RESOURCE REVIEWS

LATIN AMERICAN RESOURCES: OVERVIEW OF DATABASES USED IN LATIN AMERICAN RESEARCH

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This review departs from normal ANSS review format to attempt a broad introduction to Latin American journal databases that provide extensive coverage of anthropology, sociology, and criminal justice topics. I describe ten databases. The four produced in the U.S. are probably already familiar to ANSS readers. The remainder are created and managed in Latin America or Spain. Astute, dogged, and polyglot researchers will not limit themselves to the U.S. databases. They will correctly sense that much information is to be found nowhere but in foreign databases or on the websites of foreign journals. Some of these foreign sites can be searched in English, and nearly all provide access to free full-text articles without having to pass through a labyrinth of screens. That said, each database has strengths and weaknesses that librarians and users ought to be familiar with.

The databases described here exhibit a basic bifurcation: thesaurus indexed vs. non-thesaurus indexed. The tradeoff is one of precision vs. abundance or plenitude (Mann, 2005, p. 103). Databases that provide expertly designed access points enable users to locate relevant articles on a topic across all languages and despite changes in terminology over time (e.g., physical to biological anthropology or human osteology to bioarchaeology). Databases that provide keyword searches by author, title, etc., provide exposure to a larger number of items, but with far less precision, because keywords search only what is available in the title and rarely what can be distilled from an abstract or article body. Even if keyword searches did access the article's abstract or full text, they would not be able to simultaneously retrieve documents written in multiple languages that employ different terms to describe the same things. Thesauri descriptors serve as "standardized collocation mechanisms" in a database (Mann, 2005, p. 65). They bring together items that keyword searches are unable to unify.

The Latin American Periodicals Universe

It is impossible to know how many humanities and social science periodicals exist in Latin America. Mexico alone publishes around 4,000 titles, only half of which have ISSN registration numbers (Lau, 2010, p. 3636). According to Latindex, there are quite likely some 12,000 periodicals published in or about Latin America and the Caribbean, many of which contain information of interest to anthropologists and sociologists.

Open access has spread like wildfire in Latin America. Nationalism and federal subsidization of academic publishing, two things with a long history in Latin America, are driving this movement. The Latin American world is greatly interested in promoting and providing direct access to its societies' products. While this is mainly positive, a negative effect has been the broad exclusion of Anglo titles and Chicano, Hispanic, and Latino literature from their databases. Most databases produced south of the U.S. border are collaborative ventures. Mexico and Brazil, the largest and wealthiest Latin American countries with the most prolific academic publishing traditions, are leading the way. They

have partnered with each other and with smaller neighbors to establish the largest journal directories known in Latin America, if not the world.

We in the U.S. and Canada can hardly afford to ignore this renaissance of information assembly, access, measurement, and dispersal that is occurring to the south. The exploding Latino college population in the U.S. is reason alone to familiarize ourselves with the Latin American databases. The major PBS series "Latino Americans" airing this fall highlights how the largest minority group in the U.S., now at 50 million people, continues to reshape our society. These people have a heritage that transcends the borders of our nations, and we as information professionals will need to serve them better.

Portals to Portals

The databases described in this section are, in a certain sense, incongruent with the emerging semantic web environment. As directories they introduce an additional degree of distance between searcher and item. The cost of this additional distance is time. The potential benefit is discovery. In essence, these portals are indirect pathways to journal home pages where free full-text articles can be accessed and downloaded.

LANIC - Latin American Network Information Center, http://lanic.utexas.edu

LANIC has been around since 1992, the early days of the Internet. It is part of the Lozano Long Institute of Latin American Studies (LLILAS) and the Benson Latin American Collection at the University of Texas at Austin. LANIC groups together website URLs by country or subject, and is viewable in three languages (English, Spanish, Portuguese). It is a directory very much cut from the Web 1.0 mold, being similar to Yahoo with pre-determined or coordinated categories in which URLs are grouped. Rather than provide direct access to articles, LANIC offers links to additional virtual spaces that may or may not contain links to articles. LANIC promotes sites such as the Bibliografía Mesoamericana, which are gold mines of research for regional specialists. Another one of LANIC's redeeming qualities is that it provides links to gray literature, museum and project web sites, and digitized archival resources. On the minus side of the ledger is the fact that LANIC has become a "link farm," as a colleague of mine recently described it. It contains links to more than 10,000 unique URLs, most of which provide additional links and so on. This is not an efficient way to retrieve primary sources because it adds additional layers of search time and countless red herring distractions.

