

Evaluation of Books: Introduction

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ABSTRACT

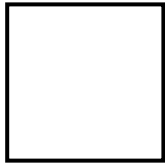
Evaluation of Social Sciences and Humanities in Europe. Hcéres Colloquium Proceedings - Paris IAS, 16-17 May 2022. Session 1

Context

Books and outputs related to books (book chapters, reports etc.) are an important part of the humanities. As reported in the previous session, therefore, books need to play a role in evaluation. The goal of evaluation is to provide meaningful results. This opens the next question: how, and for what? There are two reasons: First, evaluation is a time-consuming activity (if it is done properly, one could benefit from taking into account the evaluation used during the process). Second, it is a complex exercise and studying how books are evaluated by those who publish them is of experience in evaluating books.

So, by reflecting on how books are evaluated today and in the past, in different roles of the book in scientific communication, what are ways how a book is created and how are peers reading and assessing those books. We might also identify different strands of works into a coherent bigger picture, books to present the state of the art, books for career advancement, books for teaching, etc.

Obviously, like academic publishing and research in general, book publishing is a hot topic as well as Open Access. Somehow, it seems that there is no link between books, but still these themes are often discussed together. Generally, it seems that the evaluation of books (and the evaluation of research) is not scrutinised enough. While there is bibliometric research or (Giménez-Torres, 2018; Gorraiz et al., 2013), other aspects of the links between books and evaluation are not put forward that seem to me of need for conceptual scrutiny: On the one hand, the view of publishers' prestige, thus committing the same errors as focusing on Impact Factor, the confounding of Open Access, digitalisation, and prestige when discussing the trade-offs. On the other hand, little attention is paid to actual commercial aspects of publishing, including the demand of books by the general population or by professionals (Giménez-Torres, 2018). The conceptual scrutiny on what Open Access means and how it can be achieved, the trade-offs between making a lot of money with scholarly publishing vs. all scientific output mu



However, it is worthwhile discussing whether it would be more advantageous to
Such a discussion will also have to include reflections on the turn from “pay to

Publishers’ Prestige

Scholars publish books to present the outcomes of their research. Most often, projects and complex issues investigated from various perspectives. In many shows that the author(s) have spent considerable time and effort on the subject. advancement, which also works a little against the books as prestigious res (quasi)book. Still, books serve to prove that the author is an expert on the topic their thesis).

However, profiles of publishers and their reputation differ sometimes strongly [Mannana-Rodriguez & Giménez-Toledo, 2018](#)). Books can fulfil different roles; and non-academic books is sometimes difficult to make. Some publishers dissemination (e.g., communication of research results to the profession in local and focusing on specific topics in an academic discipline). Evaluations of the bo roles publishers fulfil in knowledge dissemination. The publishers’ prestige also book takes in the dissemination process. Therefore, assuming that the scrut reputation of the publisher seems a contested issue as reputation and evaluation knowledge generation and dissemination process. What strikes in the discussion prestige is perceived as a given (that actually also applies to journals but I think recent years due to the experience): a prestigious publisher is a prestigious p prestige takes time to build and is more stable than is functional, prestige is a r publishes bad books, the prestige will drop; consequently, if a new publisher ap become a prestigious publisher. Therefore, the discussion on OA and prestige se on something that will change according to practice, as a function of whether t regarding the role of books in evaluations, it is obvious that using the publishe for the exact same reasons as the Impact Factor: it is an ecological fallacy. Not a good; and certainly not all books published by less prestigious publishers are bac

Open Access and Digitalisation

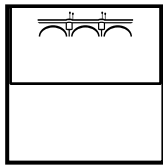
Another interesting point lacking scrutiny is the non-discrimination of Open A well happen without Open Access (and that’s a point that is indeed undisputed), Books can be made available to the public without digitalisation. Very obvious dramatically (open as well as closed access), furthermore, the change that con simultaneously other changes, like Open Access. But confounding the two transf of forms that Digitalisation and Open Access can take. If this discussion also inv

With regard to the SSH, it is interesting that Open Access seems to be conceptually clear. The argument is that research is publicly funded, so it should be available to everyone. The assumption that the product “book” is made without any price and that publishers are not available for free to anyone, anytime, it might also be considered that research should be available for a small fee. This would render visible that libraries are a form of Open Access. Making things available for free comes with paying for services the publishers provide. Prices governments are ready to pay for them are even less discussed. Digitalisation and Open Access is the idea to make research results accessible. Both processes are not mutually exclusive. It is to have clarity of what we are negotiating. Instead of thinking Open Access rather than digitalisation, think first about Digitalisation and what services are provided by whom, and then discuss the ways of making things accessible to the relevant audience can be discussed. In the context of book publishing through digitalisation, we can reconceptualise “Library” with digital libraries. This would open new ways of negotiation with publishers.

