

# Scientific Journals in Costa Rica: Current Situation and Challenges

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## Abstract:

This article analyzes the progress of the Costa Rican scientific journals standing out how they have evolved in the recent years. It describes some of their characteristics and the way the Latindex project has contributed to their improvement. Finally, it concludes that there is still enough work to do to reach the quality of many other good Latin American and worldwide journals.

## Keywords:

Costa Rica, Scientific Journals, Latindex project

For many years, Costa Rican scientific journals were, in a sense, ‘orphans’, scattered and fairly invisible. It was only in 2001 that the University of Costa Rica (UCR in Spanish) mediated at a national level and initiated the Latindex project ([www.latindex.org](http://www.latindex.org)), that eventually led to recognition that these journals currently enjoy. Prior to 2001, they did not use rigorous editorial processes and practices. With few exceptions, they were neither indexed nor evaluated by any organization, except for by the SciELO Publication System, which was established in Costa Rica in 2000 (<http://www.scielo.sa.cr/scielo.php?lng=pt>), and is still under development.

Currently, about 200 scientific, academic and cultural journals are published in Costa Rica – which is comparable to the number found in Peru and Uruguay, but more than in most of the other Central American and Caribbean countries (Latindex, 2010). A closer look at the profile of scholarly journals published in Costa Rica reveals that many of them can be best described as “cultural”, and that scientific journals in the narrow sense are actually scarce and published mainly by public universities.

The database provided by *Latindex* (Latindex, 2010) is the only resource in Costa Rica where the current status of these journals can be acknowledged. This database is a reliable directory to account for and characterize the existing journals. Given that in Costa Rica there are no national evaluation systems to classify journals, *Latindex Catalogue* has been used as a way to categorize them according to their quality level (Aguirre et al., 2006).

## Background of Costa Rican Journals

The scientific and cultural development of Costa Rican journals started in the 19th century with some short publications that contained a broad spectrum of topics that were considered scientific. The first journal, entitled *Horas de solaz*, was published in 1871, with just two issues published before the journal ceased to exist. Two journals

from this early period bear a special significance: *Costa Rica Ilustrada* (1887-1892), because of its impact at the national level, and *Gaceta Médica de Costa Rica* (established in 1896), related to medicine, surgery, pharmacy, and hygiene (Ovares, 1994), because it is the oldest journal that is still being published. In these early publications, there was a marked emphasis on literature –mainly poetry and later on, political and social affairs. Many of these publications lasted only for a short time, usually not more than three years, and some of them ceased to be published for a period of time to appear later, but also for only a brief period.

An important feature is that, in general, these journals were led by well-known writers and groups of intellectuals who wanted their work to be published. Some journals had an international profile, such as *Repertorio Americano* (1919-1958) which was led by Joaquín García Monge, one of the most important Costa Rican writers. Many Latin-American intellectuals published in that journal. Costa Rica also produced some journals sponsored by societies, as the case of *Vida y Verdad* (1904) named after the society that supported it. This journal discussed various topics brought up by Costa Rican authors and included translations of some European works, such as Erasmus of Rotterdam, Leon Tolstoy, Herbert Spencer and other (Revistas, 2008).

### **Current Situation of Costa Rican Journals**

Because there was no national policy to develop scientific journals, the University of Costa Rica began using *Latindex* criteria to assess the journals and encourage their improvement (Table). However, little importance has been given to the indexation process. Currently, the Costa Rican presence in the international bibliographic databases or repositories is minimal. Out of 206 active Costa Rican journals, a single one is indexed in ISI Thomson databases, 10 in SciELO database, 15 in REDALyC, 18 in DOAJ, 2 in CAB Abstracts, and 1 in SCOPUS.

Under the *Latindex* project, the UCR is responsible for giving constant training to national editors. The university is also in charge of promoting the implementation of new technologies and tools to increase the journals' visibility. In addition, as a representative of the *Latindex* in Costa Rica, this university has been committed to assess, advice, raise the quality and advertise national journals. The results have been gratifying, for in the past six years the inclusion rate of these journals in bibliographic indices and databases have increased from 1% to 10%.

