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DATA BANKS AND FILES  
THE LATIN AMERICAN DATA BANK  
AT THE UNIVERSITY OF FLORIDA

BY WILLIAM G. TYLER\*

As a response to the increasing demand for accessible statistical information, in 1966 the University of Florida established its Latin American Data Bank (LADB). In consonance with the University's long standing interest and emphasis on Latin America, the LADB was organized to serve social scientists doing research in this area. Not merely intended as a repository for data collected by individual researchers and donated to it, LADB was vested with the function of actively acquiring useful information for dissemination to the scholarly community. Supported initially by a grant from the National Science Foundation, by 1971 the LADB constituted the world's largest single collection of statistical data for social phenomena concerning Latin America.<sup>1</sup> As of early 1972, LADB held processed holdings comprising some 14.2 million card images on magnetic tapes.

The data base in the possession of LADB encompasses statistical information from 14 Latin American countries. LADB's holdings consist of national census materials including demographic, industrial, agricultural, housing, commercial, and transport censuses. In several instances census universes are held. In addition, other data sets held by the LADB include electoral data, some survey materials, and limited economic time series. As a result of a high LADB acquisition priority for information about to be lost, a number of LADB's data sets are now available nowhere else in the world. Either the collecting agencies have destroyed or discarded the original data files, or the originals have deteriorated to the point of being unusable.

The determination of acquisition priorities has been a problem for the LADB, as has been the case for other similar data archives. In establishing acquisition criteria, the LADB has sought to avoid possible duplication of effort and maximize potential research benefits with a limited acquisitions budget. Survey data has, until recently, been generally avoided because of the specialization in this area of the Roper Public Opinion Research Center and the International Data Library of the University of California at Berkeley. Economic and social time series, while of great importance in much economic research, also have had a relatively low acquisition priority. Many economic time series are generally available, although frequently not in machine-readable form, through such institutions as the United Nations and the Yale Economic Growth Center. Moreover, the acquisition of time series presents problems of international comparability and continual up-dating—both of which require a relatively large commitment of resources. For these reasons, the LADB has concentrated most heavily on

\* This report is based on a presentation delivered to the "Conference on the Role of the Computer in Economic and Social Research in Latin America" held in Cuernavaca, Mexico, October 25-29, 1971.

<sup>1</sup> Anthony Kruzas *et al*, editors, *Encyclopedia of Information Systems and Services*, first edition (Ann Arbor, Michigan: Edwards Brothers, 1971).

acquiring census materials. As the LADB grows, it is expected that acquisition priorities may be modified with changing circumstances. To this end, the eventual establishment of a policy-making board is envisaged, composed of outside users as well as LADB personnel and charged with planning the future direction of LADB acquisitions.

To facilitate communication and data interchange LADB cooperates with various similar interest institutions. Cooperative arrangements for data pooling and exchange exist with the International Data Library at Berkeley, the Inter-University Consortium for Political Research based at the University of Michigan, and the Centro Latinoamericano de Demografía (CELADE) in Santiago, Chile. The LADB also cooperates with the Council of Social Science Data Archives and the Standing Committee on Data Archives of the International Social Science Council, as well as with numerous institutions in Latin America.

The LADB presently provides services that distinguish it from a purely data archive, which serves primarily as an information repository.<sup>2</sup> The LADB engages in the acquisition, maintenance, and distribution of statistical information. Second, LADB is active in coding, "cleaning," and otherwise preparing data for analysis. Third, in attempting to ensure that the data are of good quality, it is involved in checking and evaluating the data sets in its possession. Fourth, LADB provides statistical services to users and suppliers alike. The LADB has access to the University of Florida's IBM 360/65 computing system, numerous software packages, and ample computing and social science research expertise. With respect to such services, LADB is especially desirous of establishing stronger working relationships with suppliers and expects to increase the technical services provided to data supplying agencies.

Thus far, use of the LADB's facilities and data base has been less than hoped for. Although users were initially restricted to University of Florida faculty and students, the LADB today services requests, at marginal cost, from the entire scholarly community. Persons desiring additional information of the LADB, including its current list of data holdings, should write to the author or Professor Manuel Carvahal; Director, Latin American Data Bank; University of Florida; Gainesville, Florida 32601.

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<sup>2</sup> For a discussion of data bank functions see Ralph L. Bisco, "Social Science Data Archives: Progress and Prospects," *Social Science Information*, Vol. VI, No. 1 (February 1967).