

## *Non-Spaces* for Scientific Communication. Reflections on the Publication of Academic Journals in the Field of Education



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For the publishers of academic journals, the changes under way in the way in which advances are made and disseminated in the area of social sciences and humanities pose certain challenges, herald several opportunities and also bring with them a number of risks.

Over the past thirty years, but especially intensely in the last decade, the management models for the publishing of academic journals in social sciences and humanities have substantially changed; it has become a more complex and dynamic task, tending toward professionalization. Today, editorial teams are no longer concerned solely with the sense and unity of the publication and the originality and academic significance of articles, reviews, interviews and other material they publish; their members need to develop other skills and abilities – social, bureaucratic and technical – which have little or nothing to do with academic, scientific work per se.

This being the case, journals wishing to carve out a niche for themselves in the academic community need to consider various issues, regardless of the management model they adopt. Firstly, despite the difficulties it entails, the number of recently-founded specialised periodical publications continues to increase – particularly in educational science. For this reason, editorial teams have to invest extra effort to more clearly define a project which attracts interest and recognition from the scientific community. Thus, they must attempt to serve the interests, concerns and requirements of a large portion of that community, and endow the project with a certain character which sets it apart from the rest. Depending on the discipline or field in question, the task of finding a rich vein of scientific- and intellectual material may be relatively easy, to varying degrees, but always there looms the threat of excessive specialisation, which could, for lack of academic production, soon lead to the exhaustion of the editorial project, or else relegate it to backfed intellectual circuits.

The second issue which publishers have to attend to is the quality of the journal's management, which must meet with the international standards of best practices, which indicate the seriousness, rigour and professionalism of the publication – at least on the face

of it – as they regulate the formal aspects which need to be meticulously dealt with, such as: transparency in the publication processes, accessibility of the content, intellectual openness and internationalisation of authors and members of the editorial teams, full identification of all parties involved, originality of the studies, peer-review of submissions, presence of the publication in clearing houses and databases, respect of the periodicity of the publication, and the adherence to some code of editorial ethics. On occasion, as is the case with the reviewing of original work, conforming to such best practices presents a further challenge for publishers, as it requires them to have a certain capacity to weave a far-reaching web of outside collaborators, specialising in the discipline, who can rigorously assess the academic quality of the articles received, and the wisdom (or lack thereof) of publishing them.

Next, it is important to plan out the indexing- and marketing strategy, so that the research is disseminated to the academic community at large. Traditionally, this has primarily been achieved through the libraries of universities and research hubs which, either through numerous subscription or through exchange between publications, acquired the latest works in science and culture, catalogued them and made them available to the public. Today, this strategy continues to be highly useful for all types of journals, be they open-access or fee-access. Nevertheless, as digital journals have grown and consolidated, international databases have sprung up, which also have their own sets of best practices and rankings in terms of impact or popularity. More recently, the complexity of the task of disseminating the work published in journals has increased, due to the relative generalisation of social media, whether or not designed specifically for academic communication, which have a notable impact in popularising the journals, and deal with the need for immediacy in the publication of the results of investigations. These matters mean that editorial teams need to have a wide range of technical-, bureaucratic- and advertising knowhow.

In view of the whole situation, academic journals in the field of education, and in the rest of the social sciences and humanities, need to deal with a number of challenges in the medium term. The crucially-important issue is that editorial teams must continue to invest their fullest efforts in maintaining the originality, solidity and academic interest of the work published – otherwise everything else becomes meaningless. The definition of the project – that which sets it apart from the rest – is a greater and more complex requirement for journals in the field of education, owing to the high number of such publications.

Furthermore, publications which do already have good recognition and indexing must maintain the level of their production so as to remain in that position, and continue adapting to the new demands of editorial management. For their part, more recently-established publishers need to plan out dissemination strategies which include social media; carry out meticulous indexing; and adopt the international standards of best publishing practices.

All of the above implies, amongst other things, that editorial teams must be prepared to take on multiple and varied technical tasks, and establish styles and workflows which are more intense and fluid, where coordination, collaboration and communication take on greater relevance.

The tendency toward standardisation of publisher projects may stem from the fact that the journals are watering down their firmly-established identifying traits, abandoning their scientific-, academic and (why not) political agendas, and are becoming non-spaces for scientific communication. This is one more reason to place emphasis on the importance of clearly defining the academic- and editorial goals which guide specialist publications – particularly in the area of education.

Ultimately, this trend is rich in opportunities and possibilities to make the world of academia into something freer, more dynamic and more democratic, where communication, collaboration, cooperation and fraternal solidarity in labour are the principles that constitute the backbone of the activity. A good example of this is the ever-expanding open-access movement and the growing use of social and academic media.

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