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**The dynamics of social  
research production,  
circulation and use in  
Bolivia, Paraguay and Peru:  
a comparative study**

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## The dynamics of social research production, circulation and use in Bolivia, Paraguay and Peru: a comparative study

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### ABSTRACT

The paper presents the results of a comparative study of the social research production environments of three Latin-American, low- and middle-income countries: Bolivia, Paraguay and Perú. It draws from three case studies – one of each country – based on in-depth interviews with key informants (policymakers, researchers, leaders of higher education and research institutions) conducted under a common thematic protocol. The comparative examination of the three case studies shows important commonalities such as the weak or null presence of the state in social research policy and funding. All three countries are also marked by a common instrumentalist approach to social research production, albeit of a technocratic kind in Peru and Paraguay, while in Bolivia it is of a political/populist nature. Together, these factors have a strong impact on the low research outputs of these countries as compared to other countries in the region, as well as on the types and quality of the research produced and on the circulation of research in academic journals. While there are important differences too, for instance in the degree of institutional development and the profesionalization of research work – where Perú stands out as the more developed of the three countries – the bottom line is that research is still experienced as a solitary pursuit which suffers from the lack of research communities and critical mass.

### Key words

Research policy frameworks; social research production; knowledge circulation; knowledge use; low- and middle-income countries; science and technology policy

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## INTRODUCTION

The importance of social research in promoting public policies that are more transparent, democratic, and sustainable over time is widely acknowledged. Despite contextual differences and important variations as to how the research-policy link is conceptualized, the need to strengthen the links between policy and social research is also recognized in many developing countries as a core element for the development process and for the consolidation of democratic systems of governance. There is, however, much less emphasis in policy debates on core capacities required to boost the production of high-quality social research, the conditions conducive to achieving this outcome, and the policies necessary for creating those conditions.

One point of growing consensus is that the indicators used to assess the research environments of developed countries might not be quite suitable within developing contexts, where institutions tend to be weaker, patterns of social organization are less differentiated and research production often operates in different ways (Cetto and Vessuri, 1998). Hence, before establishing any policies to strengthen the systems of social research production it is important to understand how they work in developing countries.

This study seeks to contribute towards achieving this goal by providing insights into the working of social research production systems in developing countries. The research on which this paper is based is a comparative study of three of the least known research contexts of South America, namely, Bolivia, Paraguay and Peru.<sup>1</sup> The case studies of these three countries were conducted using a common research design and protocol and were elaborated based on documentary analysis, in-depth interviews with key actors, and the analysis of available secondary research. These studies were jointly analyzed so as to systematically compare the structure of the three research environments and the kind of research dynamics they would generate.

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