

First European Symposium of Social Science & Humanities Journals

Brussels 22 & 23 November 2021

Online Mondays 4-6.30pm from 21 Feb. to 21 March 2022

<https://eu-ssh-journals.sciencesconf.org>



First European Symposium of Social Science & Humanities Journals – Closing remarks

Sandra Guignonis & Pierre Mounier, 23 November 2021

Sandra Guignonis

So thank you first for the invitation, thank you to the organisers, and thank you also to all the panellists. I think they proposed each very high-quality interventions and they gave us comprehensive insight on the issues at stake for journalists in the social sciences and humanities. So I think it was very thought-provoking and I am a bit nervous now, so I will try a brief synthesis of what I understood from the different interventions.

It seems to me that these interventions embraced the different aspects of what makes a journal in the social sciences and humanities and also what journals make to science. In terms of what is needed to make a scientific journal, what is the language of science? What are the translation practices? Why is there a need for multilingualism? What are the perspectives on this aspect?

And also we had the opportunity to question how we may access science via journals. How do we access science via the digital platforms? How is open access interesting to access science?

Joachim Schöpfel yesterday gave us a functional approach to open science. And also we could question the role of journals. We didn't really question it, it was obvious that the role of journals remains most important in the scholarly acknowledgment, in the career path of academics. We could discuss the role of peer reviewing and the circulation of knowledge. The role of peer reviewing being also questioned under the aspect of helping co-build science or building a better science, because the role of journals remains undisputed about sharing science amongst peers.

We could also discuss the role of a community-driven ecosystem to sustain a more equitable journal publishing system and the role of community was really stressed as the very important factor in this more inclusive approach to science. And last but not least we could also discuss the way of economics and dynamics of powers that are really

underlined in these problematics that we could discuss. I will go back to these aspects in my own thoughts.

Underlining the different interventions I was thinking of aspects that maybe were discussed, but maybe not in such an explicit way, so I would like to go back to this for my own thoughts.

So we discussed open science and we discussed open access. Open science, realised today on the digital means that allows for the existence of open science. Journals are disseminated on digital platforms. And it has a cost and it is also an invisible labour. Maybe it's important for me because I work just in digital infrastructure and digital platforms. To go back to that, I would like to say that in digital science, digital platforms, that allow for dissemination of research, that allows for journals to exist, that allows journals and articles to reach peers, to reach a broader audience that we don't know in the worldwide web. It was a promise of utopia but it's also a real goldmine and the main actors in digital publishing understood that it has a cost and it can be a huge cost and it's not taken so much into consideration. We did not hear this issue addressed as such in these two days of interventions.

And also it has an economic cost and I think there is another aspect which is important. It has also standards. And it has an effect on how we will make science. Because, today, if as scholars you think it's great to for example create a new journal such as *Symbolic Goods*, it's probably because you had somehow an itch that you had to scratch. Because it was not there and you needed this journal and this approach, this scientific approach to exist, you needed to be this team to address this approach, and to organise yourself and you mentioned, yesterday, Severine, in your introduction, that you were eager to understand what you have to do to create this journal.

What you know as scholars is how to write a paper in the social sciences and humanities and you question what should be the language for your research. But if the form of the articles was built by scholars, for scholars, for sharing research, the way it has to be formatted today depends highly on how research will be disseminated via digital infrastructure and I think it's not – it's important to address this question.

And also it's important because we talked about, well, the dynamics of power. And these are political and ideological questions, as Carli mentioned this morning – I agree. And also, it is dynamics of dominance and it induces a hierarchy. We didn't mention it as such, but there is a hierarchy between STEM and the social sciences and humanities. And there is a hierarchy in languages. Of course English is dominant in the Western world. We didn't even mention a continent that is a main continent of power today, which is Asia. There is a huge amount of research produced in Mandarin and that I think no-one amongst us knows of.

And also in the way to disseminate and in the dynamics of power, again, there is open science and there is the digital path to open science but I would like to remind that there is open access and there is gold to dig in gold open access.

And that will be all from me, and I will leave it to Pierre for the final conclusion.

Pierre Mounier

At least it will be just final remarks for myself. So thank you very much Sandra and I just want first to join my thanks and congratulations to the organisers and the panellists of this symposium for these really thought-provoking discussions that we had the opportunity – we were really lucky to listen to all of you during those two days.

What I have to say as a matter of, let's say, concluding remarks from my side, is quite, is really close to what you just said Sandra, and we didn't, it's not a plot, we didn't discuss about it previously but it's really, quite similar ideas but maybe said with my own words, that will maybe shed some light on other aspects.

So the main topic of this symposium is about SSH journals but what is striking for me, what has been really striking for me in the various presentations we listened to during the two days, is that they told us more in my opinion, more about, let's say, the environment of the journals, the ecosystem in which they sit during their life I would say, than to the journals as such as an isolated item. So we will discuss, in fact we discussed about everything that is around journals as well as the journals themselves, so that's interesting.

