

Transcript of video contribution by

Wouter Schallier

Hernán Santa Cruz Library and Web Services, ECLAC

I'm Wouter Schallier, I'm the chief of the Hernán Santa Cruz Library and Web Services, ECLAC, the United Nations Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean. I mean, open access is the way to go, and Latin America has a long tradition of being a pioneer, global pioneer in implementing open access all over the region. And then secondly, what we see is that we've seen that with the COVID pandemic, that all of a sudden 85% of all the publications became open access because there was this global emergency and something that was not possible before the COVID pandemic all of a sudden was possible.

So what we see now is that we are still at this level of 85% of COVID-related publications that are available in open access, but then when you look, for example, at climate change, you see that only 50% of the publications, climate change-related publications are available in open access. And when we look at the other SDGs and the 2030 agenda of the United Nations, which is I mean, the way to go, how to achieve this global agenda, you see that it's only between 40 and 60% of the publications that are available in open access.

So if we want to speed up and make sure that we achieve those sustainable development goals of the United Nations, we have to work harder. We have to make sure that those publications are no longer behind economical barriers but become available to all. We launched our digital repository in 2014 and we made all the publications that we produced here at the Economic Commission since its very start, we made it available so that at that moment it was like 37,000 publications.

Currently we are at the level of 45 assets, digital assets, I must say, because it's not only limited to publications anymore; we are also talking about multimedia such as audio. We have, for example, one of the last classes Raúl Prebisch gave I think it was in Sweden, a university in Sweden, just before he died, that we made available in a repository. So this is really important because we believe that it's important to make the knowledge products that we produce here at the Economic Commission, to make them available to all. This is also the case with our statistical data that are available through the portal CEPALSTAT where you can find basically all statistical information of the commission.

There's been an attempt to modernize the scholarly communications system. So some time ago there was the introduction of the APCs, the author processing charges. So the idea was that there instead of putting those economical barriers for having access, I mean, to the reader, for having access to publications, basically the proposal was to basically charge the authors to publish.

And so there would be no economical barriers anymore for the audience, for the readers, but then there would be economical barriers for the authors. So obviously this is not sustainable. I mean, this is not a good solution because it's absolutely impossible for researchers or institutions

with very few resources to eliminate this problem of competition that they basically have when they compete with institutions or researchers with much more resources.

I mean, moving it from the reader to the author obviously doesn't solve that problem. So I think we kind of all agree now that this system of APCs is not sustainable and it's definitely not a good solution. For example, here in Latin America and the Caribbean, people have been very vocal about this. This is something that should be rejected. This is something that is basically not solving this intrinsic problem that we have with the traditional scholar communication system.

We talk about publications. I mean, we talk about articles, monographs, but I would say we especially talk about data. It's really important that research institutions take care of the management, of management of research data, because this is easily going to be the most important digital assets of research institutions. So offering solutions to researchers for the storage infrastructure and for making it available, I think is absolutely crucial.

Making it available whenever possible, but obviously there can be restrictions. But as much as possible, it's important to make data available. Why? Because this is how science, this is how research works nowadays. And we've seen this again during the COVID pandemic, where for the first time in history, in human history, we were able to develop not only one vaccine, but several vaccines in less than one year.

We never seen this before in human history. And this was only possible thanks to global collaboration because the scientific researchers were working together and shared their data. So the advancement of science was much quicker. Thanks to this this collaboration, funding agencies play such a crucial role in this change because they basically define the rules of the game, they define under which conditions research projects receive funds or not.

So if you want to substantially change, modernize this scholarly communication system there, I think, is one of the key is. This is something that we've seen in Europe with the European Commission, who has been putting as a condition that data should be shared, that publications should be shared if they receive funds from the European Commission. This is something that we also see here in Latin America, where there are several funding agencies that are playing this role of a catalyst for this change.

Here at the Hernán Santa Cruz Library of the Economic Commission for Latin America in the Caribbean, we've been a pioneer, I mean, obviously with a lot of allies here in the region and raising awareness on the importance of open data, open access, open science, including citizen science. More than seven years ago, we started a series of monthly webinars, online webinars, and we still continue those webinars because we think there are still so many important things to discuss, and so many experience to exchange. So we are very happy to offer a platform for that, and so we look forward to seeing all of you at one of our next webinars.