

Publishing Strategies...

Open Access Publishing and the Challenges for Scientific Associations

From the first experiences in the early 1990s, Open Access (OA) has experienced an extraordinary increase, both in the number of journals published and in the total article output. This development is shifting the background of scientific publishing and opening up new ways of sharing scientific knowledge. Following the OpenAire definition, OA “is the immediate, online, free availability of research outputs without restrictions on use commonly imposed by publisher copyright agreements. Open Access includes the outputs that scholars normally give away for free for publication; it includes peer-reviewed journal articles, conference papers and datasets of various kinds”. My arguments on the benefits and challenges of OA will be mostly based on reflections developed within the framework of the Portuguese Association of Sociology (APS). I will especially argue for OA, as an opportunity to promote language diversity and cross-cultural exchanges among sociologists, as a way to accomplish more rewarding forms of research networking and encourage international scientific collaboration.

Whether at a national or international level, scientific associations assume a crucial role in the mediation between scientific communities and society. International scientific associations are best positioned to inspire the process of knowledge production and dissemination, and stimulate contrapositions to economically and culturally dominant phenomena. First of all, scientific associations are the place for the creation of networks of teachers and researchers who bring together specific skills capable of forming strong critical masses. Because scientific work implies, precisely, the exercise of systematic confrontation of different views, international scientific associations may stand as an “antidote” against species of dogmatism and fundamentalism. Again, and especially in the field of social sciences, international associations are more prepared to act in all matters connected with the hegemony of cultures and languages. Finally, international scientific social science associations are in a position to help global governance, by enabling serious and empirically grounded analyses reach public debate and contribute to the understanding of

and reflection upon different dimensions of globalisation (Martinelli 2003, 2006).

In short, international scientific associations are best placed to provide the institutional conditions for establishing transnational links and to innovate ways of doing it. These include major congresses, the creation of thematic research committees/networks, a whole range of discussion forums, internet platforms, not to mention (given its great importance in the process) the publication of high-impact international journals. In 2006, the Journal Citation Report (ISI) checked 93 journals in sociology, of which 22% depended on international, regional or national associations. More significant is the fact that six of the top 10 journals (the top 10 specifically sociological journals) belonged to American or British associations (Platt, 2010, 111).

It is well-known that the diversity of scientific languages has decreased with the dominance of the English; well-known is also the fact that this discourages many scientific communities from participating on international circuits. Among other aspects, the thematic and linguistic dominance determined by high-impact international journals is accompanied by the invisibility of research produced in local contexts. This invisibility is much greater if the research is conducted in languages of minor impact and when it concerns countries less represented in the bibliographic databases.

By these obvious remarks, I do not wish to put into question the advantage of using English in international academic practices. It is understandable that the English language imposes itself when, for example, sociological work refers to global comparisons. But what can be said when the work is concerned with comparisons at the regional level? Will it be possible to escape this logic of linguistic monoliths when it comes to thinking about and comparing societies having geographic, cultural and linguistic continuities, as is the case for example in Southern Europe?

Given the fact that as cultural domination (associated with and reinforced by economic and political domination) becomes evident, new forms of seeing language are needed. As indispensable tools for global dialogue, languages can also be an element of gathering and resisting hegemonic tendencies, a condition that is also essential for effective, inclusive and open dialogue on the diversity of interpretative repertoires.

Several approaches to the articulation/compatibility of linguistic diversity can be noted. Summary examples: English is typically used in thematic networks at, for example, ISA or ESA. In regional networks, other working languages are possible, for example, the Network of Sociological Associations of Southern Europe (ReSu) and the Regional Research Network on Southern European Societies (RN27/ESA) organize their working sessions in the perspective of linguistic diversity, having English and Latin as their working languages.

As we see it from the experience of APS there are opportunities to improve the visibility of sociological work and its plurality, and OA journals may provide an excellent instrument to expand sociological dialogue within Europe and worldwide. The Portuguese journals who adopted an open access policy have achieved an extraordinary increase in readers, especially from Latin America, a region where OA models

have been extremely positive and where a sample of good practices on regional collaboration have been identified in the search to find alternatives to the dominant for profit press (Alperin, Babini, and Fischman, 2014).

Given the concept and technical features of an OA journal, within ESA's structure, a full OA journal could allow for more rewarding engagement and the participation of National Associations and RNs, calling them to lead discussions on special subjects of multilateral public interest, and giving voice to the diversity of European sociology by adopting multi-language policy.

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Ana Romão
Past President of the Portuguese
Sociological Association (2012-2016)

Open Access, Democratization and the Periphery

Practices of academic and general intellectual knowledge production and dissemination have always operated in complex relations to associations, markets, networks, technologies, media, public organisations, and associated institutionalised material resources and cultures. It is common knowledge that the advent of digitisation as a production and diffusion medium has had a profound impact on these practices in ways that are still unfolding. A pivotal aspect of this impact is the manner in which it has re-energized moral-normative debates concerning the conditions of access to knowledge, raising a variety of issues, but emphasising critique of what is perceived as the existing state of publisher domination.

I would like to introduce a few considerations regarding a specific aspect of the politics of knowledge in the above sense, the differential conditions of production, dissemination, and access that separates the core and periphery. In the first instance, I am thinking of this issue

with respect to Europe, but the implications are clearly wider. My concentration is on Europe because it is the place where most of my direct experience of the issue has been gained, but also because I want to direct a few remarks to the possible role in this matter of the European Sociological Association (ESA).

For present purposes, when the terms 'core' and 'periphery' are used below, they are used rather loosely and, indeed, my illustrative case, Ireland, is really better addressed though the category of semi-periphery rather than periphery. I count Ireland as on the semi-periphery in the relevant respect for the following reasons: Firstly, access to academic books is relatively restricted, as, on the whole, library budgets are rather small and cannot ensure comprehensive coverage; secondly, with regard to article access, there has been a type of inverse movement between the disadvantage of rising prices of journals, on one side, and the greater availability of institutionally pooled digital database access on the other; thirdly, the national sociology association is small, has little or no publishing influence beyond its own journal, and does not play a significant role in opening up international networks; and, finally, for various reasons,