

Book industry, values and research evaluation

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ABSTRACT

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First of all, I would like to thank HCÉRES and all the people involved in the organization of the Colloque for inviting me to be here and for dedicating the colloque to central issues in ENRESSH research.

Evaluation of scholarly books must be understood as a complex task that encompasses both the questions linked to the particular book under evaluation-the theoretical or applied **contribution derived from research**, the content quality, the editorial process, the publisher- and the **publishing sector** that produce the set of academic books of a country.

The book industry in each country can have an important economic weight and even stand out among cultural industries. The characteristics of the publishing sector in each country must be the object of collective reflection and attention by public policies, not only because of what they represent in economic terms, but also because **the publishing infrastructures must be guarantors of**

bibliodiversity, plurality in research and multilingualism in scientific communication. That is why **it is essential** for the evaluation of books in the research assessment processes **to be aligned with book, linguistic and cultural policies.**

Because the evaluation of books should be holistic (that is, jointly considers all the aspects that concern the production of academic books) I have pretended to reflect the eight main points that I consider critical when facing the process. The evaluation of academic books is not trivial, it should not be a mere procedure or the product of a mechanical evaluation. It must entail:

- **Consider them as a valuable and prominent way of producing knowledge**, especially in the Humanities and in some Social Sciences. This communication pattern has been studied for a long time and it still in force: If we look at the scientific output of the Center for Human and Social Sciences (CSIC) we can see that book chapters, monographs and edited volume represent 51% of the total output.
- **Recognize the different genres of academic books**, their role and their audiences. Assess in context. Evaluation of the research activity at the individual level should consider original research books, documented essays or critical editions. Other research exercises should focus the attention on dissemination books or books oriented to a professional community, governments, associations, etc., that is, audiences that need the results of research very specifically oriented towards their activity (a function that is closely linked to the societal impact of science). The recent experience in Spain for evaluating knowledge transfer and societal impact at the individual level show us how these kind of books are a relevant part of the approved submissions, hence demonstrating their value in this sense.

Everything is derived from research, but the evaluation frameworks have to establish the proper weight of each type of contribution.

- **Know the academic contribution of each author, the knowledge that it generates**, the question that it raises or the social problem that it contributes to solve. That is a joint task made possible from the narratives of the authors and also by the experts evaluation.
- **Value the important role of the editor/publisher** who, together with the author, transform a text into a book. Remind us The Art of the Publisher, a wonderful essay on the contribution of an editor to a text.
- **Stay informed about the international scenario of academic publishing**

Our national books industries, which are usually made up of small and medium-sized publishing houses, are “competitors” of these huge publishers. Table I shows the list of biggest publishers –not only academic- according to their revenues (thousand millions of euros). Elsevier, Wolters Kluwer, Springer Nature, Wiley... are in the first places of the ranking. If we believe in plurality, multilingualism and societal impact we need to preserve the national industries, hence we need to know how are the competitors, which are their movements in the business, etc. We need also to pay attention to the national publishers, recognizing their value –when working in a professional way- although they are not in these privileged positions. They are playing a role that international imprints don’t play.

| The top 50 largest publishing companies worldwide, based on 2020 revenue data. | | | | | | | | |
|--|--|-----------------------|--------------------------------------|----------------------------|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|
| Rank 2021 (Data 2020) | Publishing Company (Group or Division) | Country Publ. Company | Parent Corporation or Owner | Country Mother Corporation | 2020 (Rev mEUR) | 2020 (Rev mUSD) | 2019 (Rev mEUR) | 2018 (Rev mEUR) |
| 1 | RELX Group (Reed Elsevier) | UK/NL/US | Reed Elsevier PLC & Reed Elsevier NV | UK/NL/US | € 4.797 | \$5.890 | € 5.025 | € 4.613 |
| 2 | Thomson Reuters | US | The Woodbridge Company Ltd. | Canada | € 4.178 | \$5.133 | € 4.705 | € 4.486 |
| 3 | Bertelsmann | Germany | Bertelsmann AG | Germany | € 4.103 | \$5.038 | € 3.969 | € 3.628 |
| 4 | Pearson | UK | Pearson PLC | UK | € 3.763 | \$4.620 | € 4.533 | € 4.583 |
| 5 | Wolters Kluwer | NL | Wolters Kluwer | NL | € 3.529 | \$4.334 | € 3.544 | € 3.284 |
| 6 | Hachette Livre | France | Lagardère | France | € 2.375 | \$2.917 | € 2.384 | € 2.252 |
| 7 | Springer Nature | Germany | SpringerNature | Germany | € 1.630 | \$2.002 | € 1.718 | € 1.658 |
| 8 | Wiley | US | Wiley | US | € 1.491 | \$1.832 | € 1.605 | € 1.570 |
| 9 | Phoenix Publishing and Media Company | China (PR) | Phoenix Publishing and Media Company | China (PR) | € 1.357 | \$1.667 | € 1.458 | € 1.393 |
| 10 | HarperCollins | US | News Corp. | US | € 1.356 | \$1.666 | € 1.564 | € 1.536 |

Table I. Global 50. The ranking of the publishing industry 2021

It is also important for institutions in charge of book, language or science policy to know about developments boosting visibility, prestige or metrics about publishers. They should know, for example, that being covered by DOAB or Dimensions implies certain support from public institutions to their national industries for promoting among the small and medium publishers the digital transformation or OA publishing programs.

- **Examine the effort made at the national and institutional level** for sustaining the academic book production and their relationship with the indicators.
- **Know the publishing infrastructure of a country and the main features of the academic publishing sector.** How many “academic” publishers are there? Are they university presses, commercial, institutional? In what subjects do they publish? What is their production volume? Are they small, medium or large? Do they have

the capacity to face great challenges such as digital transformation or the transition to open access?

Within the project *Cartography of the iberoamerican academic publishers* –supported by academic institutions, publishers associations and CERLALC (UNESCO center for the promotion of books in Latin America)- we have been able to identify the weight of scholarly publishing in each country, the largest producers of academic books in the region and the core of academic publishers. Without this information, research assessment agencies do not know nothing about their national publishing scenarios and they usually recognize only the most relevant international imprints. There should be studies on publishing sector at the national level which identify imprints, profiles, editorial practices, topics and language of publications. Behind these data is research oriented to different audiences. This is something than we can also see developing *Academic Book Publishers*, a project born in ENRESSH.

By doing so, it is possible to see how small and medium publishers are publishing academic books that would not be published by the big ones, on local subjects that will have a local impact and in vernacular languages that allow reaching close communities interested in the topics. Taking care of these infrastructures is protecting bibliodiversity, multilingualism and plurality. These are values that should be promoted from public policies.

- Ensure quality in academic publishing, promoting transparency, quality contrast by experts (peer review or alternative systems) and boosting projects such us quality labels for books and book series, certification services like PRISM, studies on publishers prestige like SPI or Academic Book Publishers