LAPTOC - The Latin American Periodicals Tables of Contents database, http://laptoc.library.vanderbilt.edu/query/basic_search.jsp

LAPTOC was created in 1994 by the Latin American Resource Research Project (LARRP), a collaboration of more than fifty ARL libraries. It was launched as a pilot project to provide greater bibliographic control and access to the extensive body of literature generated in Latin America. Today, LAPTOC is hosted by Vanderbilt University. LAPTOC allows one to search by journal, author, title, or country of publication the tables of contents of 975 journals published in 29 countries. It also includes bibliographic references to more than 340,000 articles. Most of the articles included in LAPTOC were published between 1994 and 2009. Nothing has been added since 2009. Its interface can be viewed in three languages (English, Spanish, and Portuguese). LAPTOC provides no subject indexing, no direct access to full-text articles, and is of course no longer current.

LATINDEX - http://www.latindex.unam.mx/

LATINDEX began in 1995 as a project spearheaded by the Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México (UNAM) and has been online since 1997. It has three purposes: (1) to be a directory of Latin American journals, (2) to provide an objective, non-citation based system for ranking the quality of each journal, and (3) to be a portal to journal websites

where full-text articles can be downloaded. LATINDEX's strengths are its ease of use and the journal rankings, which provide valuable benchmarks of journal quality for librarians, editors, and publishers. Its weaknesses are: (1) it has no thesaurus-based indexing (it provides rough groupings by discipline only); (2) it has no subject, author, or title search capabilities across all journals in its directory, and (3) it is available in Spanish only.

Thesaurus Indexed Databases

The main attribute that distinguishes the databases in this section is their use of pre-coordinated subject and author terms. Both databases are produced in the United States. Items contained in them derive from scholarly publications of widely varying, but respectable quality. Nevertheless, a vast sea of Latin American publication is excluded from these databases due to their limited staff resources: subject indexing and expert annotation limit their capacities for expansion. Thus, these databases have become unofficial rating systems of what is and is not worthy of the attention of Western readers.

HLAS – The Handbook of Latin American Studies, http://lcweb2.loc.gov/hlas/

Launched by the Library of Congress in 1936, the Handbook of Latin American Studies (HLAS) claims to be "the oldest and most prestigious area studies bibliography in the world" (Mundell, North, & Moyano Martin, 1996, p. 1). Unlike other databases described in this review, HLAS boasts a controlled vocabulary for indexing books, journal articles, book chapters, conference papers, maps, CD-ROMs, and web sites—uniting disparate formats, languages, and related terms in one search. Updated weekly, HLAS Online has been available since 1996. Volume 1 (1936) onward is searchable on the web. HLAS can also be searched from the bound volumes or on a CD published in Spain by the Instituto Tavera. Each HLAS entry is annotated by one of 130 academics from around the world. About 5,000 entries are added each year, with the print volume alternating annually between the humanities and social sciences. The online version can be searched by keyword, author, title, subject, and/or annotation. A glossary of subject terms is accessed via an associated link to provide researchers with searchable terms—these are the codes that combine items from vastly different time periods and languages. HLAS can be searched in English, Spanish, or Portuguese. One limitation of HLAS is that direct links to free full-text articles for the general public are not as common as one would like because many items remain shielded by copyright. For those with a password protected OPAC account, OpenURL links within HLAS allow one to access these proprietary articles directly with a "link resolver." Open access Latin American titles are usually accessed by a link to one of the Latin American databases, such as SciELO.

HAPI – The Hispanic American Periodicals Index, http://hapi.ucla.edu

The Hispanic American Periodicals Index, affectionately known as HAPI, is a paid subscription database that was established in 1974 at Arizona State University. For the last 37 years it has been the cornerstone of the publication arm of UCLA's Latin American Institute. HAPI has been online since 1998 and contains some 300,000 records dating from 1970 to the present with full-text links to an estimated 100,000 articles. The database is updated weekly, and approximately 7,000 records are added annually. Like HLAS, HAPI's principal emphasis is the humanities and social sciences, and fields such as anthropology and sociology are strongly represented. HAPI utilizes the volunteer services of some 35 dedicated Latin American librarians and scholars who provide subject indexing for around 400 titles (200 more are searchable but no longer indexed). An impressive, in-house regularly updated thesaurus enables search results to be collocated by pre-coordinated subject terms. Users have access to the thesaurus' search terms by a link on the landing page (read "Help Using the Thesaurus" to see an example of how many items are missed by keyword searches or by searching with your own search terms). HAPI indexes a modest, yet important chunk, of the Latin American periodical literature for anthropology and sociology. Its greatest asset is its subject and author authority work (because author names change constantly in a region where people have two surnames or *apellidos*!). Its biggest weakness is its limited

