

## Case Study

## Case Study: Derechos Digitales

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### Abstract

Derechos Digitales is a Latin American advocacy and research network focussed on freedom on the internet, privacy and copyright reform. For the pilot project a specific IDRC funded project was the notional focus of study. However in practice the effort for considering data sharing was aimed at being organisation wide.

The organisation already shares reports and other resources (particularly images and infographics) by default. While open data was described as being “in the DNA of the organisation” there was little practice across the network of sharing preliminary and in-process materials. Some aspects of data collection on research projects, particularly to do with copyright and legal issues, have significant privacy issues and as the organisation focuses on privacy as one of its advocacy areas this is taken very seriously. Many materials from research projects are not placed online at all.

Derechos Digitales run distributed projects and this creates challenges for consistent management. Alongside this the main contact at DD changed during the course of the pilot. This exchange exemplified the challenges of maintaining organisational systems and awareness through a personnel change.

### Keywords

copyright, Latin America, privacy, data sharing, data management, case study, Columbia

## **Main Findings**

Derechos Digitales is in the process of putting in place a set of infrastructures to manage both confidential, secure and public information. The distributed nature of the organisation and its focus on advocacy and campaigning means that despite an alignment with data sharing agendas in general, the actual practice and culture of sharing objects from within the research process was limited.

- Alignment with the goals and advocacy for data sharing and transparency is not necessarily coupled with culture and practice of data sharing within organisations.
- A strong commitment to open source and/or non-commercial products can pose challenges for rapidly deploying a data sharing infrastructure.
- Distributed research projects create a particular challenge in managing and coordinating a consistent culture and practice of data sharing.
- Change in personnel creates particular challenges in developing a policy implementation program.

## **Awareness and pre-existing capacity for managing and examining data**

Derechos Digitales demonstrated awareness of many of the issues associated with data sharing, including an interest in engaging with the pilot project. The organisation manages a sophisticated advocacy and information program on many issues that are aligned with a data sharing agenda. The organisations also has a strong program of releasing reports and other resources for wide-spread re-use. However the research programs are distributed amongst advocacy partners and there was a limited culture of sharing “data” in the sense of intermediate products of research. The distributed nature of research programs led to challenges in agreeing and implementing a data sharing/management program.

DD had a strong web presence already and some internal infrastructure for data management. The engagement with the pilot project was intended to support an audit and broader deployment of resources for data sharing. There was limited internal technical capacity this and DD sought outside expertise to support this. A commitment to open source and non-proprietary platforms limited the range of options available.

## **The development of data management plans**

The process of developing a data management plan was challenging for a variety of reasons. Firstly there was little experience of data management from a research perspective. While the organisation is aligned with and sympathetic with a data sharing and open access agenda there was limited experience of sharing the intermediate product of projects. The relevant files are available in the project data package (Neylon 2017).

The initial data audit was considered a useful process and the workshop through which the concept of what data might include was also considered valuable. However in the context of a broadly federate project with many contributors it was challenging to get engagement from all participants in a consistent way. The general culture appears to be for individual project contributors to operate autonomously and that placing central requirements for output sharing proved challenging.

The final DMP itself dealt primarily with high level issues and did not provide significant detail. Nonetheless the process was seen as useful in thinking through issues in detail. In common with other projects within the pilot the process raises a set of issues, for instance on the collection of information from interviews, and whether this material was being appropriately archived and stored. Throughout the process the challenges of working with the team as a whole was raised. In addition the issue of bandwidth and the extent to which it was feasible to undertake a planning exercise for every project was raised.

## **Tools and systems: Experience of use in developing world context**

There were no specific technical issues raised with respect to either the platform or network access to the DMPAssistant tool. Derechos Digitales operates in Spanish but English support was adequate for the process undertaken here. It may be the case that engagement with the wider network of project contributors would have been improved if a Spanish language implementation was available.

## **Challenges of implementation and data sharing**

The challenges fell into a number of categories as noted above. The most significant was the challenge of getting engagement from a distributed group of researchers operating separately. The Pilot Project was a centralised effort driven through interaction with a single person in the funded organisation. The risks of this were demonstrated when that point of contact changed due to personnel changes.

The interaction with the pilot project provided resources that allowed the organisation to bring in IT expertise so as to provide local data management and sharing infrastructure. In common with many of the other contributing projects concerns over management and control over access drove a choice to provide a central server infrastructure. In the case of DD additional limitations were driven by the choice to work only with open source and non-proprietary systems. A lack of internal expertise was a substantial challenge. Engagement with the pilot project provided resources that allowed this development to take place. It is unclear that this would have occurred without that support.

Another issue that was identified was a lack of consistent consent procedures for project participants. While privacy was taken seriously and managed locally, consent was

described as not generally being recorded and not administered consistently across the distributed research projects. This was consistent with processes not always being consistent with best practice across these distributed groups. Certainly the balance between reach and consistency in culture and practice was a challenge.

The final challenge, which was expected was related to substantial issues of privacy with some materials. In particular some sets of interviews involved highly confidential material. DD has developed a workflow for managing the categorisation of materials. This involves a substantial amount of work and creates significant overheads in terms of managing security and access for different categories of material. It is not clear how best to handle the balance of additional work created locally, centralised provision by a funder or other infrastructure provider, and the need for the research group to be able to provide guarantees on the handling of data for consenting project participants.

## Changing culture and the role of policy

Derechos Digitales provides an interesting case where there is a strong pre-existing culture of open practice and access to knowledge in general, but a limited practice and culture of embedding this in the research process itself. In part this is due to the nature of the organisation itself. Being focussed on advocacy and education it is the end products of projects that are considered the main focus for sharing.

The role of policy in shifting this culture and practice towards a broader adoption of consistent best research practice was regarded as important. The role of the funder in emphasising the sharing of data, and in providing guidance and support, was considered important. The previous experience with funders is that they would generally not support generic aspects of access to knowledge and data sharing and the leadership from IDRC was considered valuable. It was described as “sending a signal” in an area which had previously “not been an issue”.

## Grant title

Exploring the opportunities and challenges of implementing open research strategies within development institutions (Neylon and Chan 2016).

## References

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