At this moment, there are over 200 Costa Rican journals in three categories: scientific, technical-professional and popular science. Out of these journals, 56% are published by state universities. Journals are sold at cost or donated. Editors are academics who work pro bono because the task is included in their regular teaching and research activities. The main purpose of these journals is to disseminate research results, and to emphasize innovative experiences that could push forward the professional practice and theoretical discussions. The rest of the journals are sponsored by professional associations (called *colegios* in Spanish), and governmental or non-governmental organizations. Most journals are published twice a year, which is an indication of their difficulties in

maintaining a steady flow of submissions and perhaps of some economic problems they have to face.

**Table. Characteristics of 25 best journals in Costa Rica, according to the 2010 Latindex evaluation (Source: Latindex Catalogue)**

Journal name	Publisher	Percentage of achieved <i>Latindex</i> Criteria	No. of databases and indexes in which the journal is included	Publication form	Issues per year
Agronomía Mesoamericana	UCR	100	18	Print and electronic	2
Revista de Biología Tropical	UCR	100	42	Print and electronic	4
Actualidades Inv. Educación	UCR	100	6	Electronic	3
Agronomía Costarricense	UCR	97	20	Print and electronic	2
Acta Médica Costarricense	Medical Association of Costa Rica	97	7	Print and electronic	4
Educación	UCR	97	6	Print and electronic	2
Medicina Legal de Costa Rica	Legal Medicine Association	97	4	Print and electronic	2
Población y Salud en Mesoamérica	UCR	97	5	Electronic	2
Diálogos	UCR	94	3	Electronic	2
Ingeniería	UCR	94	4	Print	2
Estudios Históricos de la Masonería LA y Caribeña	UCR and others	94	1	Electronic	2
Odontos	UCR	91	0	Print	1
Biocenosis	UNED	91	3	Print	2
Revista de Matemática	UCR	91	1	Print and electronic	2
Educare	UNA	89	1	Electronic	2
MH Salud	UNA	89	1	Electronic	2
Revista Derecho Electoral	Supreme Electoral Court	89	0	Print and electronic	2

Posgrado y Sociedad	UNED	89	0	Electronic	2
Reflexiones	UCR	88	5	Print and electronic	2
Rev. Ciencias Económicas	UCR	88	3	Print	2
Rev. Ciencias Sociales	UCR	88	10	Print	2
Rev. Geográfica América Central	UNA	88	1	Print and electronic	2
Pensamiento Actual	UCR	88	0	Print and electronic	1
Humanitas	Universidad Católica	88	1	Print	1

Abbreviations: UCR (Universidad de Costa Rica), UNED (Universidad Estatal a Distancia), UNA (Universidad Nacional Autónoma)

Despite the fact that the evolution of Costa Rican journals has been slow, the improvement in quality during the last five years is remarkable. In 2004, there were 11 journals in the Latindex Catalogue. By 2010, there were 57 (27% of all journals). The number of e-journals raised from 31 in 2004 to 111 in 2010. Besides, in 2007, the UCR opened the Latindex-UCR [www.latindex.ucr.ac.cr](http://www.latindex.ucr.ac.cr), a database where full versions of articles can be found and downloaded. This tool has also increased the contribution of authors from other countries to these journals.

However, the challenges that remain are still manifold. It is necessary for the journals to increase their visibility, not only by getting included in international indices databases, but also by providing online versions of their content. A tendency towards national isolation is a major constraint that has not been overcome yet. There is still a resistance to expand the editorial boards, to accept more articles by foreign authors and to allow external evaluation. Also, regular periodicity remains to be achieved; for many journals this challenge is related to the scarcity of resources.

Only a few journals are published exclusively in electronic edition; in general, most of Costa Rican journals publish electronic issues that are very similar to the ones printed. Therefore, these journals lack value-added services, implementation of metatags and internet search engines to make them more versatile (Córdoba & Coto, 2008). A minority takes advantage of web-related functions such as online videos, interactivity with the reader, or the use of hypertexts.

In conclusion, the progress of Costa Rican journals from 2002 to 2010 has been very positive. Nevertheless, it is still not enough to reach the level that many Latin American and other journals around the world already have.

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