

# Introduction to Publishing in Academia: Digital Challenges

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This *European Review* supplement is based on a conference on the topic ‘Publishing in Academia: Digital Challenges’ held at the Wenner-Gren Center in Stockholm on 10–12 May 2023 with the economic support of the Wenner-Gren Foundations. The conference was part of a series arranged by the HERCuES group within Academia Europaea. Since its formal establishment in 2004, the group – with the full name of Higher Education, Research and CULTure in European Society – has organized the following symposia addressing issues in relation to higher education and research:

- 2005: *The Formative Years of Scholars* (Stockholm with the Wenner-Gren Foundations).
- 2006: *Quality Assessment in Institutions of Higher Education in Europe: Problems, Practices and Solutions* (Pavia with Compagnia di San Paolo).
- 2007: *The University in the Market* (Stockholm with the Wenner-Gren Foundations).
- 2009: *From Information to Knowledge, from Knowledge to Wisdom. Challenges Facing Higher Education in the Digital Age* (Stockholm the Wenner-Gren Foundations).
- 2009: *Diversification of Higher Education and the Academic Profession* (Turin with the Compagnia di San Paolo and Accademia Nazionale dei Lincei).
- 2011: *Trust in Universities* (Stockholm with the Wenner-Gren Foundations).
- 2013: *Migration and Mobility in Science. Impacts on Cultures and the Profession in Institutions of Higher Education in Europe* (Rome with Compagnia di San Paolo).
- 2013: *Bibliometrics. Use and Abuse in the Review of Research Performance* (Stockholm with the Wenner-Gren Foundations).
- 2014: *Humanities and Social Sciences, Globalization and China* (Beijing with the support of the Bank of Sweden Tercentenary Foundation).
- 2015: *From Books to MOOCs? Emerging Models of Learning and Teaching in Higher Education* (Stockholm with the Wenner-Gren Foundations).
- 2016: *University Governance. Impeding or Facilitating Creativity* (Hannover with Volkswagen Stiftung).
- 2017: *Crossing over to the Future. Interdisciplinarity in Research and Higher Education* (Stockholm with the Wenner-Gren Foundations).

2019 (May): *Mind the Gap – Bridging Secondary and Higher Education* (Stockholm with the Wenner-Gren Foundations).

2019 (November): *Missions of Universities over Time: Global Actors, National Champions, or Local Power Houses?* (Stockholm at the Royal Swedish Academy of Letters, History and Antiquities with the support of the Bank of Sweden Tercentenary Foundation).

2022: *The Internationalization of Higher Education Institutions* (Uppsala with the support of the Åke Wiberg Foundation).

### **Contributions to this Supplement**

After the first article, which provides my analysis of academic publishing in modern society, eight papers follow that illustrate various aspects of the system for academic publishing. Five of these refer to the European context, while three give evidence from non-European countries. In the first group, those by Astrid Söderbergh Widding and by Åse Gornitzka and Bjørn Stensaker provide experiences of Academic Leaders. After that follow three contributions, by Christine Musselin, Charlotte Wien and Pil Maria Saugmann on the experiences of Faculty Members. Finally, this supplement concludes with the three papers by Osman Aldirdiri, Chengzhou He and Abel L. Packer reporting from non-European countries.

### ***Academic Leaders and Publishing***

In the first of the contributions by Academic Leaders, Astrid Söderbergh Widding, President of Stockholm University, deals with the way universities handle open access. Her article refers to Sweden, a country where the ambition was to reach 100% open access by 2021, and where, in 2023, about 82% of publications are open access. The latter is a result of governments of different colours pushing for the adoption of open-access publishing but also tough negotiations between university representatives and publishers. For this, a consortium, founded as early as 1996, has been very important. It has, in particular, made strong efforts to avoid double-dipping – the phenomenon of publishers charging both for publishing and for reading. In this way, there has been a certain transition from subscription deals to payments just for publishing. However, Söderbergh Widding shows that publishers continue to have a strong position vis-à-vis academia because of their possession of high-ranked journals that lend researchers academic prestige. For the Swedish consortium, like its counterparts in other countries, it is therefore an important task to challenge the publishers in order to cut costs further. In so doing, the movement towards article processing charges only is the goal. In order to achieve this, Söderbergh Widding points to the importance of Academic Leaders working together in the negotiations. She also reports that there are voices in Sweden that argue that universities should not renew their deals with Publishers when they terminate. Instead, these representatives of the research community suggest that universities should develop platforms of their own for publishing.