For example, Gisèle Sapiro, I just remember one very important, interesting thing in Gisèle Sapiro's presentation – she made a relationship between the variation of scope of the journal and the variation of scope of the learned societies, so there was this relationship between nationalisation or internationalisation of learned societies that has let's say a consequence on the scope of the journals themselves. So it means that the journals are really linked the institutions and in this case to the learned societies of course.

Joachim Schöpfel, he made for us, he gave us the big picture of the dynamics of the publishing industry, with different dimensions such as the economical one of course, which is around the journals which has a consequence on the life and the situation of the journals.

Vanessa Proudman, for example, she insisted on the technical infrastructures and services on which the journals depend and that is also a common point of my remarks with yours Sandra, it's not by chance of course.

So Carli Coetzee, you did a very, it's really interesting the way she made visible the invisible work of researchers inside the journals but what I found very interesting is that there is this approach of researchers under specific profiles, or under a specific role. So it's not the researchers we used to consider researchers as let's say, researchers doing field work and doing their analysis, but researchers as editors and researchers as reviewers under different roles. So it tries also, a kind of revelation of this invisible labour inside the journals.

Björn Hammarfelt, made the link with the evaluation system around the journals and how the journals and the evaluation systems interact with each other which also put in light, or shed some light, on the research managers which is a different type of stakeholder, so those people who manage the evaluation system at institutional or national or international level.

And Delfim of course made this very important relationship between the journals and the languages and cultures.

So you see the journal is not an isolated item once again. It's something which is highly in a relationship with a lot of different stakeholders around and inside the journal, and a lot of different dimensions. So some people consider the journal not only as a dissemination means or technology but primarily as a club or as a community. So what is a journal? Some people or some researchers say and have published on that, saying first and foremost a journal is a community, it's a meeting point where you have different stakeholders coming together discussing together and working and collaborating together to produce knowledge, assess knowledge and disseminate knowledge.

So my first remark, one of my remarks would be to say that together the network you want to gather because I understood from your introduction, that was your main, one of your objectives, to set up this network of SSH journals, I think that one of the lessons we can keep from the different presentations is that it's necessary to include in that network, the various roles and stakeholders which participate in fact to the fate of the journals, and participate to the building of the journals.

So people who are involved in evaluation, people who are involved in technical infrastructures and technical services, people who are involved in cultural diversity, research managers as well, and all different types of stakeholders, I think it's really important.

So if we try to reflect from that about what is a journal, so we said that it's a community but it appears from the presentations we heard that a journal is also a highly complex web of interactions and interdependency. And for my part I always, that's what I'm interested in in journals, it's because I always consider journals as like the central nervous system of the world's research in fact.

Because this is a meeting point where all, not all but most, of the stakeholders, they meet, they work together, so it's like a central nervous system for the research itself and for knowledge production itself, particularly in the SSH.

So it's not by chance that we find different stakeholders participating to the building, the construction of those journals, and for me this is the reason why journal is not dead. Contrary to what many people, journal is not dead because this is an essential and a crucial meeting point for all the knowledge producers, the knowledge workers in fact, collaborating to produce knowledge.

And this is, maybe, I'm going to be a bit more controversial saying that for me, you know, there are some other points, some other fora, agora, meeting points where the stakeholders participating to the knowledge production meet and work together, and those other meeting points are institutions. Universities, research performing organisations... and that's where I'm going to be controversial, saying that for me, institutions are a little bit less interesting than journals because what institutions manage, basically, and Björn said that to us, is the access to resources in fact, so that's their primary function I would say, to make arrangements, and to select also those who are able to access resources, human resources, buildings, electricity, network and so on, documentation and so on. And for me the journals are meeting points as institutions but

really more focused on content itself, on research, on what we are working on, the topics themselves.

So it's quite a paradox to see that after the second world war, the research institutions, scholarly societies and universities and so on, they outsourced to commercial companies the production of the journals, which is, if we agree that the journals are a central meeting point for the research itself, it's completely stupid to outsource them to commercial companies because this is a core function, you see. So here we have I think we have really a challenge and something to do which is for the scholarly community to take back control of the journals themselves because this is their meeting point, this is where, once again, researchers as knowledge producers, can collaborate on producing knowledge together and having control over that. That's really important.

So my final conclusion from my perspective would be to say, it's really important to do what you want to do, so to set up this network, not to consider the journals as completely isolated from the wide array of different stakeholders participating to knowledge production, so to onboard, if it's possible, all the various stakeholders that participate to the journals' production, and should be at the table, sitting at the table, discussing with the researchers as well and to build alliances inside these networks to start changing a little bit the system.