With regard to the evaluation of books, it seems that it is often perceived that digitalisation is important to acknowledge that Digitalisation and Open Access are not linked. Rather, books fulfil many different roles in knowledge production and distribution. There are different requirements regarding accessibility (both from perspective of digitalisation as well as from perspective of being printed, some books are clearly meant to be sold, some books are meant to be read physically). This also means that the manuscripts should be evaluated regarding their content. Open Access has become relevant and Digitalisation has become dominant, book publishing has become a business. Publishers have been taking advantage of the need of scholars to publish their research. Further evaluation. Regardless of Digitalisation and Open Access, it is relevant to think about book publishing.

Open Access and publishing

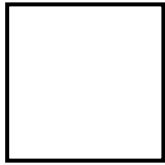
This reflection leads straight to the next point: Oftentimes, there is a dichotomy between the good (research results accessible for anyone anytime) and the bad (commercial publishers gaining ridiculous profits). The academic is put in front of those two options and needs to decide. However, these are not two extremes of a continuum. There are several ways of making scientific research results accessible. Open Access (Plan S) is not the only possible one, and not the first (Debat & Ochsner, 2022). It has been neglected. In several meetings on Open Access with EC representatives in which the Open Access agenda’s main goal was to regain the central role of Europe in research, the EC has come under pressure recently. More interestingly, the EC envisages to allow funding of research when it is needed in the context of Horizon Europe (e.g., for a special issue or a special project) which might be discriminatory. However, the funding is possible under the condition that the research aligns with the “European Values”. While we might agree on the relevance of some basic research, it raises several interesting issues: who controls? which values exactly? What if we have different research systems are organised across the world but cannot include contributions from



European values? If non-European researchers need the agreement of European relevant journals, this puts academic freedom quite into question and, ironically (and the European value “non-discrimination” as well).

Because an important focus lies on keeping Europe on top regarding visible research, the current agenda simply moves from a “pay to read” to a “pay to publish” model. The public saves money because the focus is not on the prices for specific services; the consumer of the content pays for the distribution ([Armstrong, 2021](#)). It is too easy to circumvent for researchers: a mail to the author was usually all it needed. “pay to publish” is much more difficult to circumvent. There is the idea of waiving Access publishers. But in many cases, they publish in “special issues” where, for example, relevant for the SSH because SSH scholars usually have smaller funds and special issues in Eastern Europe, and many colleagues from Eastern Europe might not be able to attend and are then excluded from the special issue, as I had to experience as an editor ([2021](#)). The aspect of political power and control of Plan S is discussed and seen ([Albornoz et al., 2018](#); [Debat & Babini, 2019](#)).

Another aspect that is not often discussed is that not all research necessarily is research results are presented in a specialised manner only intelligible to specialists to the non-academic audience. Publishing is not just making things available including editing, layout, making it available in print or on screen; but it also includes presentation etc. The importance of those aspects of publishing is not to be underestimated for scholars. The fact that a text is written and available does not mean that the text has to be put into context, presented, advertised etc. Not to forget audience-targeted presentation for the wider public must not be written in the same way as to specialist peers). Small changes in the way research is presented are especially relevant for SSH disciplines: some SSH research addresses the wider public, some is aware of the existence of new research, some address the wider public where the research is published in Open Access. The public is not interested in reading each research result, quite the opposite: they want to know if some scientific articles said A while others said B, so how can both be scientifically valid? This is confounded with dissemination to the wider public. This brings us back to the topic of Plan S: a lot of focus on availability of research instead of quality of research, quality of research. However, Open Access comes with changes as to how research is published and the publication process changes dramatically. It also changes incentives for authors and must be part of the policy making in Open Access and the focus on availability of research. This holistic idea of the changes the idea of Open Access brings. Finally, Open Access changes in how to evaluate. This interlink between Digitalisation, Open Access and evaluation beyond printed books equal no review versus Open Access books open the door to a new world: the opposite: printed books are prestigious, Open Access books are just pay for publication. The issues are complex, but the issues remain the same: dissemination changes with technology, evaluation aspects and services change when technology changes; evaluation needs to take societal needs into account. These are all distinct discussions and a clearer separation of the different options.



Conclusions

The evaluation of books undergoes radical changes, not only because the evaluation of more the book-oriented disciplines of the humanities ([Guillory, 2005](#), p. 34). With the advent of Digitalisation, Open Science and, specifically, Open Access impacts also how they are evaluated. In this short introduction, I have argued that the decision on who has to pay how much for research to be published. The scientific community's discussion on dissemination of research results to different audiences, the role of prices for specific services should be. The evaluation process of books must be re-evaluated.

The contributions in this session of the conference and its proceedings cannot provide specialist insights into some selected aspects, i.e. Open Access, reputation and opportunities, risks and limitations of Open Access in the humanities.

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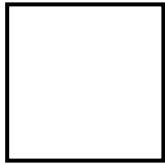
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