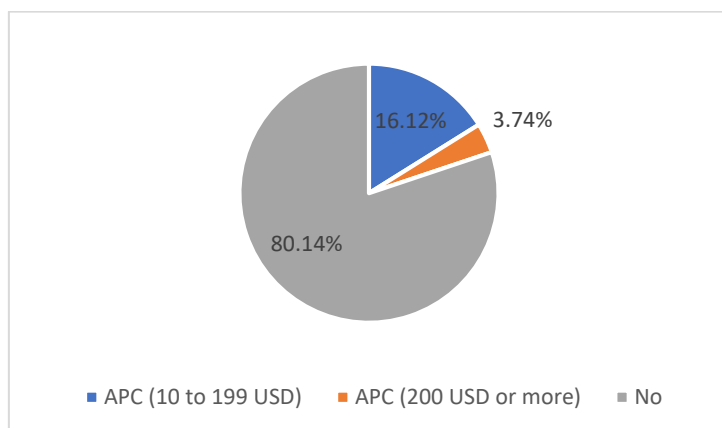
Figure 2 – Scielo/Redalyc gold access journals, by institution. N=222



The journals with high APC are the ones managed by commercial publishers while the low APCs belong to journals managed by learned societies or universities. Let’s see now the APC journals within the sub-universe of the 475 journals managed by learned societies.

They are 85, mostly founded before 2010, and coming from the areas of Health, Biology, Agrarian Sciences, Engineering, or Natural Sciences. Figure 3 shows that the majority charge USD 10 to 199 and only 10 cost USD 200 or more.

Figure 3 – Journals of learned societies according to APC (n=428)



In sum, the Latin America publishing circuit offers a non-commercial publishing environment with thousands of diamond open-access journals led by the academic community and acting in diverse disciplines. The incidence of the gold model in the journals is still minimal but its prevalence in other regions is endangering the circuit because the more the institutions pay APCs (or onerous transformative agreements), the more they will feel pressure to forgo investments in the diamond OA ecosystem (Córdoba González, 2021; Alperín, 2022). Yet, another ghost haunts our region and is particularly affecting journals led by scientific societies: the commercial companies that have coopted hundreds of journals on other continents and are harassing our editors to give up. As the editor of the Latin American Journal of Sedimentology said: “I receive at least one proposal

per month to sell the journal, and the figures offered keep rising” (Cuitiño, Interview, 2023).

Conclusions: proximity and institutional anchorage as key features of the academic quality of a journal

The limited coverage of the global output in databases such as Scopus and Clarivate, together with the transformations that occurred in the publishing market, plus the uses and abuses of the Impact Factor, compels researchers and policymakers to redefine what a “quality” journal is. That sentence *à la Beall* against SciELO revisited in this paper aimed not to report fraudulent practices but to convict these journals and the researchers who contributed to them into a path of irrelevance. On their part, the oligopolistic publishers profited from the “predatory” haunt supposedly occurring outside its realm, replicating the idea of backwardness-striving of the journals not included in their collections. Despite the disappearance of the Beall list, its “field effect” -in bourdieusian terms- is still active in the symbolic equivalence made between high-impact/top-quality against low-impact/low quality, compelling researchers towards longing for publishing only in Q1 journals. We argued that the interferences of the commercial publishers in scholarly editorship have a higher wingspan in the so-called “mainstream” journals because the profits and the clients come along with journals highly valued for research assessment. Moreover, the uniformized style of editorial management proposed by the commercial publishers is deepening the distance between the journals and their disciplinary

community. At end, this technocratization and the increasing manipulation of the journal's impact is expanding the "exteriorization of the scientific authority" (Bourdieu, 2003) and involves a significant risk for academic autonomy.

We delved in the definition of "spurious" journals created by Latindex because it points to the heart of the problem that the journals are dealing with: the displacement of the role of academic editors in order to put the interests of the company at front. This commercial interference not only affects autonomy, but it also pushes an abandonment of the specific research agenda, and the silent defection of the journal's scholarly audience. Framed in a rooted Latin American tradition of communitarism and anti-materialism, Latindex's list of editorial good practices is made to watch for scholarly publishing to remain in the realm of science as a public good¹⁶. Eventually, this non-profit interaction between journals, academic editors, and public institutions, within open infrastructures, allowed the survival of the regional publishing circuit over time.

The norm established by Latindex to differentiate academic editorial bodies from technical staff is relevant to prevent heteronomous pressures and management takeover. But perhaps the most noticeable feature of Latindex, and this also applies to SciELO, is the fact that they function as networks with national nodes coordinating national collections, anchored to academic institutions or public research agencies. This decentralized, localized and contextualized type of evaluation is featured by proximity to the journal team and environment. Meanwhile, inclusion in the proprietary databases seems, on the contrary, a centralized decision made by automated procedures, distanced from the

¹⁶ As explained before, this is valid also for the evaluation performed by SciELO, Redalyc and BIBLAT because they share similar criteria and focus.

research community that created the journals, the institutions where they circulate or the audience that made most of them prestigious. This distance widens even more among the mega-journals that are precisely created to cover an extended range of research topics.

There is growing consensus that the Impact Factor of journals must be abolished, and that national science cannot be evaluated or measured solely from WoS and Scopus. This is why coverage is a core issue in discussing biased definitions of excellence, visibility, and impact. But to make this possible, it is critical to have new open infrastructures that can shed light on bibliodiversity and multilingualism, capable of showing diversified profiles of scientific production and multi-scalar research agendas. National information systems are increasingly seen as a remedy for traditional databases' biases and a better means for responsible research assessment (Sivertsen, 2018; Beigel, 2021). The new perspectives offered by these data sources bring back the interculturality of science and can give us more accurate observations of intersectional inequalities in situated contexts.

Open Alex is a progressive alternative as a collaborative infrastructure that can help to integrate regional and national data sources. Besides, it can boost the valorization of diamond journals that are struggling for visibility. In the meantime, a reorientation of funding policies and research incentives towards contextualized notions of quality must prioritize the rescue of hundreds of prestigious journals that have been coopted by commercial publishers. Rewarding editors and editorial teams at universities and learned societies while supporting quality journals has become an urgent matter because the academic control of scholarly publishing is endangered.

The Latin American publishing circuit has survived beyond commodification and has resisted the devaluation by impact assessment. There are thousands of diamond open

access journals in all disciplines whose quality is not determined by the journal rankings but by the evaluation in the Latin American services analyzed in this paper. The role of this regional experience is significant nowadays as a global leader in diamond open access. As we have seen, the scholarly community has a longstanding commitment to establishing journals, and both universities and governments persist in providing support. However, a paradox becomes apparent when several national journal classification systems in this same region devalue these quality journals in front of the “high impact” publications. This phenomenon is not only due to the historical dominance of a heteronomous idea of excellence but also to the inexistence of a regional platform that integrates all these indexed journals. This old, unsolved problem severely limits the circulation of output and prevents the institutions from using regional indicators for responsible research assessment. We will not give up on this project that is so decisive for the region and, why not, for academic autonomy at a global scale.

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