

## **FLACSO ANDES project: pioneering initiative on information management of Social Sciences in Ecuador**

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Paper for presentation (go with the web pages) (15 min. included question)

### **BRIEF INTRODUCTION**

During the last few years in Latin America and the Andean Region scientific research in Social sciences has considerably grown: academic centers have bloomed and researchers have broadened their investigation subjects as well as their discussions. These factors resulted in an increase of academic production, setting a new challenge for higher academic centers of social sciences: find the most effective and widespread way to manage and share their academic resources.

For the Latin-American Faculty of Social Sciences, academic centre of higher education in Ecuador, the challenge is assumed through the FLACSO ANDES virtual project, which intends to develop and implement a web services platform in order to organize and diffuse its academic production.

This presentation will briefly expose the chore of the Project as well as the current challenges and results.

### **CREATION OF FLACSO ANDES**

(OPEN WEB [www.flacsoandes.org](http://www.flacsoandes.org))

In 2007, during a strategic planning meeting of the Latin-American Faculty of Social Sciences (campus Ecuador), came up the idea of developing a project to organize, manage, preserve, exchange and offer free access to the institution's scientific-academic production, on a digital format and using Information and Communication Technologies (ICT). A working team was formed and set to work during 6 months on creating a technological and modular platform called: **Flacso Andes: Innovative Digital Center for Social Sciences Research in Latin America and the Andean Region.**

On this platform, which objective was also to encourage the exchange of documents within Latin America and the Andean Region, was implemented, in the first stage, three main working modules: *e-biblioteca* (virtual library); *ágora* (section for self-archiving documents), and *enlaces web* (thematic systematization of links). In turn, FLACSO ascribes a permanent budget to the project; hires trained staff such as librarians, webmasters and typesetters; and buys state-of-the-art equipment to digitalize printed documents. The platform went out on July 2008, under the domain [www.flacsoandes.org](http://www.flacsoandes.org).

Since the beginning, Flacso Andes was conceived as an **access-free** and **open** project; however, it is only recently that the term **access-free** has become a real institutional policy, allowing us to go ahead with the project and to give it some continuity.

(OPEN <http://www.flacsoandes.org/dspace>)

On April 2009, we implemented the open-access repository named Dspace to organize and preserve theses, journals, newsletters and all multimedia material from the Ecuador-campus Flacso as well as all the existing campuses in Latin America.

( OPEN <http://www.flacsoandes.org/buscador>)

At the end of the same year, having reached a better understanding on subjects such as repositories, user's policies and open access, we started to develop an open-access meta-search engine (OAI). The meta-search engine called **Latin America Search Engine of Social Sciences** went out on June 2010 and mainly tries to "inter-operatively" unite open access (OAI data bases), especially regarding social sciences.

(OPEN [http://www.flacsoandes.org/archivo\\_lenguas](http://www.flacsoandes.org/archivo_lenguas))

In 2010, together with the Max Planck institute of Psycholinguistics of Netherland we carried out a new project to create a digital archive of languages and cultures in Ecuador. This archive is consolidating itself with the contribution from various researchers working on the indigenous nationalities thematic in Ecuador. It became available in 2011.

## **RESULTS: Working sections of FLACSO ANDES and statistics**

Flacso Andes can normally boast an average of 25.000 visits every month in its distinct services areas.

### In *E-BIBLIOTECA*: Virtual Library

We have the bibliographic fund from Flacso Ecuador, and we have managed to sign some agreements regarding the authorization and use of publications to upload them to the platform of institutions, organizations and academic centers of Ecuador, Latin America and the Andean Region. We currently possess 1260 books and 5500 articles that can be downloaded as a complete digital text absolutely free of charge.

The documents own a Creative Commons license, to be allowed to publicly copy, distribute and execute works, but under specific conditions: the author or owner of the work has to be respected, the work can not serve as commercial purpose, and the original work can not be altered, transformed or used to create a sub-work.<sup>1</sup>

### **Regarding the digitalization of documents in *e-biblioteca***

In the section of *e-biblioteca*, all printed documents are scanned and digitally converted into PDF format (Portable Document Format) with securities and recognition of OCR. This format enables us to ensure a secure and reliable distribution and exchange of our digital documents.

