

THE SILENT CRISIS OF SCIENTIFIC PEER REVIEW

At the core of every scientific journal lies a fundamental process upon which the credibility of published knowledge depends: peer review. In recent years, this essential mechanism has been under growing strain. The difficulty in finding reviewers, the increasing academic workload, and the limited institutional recognition of refereeing threaten the sustainability of a system that has been, for decades, the foundation of scientific communication.

Global academic production has expanded at an accelerated pace. Each year more manuscripts are submitted, new journals are created, and publication channels continue to grow. However, the number of researchers willing to devote time to reviewing has not increased at the same rate. The result is a structural imbalance: more peer review is demanded, yet those who perform it receive ever less recognition. In Latin America and the Caribbean, this tension is felt with particular intensity due to budget constraints, heavy teaching loads, and evaluation systems that rarely consider editorial work as an academic merit.

In September 2017, an editorial published in *Interciencia* by Dr. Miguel Laufer, and reissued in October 2020, referred to reviewers as “hidden heroes,” highlighting the silent and essential nature of their work. That reflection, published in a relatively recent context but already profoundly different from today’s, remains fully valid. Nevertheless, current challenges are more complex: the acceleration of publication times, the pressure to produce more articles, and the proliferation of questionable editorial practices have substantially transformed the environment in which peer review takes place.

For a journal such as *Interciencia*, which for five decades has upheld an editorial model based on rigor and expert evaluation, this problem has become a daily challenge. Finding qualified, available, and committed reviewers is now one of the most difficult tasks in editorial management. Behind every published article lies a collective and anonymous effort that seldom receives the recognition it deserves.

Peer review is far more than a formal requirement. It is a process of critical dialogue that improves manuscripts and strengthens the quality of regional science. Yet this work is usually carried out on a voluntary basis, during personal time, and under increasing pressures of productivity. In a context dominated by metrics and quantitative indicators, reviewing articles for regional journals is not always visible

in academic careers, even though it is indispensable for the advancement of local knowledge.

New tensions further complicate this scenario. The use of artificial intelligence tools, the need to verify increasingly complex data and methodologies, and the responsibility to detect potential misconduct have raised the demands placed upon reviewers. All of this requires time, experience, and commitment—resources that the current academic system does not always provide.

Given this situation, it is urgent to rethink the way scientific institutions conceive peer review. Universities and research organizations must explicitly recognize refereeing as a relevant academic contribution. Evaluation agencies should include the role of reviewer as an indicator of impact and service to the community. Journals, for their part, are called upon to develop transparent mechanisms for recognition, training, and feedback for those who collaborate in this process.

Throughout its history, *Interciencia* has sought to build a close and respectful relationship with its reviewers. However, present challenges demand going further. It is necessary to strengthen regional networks of reviewers, promote good evaluation practices, and foster a culture of academic co-responsibility. The quality of Latin American science depends largely on ensuring that this invisible task becomes visible.

Renewing the peer review system also involves rethinking its times and formats. Rigorous evaluation should not be confused with unnecessary delays, but neither should it be replaced by hasty processes that compromise the depth of analysis. Finding a balance between efficiency and quality is one of the great editorial challenges of our time.

The future of scientific journals in the region inevitably depends on strengthening their communities of reviewers. Caring for those who evaluate is caring for science itself. At the beginning of 2026, *Interciencia* calls upon researchers, universities, and research centers to revalue peer review as a common good, essential for the integrity and development of knowledge in Latin America and the Caribbean.

Recognizing and supporting our reviewers means continuing along the path of those “hidden heroes” who have made possible, issue after issue, the editorial history of *Interciencia*.

ANA RAQUEL PICÓN ÁVILA
Editor (E), *Interciencia*