coverage of the Latin American literature. Notwithstanding this, HAPI—along with EBSCO's Chicano Database (UC-Berkeley)—are outstanding resources for researching Hispanic, Chicano, or Latino culture in the U.S. HAPI is searchable in English, Spanish, and Portuguese and is probably the only database that makes a resolute effort to index: (1) journals published in Europe, Asia, the Middle East, and Australia that are devoted to Latin America, and (2) journals published in small or poor Latin American countries with little academic production.

Non-Thesaurus Indexed Databases

The databases in this section are gaining a justifiable reputation for their broadly cast bibliographic nets. They attempt to capture the extraordinarily large, infinitely diverse varieties of scholarly literature published in Latin America. To call them "clearinghouses" would be a misnomer. Their structures are analogous to solar systems—although the work is centralized in large "home base" institutions, these institutions partner with smaller ones in neighboring countries so the region as a whole can benefit from promotion of its scholarly products. The breadth these databases achieve is tantamount to the precision they lose. Both rely on keyword searching. None have yet harnessed the intellectual and financial resources to provide the fine-grained topical indexing needed to draw together resources published in different languages (including French, German, Italian, Japanese, and the hundreds of aboriginal languages) and deal with synonyms or more complex content-related issues of aboutness, although BIBLAT has taken a step in this direction. Without question, their signature feature is open access. The volume of full-text items they offer trumps anything available in the U.S.

BIBLAT - *http://biblat.unam.mx/*

BIBLAT is a federated search engine created and hosted by the Universidad Autónoma de México (UNAM) with federal government support. It searches two outstanding databases simultaneously: PERIÓDICA and CLASE. These two databases comprise UNESCO's Global Open Access Portal for Latin America. Together they record more than 3,000 journals from 20 Latin American countries, offering 646,707 articles at the time of this writing, a third of which are available online for free. CLASE (Citas Latinoamericanas en Ciencias Sociales y Humanidades) was created in 1975 and is the database of greatest interest to ANSS librarians. It contains article citations and links from approximately 1700 Latin American journals in the humanities and social sciences—anthropological and sociological themes permeate much of this material. PERIÓDICA (Índice Revistas Latinoamericanas en Ciencias) evolved in 1978. Some of its content, particularly articles hailing from fields such as geology, biology, and medicine, are of potential relevance to archaeologists and biological or medical anthropologists. For this reason, the two databases can be profitably searched in BIBLAT. BIBLAT has a basic search screen for initiating keyword searches of journal, article title, institution, author, or topic. It also boasts an advanced search that limits the search to one of the two databases, journal name, country of publication, year, author, author's institutional affiliation, country of the author's institution, and discipline (e.g., anthropology). It provides links to full-text articles when available. Its search screen is in Spanish only. It has topical indexing but no indication of a thesaurus. Hence, the nature, quality, and consistency of this indexing are not explained to users. BIBLAT also has anemic coverage of journals published in non-Spanish languages. In fact, its content remains heavily weighted toward Mexico. Hence, the journal output of other Latin American countries is underrepresented.

Redalyc – *http://www.redalyc.org/*

Redalyc (pronounced "Red a LEEK") is the brainchild of the Universidad Autónoma del Estado de México. Online since 2002, this database provides access to nearly 900 scientific journals and 300,000 full-text articles, more than half of which pertain to the social sciences (509 journals and 160,000 articles). Coverage spans from 2002 to the present. Redalyc differs from BIBLAT in that it includes Iberian titles from Spain and Portugal and achieves a decent balance

with Brazilian and South American periodical production. It also has an AND/OR Boolean search option on its advanced search screen. Redalyc collects a broad set of metrics that are useful for editors, publishers, and information scientists. Its main deficiency is the lack of subject indexing. The "subject" search option in Redalyc is actually a discipline search (anthropology, sociology, biology, art, law, geology, history, etc.), not an article content search by topic. You can see how useless this would be if you were searching for articles on *street gangs in Rio de Janeiro*, *18th century Argentinian land tenure*, or *marriage customs among Amazonian tribes*. It does, however, guide users to many full-text articles, though it has fewer than BIBLAT in the social science category. The website can be viewed in English, Spanish, or Portuguese and Redalyc includes articles written in Danish, German, and Polish.