In the second paper providing perspectives from Academic Leaders, Åse Gornitzka and Bjørn Stensaker, Pro-Rector and Vice-Rector, respectively, of the University of Oslo, report on their experiences. They discuss the implementation of Plan S, i.e., the principle that all publicly funded research should be published Open Access. In analysing this development, they point out that European policymaking in the knowledge area is complex, driven on different levels by a large number of actors handling several different issues. Empirically, they first offer evidence regarding the Norwegian research system, which since 2006 has been rewarding academic institutions economically for the publication performance of their Faculty Members at the same time as the Ministry requires Open Access publishing. This has had effects on the costs for academic publishing but also on the output of Norwegian researchers as well as their citations. It has also affected promotion practices and Open Access publishing. As part of the top administration at the University of Oslo, the two authors have handled these changes on the institutional level. While they found the principle of Open Access publishing logically justified, they have faced considerable resistance. It was obvious for them that the requirement of Open Access publishing was in conflict with another fundamental principle in academia, namely academic freedom in the sense that the researchers should be able to publish their results in publications of their choice. In other words, as university leaders, they are, on one hand, expected to protect the academic freedom of the faculty members of the university. On the other hand, they experience pressure to follow the rules of Plan S. This in turn has had significant economic implications due to increasing charges from publishers.

### ***Faculty Members and Publishing***

Christine Musselin, in her article, provides two perspectives on publishing. First, she discusses the idea of strategies in publishing. As a researcher with long experience, she points out that in the earlier days of her career such strategies were absent. Over time, she has found it appropriate to pay more attention to where her research results are published. In so doing, she chose not to completely abandon her earlier publication channels but instead adopt what she labels as ‘a balanced strategy’. This means that she has continued to publish in French, but also to publish in English. In addition, it has implied a combination of publication outlets, i.e., books, papers in journals, and edited volumes as well as Open Access. She feels this diversified strategy is under threat in view of the increasing focus on publications in high-impact journals. Musselin’s account of her own development is a good demonstration of the transition of publishing conditions for researchers in a non-English speaking country.

The second part of Musselin’s article, based on her experiences as editor of two journals, is another demonstration of the transition of publishing towards an English-dominated world. It is very clear from her article how the power of publishers has increased. A significant factor behind this has been the development of information technology that provides advantages for publishers through their platforms and their ability to turn to digital publishing. Musselin also points to the increasing commercialization of the industry, with cost cuts and strong marketing

efforts to sell journals in bunches. At the same time, academics play a significant role as editors and reviewers. Thereby, Musselin underlines, it is important to develop collegial decisions both within journals and in relations to reviewers.

The peer-review system is also the focus of the article by Charlotte Wien. She starts by discussing this selection mechanism as an act of communication. In a subsequent section, she demonstrates – based on the existing literature – the costs of the peer-review system. From this account, it is clear that many working hours are devoted to reviewing manuscripts. In the current competitive academic world, many researchers, particularly those who are early in their careers, are hesitant to allocate time for peer reviewing. As a result, there are increasing difficulties for editors to find qualified and willing reviewers. Charlotte Wien thus concludes that there is a gap between the demand and the supply of quality peer review. Another problem that she addresses is the bias that those who accept review assignments may have. In view of the problems she has addressed – costs, recruitment difficulties and bias – in the latter part of the article she discusses possible improvements in peer review procedures. One possibility would be to move from double-blind peer review towards open peer review. After such a change, according to studies, reviews become less negative and less subjective. However, at the same time, the willingness to review appears to decline. An opportunity would then be artificial intelligence as an instrument, although it still has to be developed and – since such systems are based on earlier human behaviour – it will tend to have the same biases as the ordinary reviews.

In the third account from a faculty member, Pil Maria Saugmann discusses publishing with a focus on an Early Career Researcher (ECR). In so doing, she starts by elaborating on the purpose of academic publishing, i.e., ‘to facilitate the dissemination of new knowledge and research findings to the research community and even beyond’. Therefore, she commends open access as a principle that makes research results and data available. She also points to the role of publishing as a significant part of research assessment, and to the tendencies to use bibliometric data for this purpose. In addition, her paper offers a discussion regarding the use of artificial intelligence in research. However, her focus is particularly on the precarious working conditions of ECRs. She thereby points to the frequent use of short-term contracts. For young scholars, this implies difficulties in being included in the general social and economic community, which in a number of cases forces ECRs to leave academia. Saugmann reports that ECRs generally see advantages with open access and open science. However, she also points to the fears of ECRs that research assessments will not consider open science practices. Therefore, in concluding her article, she suggests reforms of the research assessment system. In addition, she asks for more in-depth training of ECRs in open science and the strengthening of academic freedom.