At the same time digital books are separated into chapters to reduce the size of the document (2 mega at the most), considering that not all users have a broadband connection.

### The *ÁGORA* section:

It is a space where any user can freely self-archive and upload articles, working documents, presentations, or any contributions under the form of books or essays of 30 pages maximum. It is necessary to register briefly and simply, and to provide some basic information regarding the document. This space is moderated in order to ensure quality documents. We currently have 1327 documents.

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<sup>1</sup> More information on: <http://creativecommons.org/international/ec/> - <http://creativecommons.ec/>

### In **ENLACES WEB**

We provide the user with an exhaustive and actualized database of external web links that are divided into various subjects: Anthropology, Gender, International Relations, Economy, History, Development, Politics, Environment, Communication, City, Society, Education, and Government, among others. We have 2400 web links.

### **(OPEN pages)**

During the last two years we have incorporated a section called **THEMATIC LINES**, consisting in the creation of web pages from FLACSO's different academic programs (faculties). The objectives of this creation are distinct: 1) to offer specialized information on a subject (examples: Information System on Andean Migrations, Youth Catalogs, Safe Borders, Means observatory); 2) to present results of research (examples: Gender Unrest, Social and Cultural Memory); 3) to diffuse current research (examples: Public and Governmental Policies); and 4) to diffuse the activities of academic programs and their subsequent research (example: Visual Anthropology, Local Development, CTS, Communication Studies). We currently have 14 web pages that are actualized by each academic program in charge.

### The Dspace repository of **FLACSO SYSTEM THESIS, Journals and newsletters**

It contains all digital theses from all headquarters of FLACSO's International System, and all journals and bulletins from Ecuador headquarters. We currently have 1270 theses, 1100 articles and 44 bulletins articles.

**The Latin American SEARCH ENGINE of Social Sciences** unites through a network various databases from institutions, academic centers and organizations dealing with social sciences, thanks to the OAI-PMH protocol. We currently have 24 connected databases.

### **CHALLENGES:**

Even if the Flacso Andes Project has increased its publications and number of users (it is now part of some information networks such as CLACSO, RIBEI, COLABORA, etc.) and has been allocated an annual budget, there still remain some permanent challenges:

- The rapid technological changes require constant training, development and implementation.

- The evaluation of information quality.
- The long-term digital preservation.
- The means used by technology, and the lack of technological competences and abilities at students and professors' level.
- The *copyright* restrictions of the digital world tend to follow the same norms as in the case of published information: the rights usually come to an end only fifty or seventy years after the death of the author, meaning that to include recent publications into a database we have to negotiate with the people who own the rights, usually the authors. This situation generates some kind of competition to purchase academic goods, creating important inequality regarding information access.
- Internet high costs prevent the majority of users from having access to Flacso Andes resources. In Ecuador only 29% of the population has access to Internet (there are 14 millions Ecuadorians).
- In the Ecuadorian case, even though universities and civil society institutions contribute to the creation of a new vision on ICT appropriation and use, the government doesn't really consolidate concrete and empiric mechanisms to allow the digital inclusion of all the society. Therefore, the social vision of an open access will not only depend on isolated institutional initiatives to improve and benefit from information and ICT, but will also require concrete public policies to ensure the long-term sustainability of the information society, in a more diverse and equalitarian way.

## CONCLUSIONS:

This Project can boast various achievements:

- The library acquired a new active role in the economic, cultural and social development of the country, as we provide quality information through free-access resources, innovative spaces and versatile as well as user-friendly ICT tools. In 2012 FLACSO even inaugurated a new 7-floor building that only hosts a library and digital resources.
- The use of technologies within the academic space was highly motivated by this project, and the use of databases, technological programs, or laboratories became much more common and frequent.
- The project also enabled the compilation of important bibliographic funds and to offer them to the public at large. In turn, it generated an exchange of documents with other

countries from Latin America and the Andean Region, opening new talks and boosting the formation of research networks.

- The research and implementation of open technologies, through the Flacso Andes project, raised some interest from the Ecuadorian university community who started to implement open-access repositories to put its academic production within everybody's reach. Hence the fact that we are a pioneering Project in Ecuador. Currently, there are 22 institutional repositories in the country.

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