Databases-cum-Repositories

Three databases not yet mentioned are SciELO, Dialnet and CLACSO. Unlike the above, these databases double as repositories. Dialnet and CLACSO provide access to full-text theses as well as journals, books, book articles, and gray matter such as conference talks. Theses, dissertations, and raw data are now appearing in open access institutional repositories throughout Latin America—a veritable empirical boon to global social scientific research. Again, the principal traits distinguishing these databases are open access and the lack of authority control indexing (although, in all fairness, SciELO has made some strides in this direction). Without such devices one can swim in a vast ocean of information in perpetuity without finding exactly what one needs. These portals are mainly useful when one has developed a research topic or idea and already has a good sense of what one is looking for and who produced it.

SciELO – Scientific Electronic Library Online, http://www.scielo.org/php/index.php

Online since 1998, SciELO (pronounced "SEE eh low") began as a cooperative undertaking between Brazil and other international Latin American organizations involved with scientific communication. SciELO is a web portal, database, and digital repository. It provides users with access to full-text electronic journals while producing usage and impact statistics for each journal title. Its interface is viewable in English, Spanish or Portuguese. By recent count, it contains 1,066 journals (approximately 443,168 articles) from all fields. SciELO offers keyword searching of title, author, and subject. But unlike other databases produced in Latin America it offers a full Boolean AND/OR/NOT search in fields such as subject, title words and abstract. It also provides users with extensive lists of approved subject and author terms. Unclear, however, is how the terms are generated. Like BIBLAT, the caliber of this authority control remains a mystery (there is certainly no mention of a thesaurus), but its mere existence is a plus. At any rate, if you are looking for items published in South America, especially in Portuguese, SciELO is a great place to look. SciELO supposedly covers all of Latin America, but numbers alone indicate that its Mexican and Central American content lags behind its South American offerings.

Dialnet - http://dialnet.unirioja.es/

Dialnet is hosted in Spain by the Universidad de la Rioja. This free database is sponsored by the Fundación Dialnet, a cooperative of 58 universities, 15 library institutions, and 4 public libraries in Spain, Portugal, and South America, most of which are in Spain. At this writing Dialnet contains 8,832 journals and almost 4 million documents. Dialnet is a journal directory similar to Latindex, but it is not a "portal to a portal." Rather, it is a repository that provides direct access to journal issues with links to each article, when available. Dialnet's search screen is elegant and simple, and its main options can be viewed in ten languages. Unlike the databases described above, Dialnet provides access to recently digitized dissertations and theses produced in its partner countries. Its search capabilities are primitive, however. One should come to this website with a particular author, journal or article title in mind. Anthropology, sociology and criminal justice topics can only be searched under the broad headings "social sciences" or "humanities." Additional

search optimizations are available with DialnetPlus registration, but authority-controlled subject and author indexing are nonexistent.

CLACSO – Centro Latinoamericano de Ciencias Sociales, http://www.biblioteca.clacso.edu.ar

CLACSO is a non-governmental organization created in 1967 by UNESCO. It unites 320 research centers and 600 post-graduate programs in the Social Sciences and Humanities in 25 countries throughout Latin America, the Caribbean, the United States and Europe. Once a bibliographic database, CLACSO is now a digital repository. The repository is headquartered in Buenos Aires, Argentina. Its social science focus is of obvious relevance to ANSS librarians. CLACSO's busy bibliographic website can only be searched in Spanish. But CLACSO need only be searched if one is looking for non-peer reviewed journal articles, books, unpublished documents, conference talks, theses, and multimedia. For peer-reviewed articles, simply search Redalyc, which has assumed stewardship over this portion of CLACSO. Finally, CLACSO has a *tema* or topic search, but provides no access to the list of terms and no assurance that they are precisely defined and consistently applied.