### *Non-European Experiences*

The articles from non-European countries demonstrate other problems than those of the European countries. In particular, the paper by Osman Aldirdiri points to the fact that,

although European scholars experience a number of problems in relation to academic publishing, they are in a favourable position in relation to their counterparts in developing countries. This is evident from Aldirdiri's account of the opportunities for academic publishing among African scholars. He reports that, as on other continents, there are many advocates for the need to strengthen research and academic publishing, but at the same time a number of challenges on the way to achieving this. A basic problem is that African research suffers from limited funding. This is already hampering the research itself. Obviously, it is also a serious problem in relation to the access to international publications, as well as the increasing publication costs. In addition, African scholars face poor infrastructure, particularly internet connectivity, which is a fundamental problem in a world where digital communication and publishing have become so important. The limited resources and the poor infrastructure have in turn resulted in low research output. An important reason for that is language barriers on a continent with more than 1500 different languages. This language diversity, Aldirdiri points out, also contributes to difficulties in pursuing quality assurance and peer review, a circumstance that tends to lead to predatory practices. In addition, copyright and intellectual property laws in scholarly publishing appear underdeveloped in most African countries. Likewise, African scholars and institutions largely lack the resources to maintain proper data management systems. More generally, they suffer from a lack of policies and regulations.

The Chinese situation, on the other hand, examined by Chengzhou He, is at the same time both similar and different from the European one. Thus, both in Europe and China researchers face strong counterparts. However, while the Europeans are facing strong commercial publishers, their Chinese colleagues have to deal with a Chinese journal national database giant, called CNKI (Chinese National Knowledge Infrastructure). This database, with a monopolist position, has met criticism both for charging high subscription fees and infringing intellectual property rights. The latter is of particular concern for Chinese scholars, who at a time when they become more dependent on digital publishing face difficulties in protecting their academic autonomy as well as their intellectual copyright. In addition, He points out that the strong market power of CNKI has hurt domestic academic justice. It has been deleterious for the development of Chinese academic journals as well as the international transmission of Chinese scholarship. In view of the negative features of the CNKI, at the end of the article the author discusses possible alternatives at a time of digital opportunities in order to develop a new academic ecosystem locally as well as globally. He points to the dependence, in the future of Chinese scholarship, on both the progress of Chinese journals and databases as well as the international academic journals in a world shifting to open access and publication fees. He envisages both cooperation and competition between Chinese and international databases, as Chinese scholars increase their publishing in international academic journals.

In the final article on non-European experiences, Abel L. Packer reports on the open-science programme SciELO Brazil collection. It has been in operation for 25 years and, as of 2023, has brought together more than 320 open-access journals from different disciplines and thematic areas, with a cumulative repository of 490,000

documents. In order to overcome the phenomenon ‘lost science in the third world’, it has raised the minimum indexing criteria regarding the share of articles in English or Spanish. As a result, since 2016 more than 50% of all journals in the collection have been published in English. This is particularly the case in Life Sciences and Physical Sciences, while Social Sciences and Humanities exhibit a lower figure, 40%. At the same time, the number of accesses per document for all disciplinary areas is higher for publications in Portuguese than for those in English. The article therefore demonstrates the importance of platforms such as SciELO Brazil for multilingualism by facilitating opportunities for diffusion of research results in languages other than English. Nevertheless, it is clear that publications in English have a higher chance of being cited, which is manifested by a high correlation between the share of publications in English and citations.

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### About the Author

**Lars Engwall** is professor emeritus of Management at Uppsala University, Sweden. His research has been particularly directed towards organization studies. Among his publications in the last decade can be mentioned *Bibliometrics* (2014, ed. with Wim Blockmans and Denis Weaire, Portland Press), *From Books to MOOCs?* (2016, ed. with Erik De Corte and Ulrich Teichler, Portland Press), *Defining Management* (2016, with Matthias Kipping and Behlül Üsdiken, Routledge), *Corporate Governance in Action* (ed. 2018, Routledge), *Missions of Universities* (ed. 2020, Springer), *Internationalization in Higher Education and Research* (ed. 2024, Springer). He has received honorary degrees from Åbo Akademi University and Stockholm School of Economics, and he is an elected member of a number of learned societies.