Conclusion

The electronic world is motile and often unreliable. This is especially true in Latin America, where web pages are particularly prone to temporary shutdowns, 404 page errors, and sudden, permanent disappearance. Bibliographic databases and repositories tend to be more stable. But some, such as LAPTOC, now experience desuetude (Mazurkiewicz & Potts, 2007). Others, such as HLAS and HAPI, have justifiably retained their reputations as stable gateways to high end Latin American academic sources. Yet these data sources only index the tip of the periodicals iceberg, and searching them effectively requires familiarity with their controlled vocabulary terms.

Information overload, dispersal, and chaff are intrinsic qualities of the Latin American bibliographic universe. Database directories and open access bring the magnitude of that problem into sharp relief. I cannot overstress the importance of knowing what you are and are not getting with each of these online resources. Thesaurus-based subject indexing, though slow and expensive, provides collocation of items that are written in different languages and describe the same phenomena in different semantic terms. Databases such as HLAS and HAPI, not only provide this indexing, but vet the scholarly quality of the resources indexed. Other search sites—BIBLAT (CLASE), Redalyc, and to some extent SciELO—provide exposure to a broader spectrum of items, but fail to offer powerful subject search collocation of synonymous topics in all languages. Interestingly, the databases described in this review can be bypassed if one knows the exact journal from which one wants an article—*most journals published in Latin America have websites where their articles can be downloaded freely*.

Curiously, as I have written this review, I have gained a greater appreciation for the irreplaceable value of traditional scholarly research methods: the careful scanning of bibliographies, communicating directly with subject experts, and deep reading of authoritative works. Of course, the needs of undergraduates who are writing term papers in the eleventh hour and of graduate students or scholars who are devoted to a topic for the long haul are fundamentally different. On this point, the words of Thomas Mann (2005, p. 108) ring ever true: an amateur researcher asks "What can I get immediately online?" and a professional researcher asks "What path(s) will lead me most efficiently to the best information, whether online or not?" The dizzying array of databases described in this review can be both tool and time suck depending on how well the research topic is defined, what the subject knowledge, technical search skills, and foreign language abilities of the seeker are, and what the researcher understands about the strengths and weaknesses of each database. The databases, important as they are, only provide one piece of any scholarly investigation.

In parting, two trends have surfaced here: (1) the movement toward open access (continued commercial barriers in North America and Europe notwithstanding) coupled with the universal shift to fewer search screens needed to obtain items, and (2) limited regard for, or in some cases complete abandonment of, authority control mechanisms for unifying related items in different formats and languages, and from different scholarly eras (where different terms describe the same thing). As an information specialist and scholar, I can scarcely think of a more disturbing convergence. What lies before us is an explosion of information with greatly inferior means to organize, sort, and retrieve it. In a way, online research has become analogous to digging a crater with a spoon in search of many widely scattered pebbles. A ground penetrating magnetometer would be of some help, but only if the pebbles were magnetized.

Acknowledgements

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Appendix: Comparison Chart of Latin American Research Databases

	Portals to Portals			Thesaurus-indexed		Non-thesaurus indexed		Database-Repository		
	LANIC	LAPTOC	Latindex	HLAS	HAPI	BIBLAT	Redalyc	SciELO	Dialnet	CLACSO
items	10,000 URLs	340,000 records	n/a	300,000 records	300,000 records	646,707 records	300,000 records	443,168 articles	4 mil. documents	30,000 items
country	USA	USA	Mexico	USA	USA	Mexico	Mexico	Brazil	Spain	Argentina
founded	1992	1994	1995	1936	1974	1975	2002	1998	2000	1967
English search capability	x	x		x	x		x	x	x	
federated search						x	x	x		
Boolean search				x	x			x		
proprietary articles				x	x					
open access articles				x	x	x	x	x	x	x
peer & non-peer reviewed journals			x			x				x
theses & dissertations									x	x
books and book chapters										
conference papers										x
strengths	web site discover-ability	browse thematic issues	ease of use	vetted content expert indexing	vetted content expert indexing	deep in Mexican lit	broad regional coverage	South American lit	simple navigation	gray literature
weaknesses	link farm	1994-2009 only		not user friendly delayed content	limited offerings delayed content	search engine quality unknown	limited social science content		limited content	cumbersome - for journals, search Redalyc instead