

STARTING AN OPEN ACCESS JOURNAL IN ICELAND

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The *Bifröst Journal of Social Science / Tímarit um félagsvísindi* (bjss.bifrost.is) is now in its third year. While it is not the only open access scholarly journal in Iceland, it was the first one to use international open access software (OJS) and to be listed in the Directory of Open Access Journals (doaj.org). The most recent annual issue was 180 pages and included 9 articles. This article presents the history of the journal and summarizes lessons learned from the journal's first three years.

Subsidy model

The journal is entirely subsidized by Bifröst University. Bifröst University occupies a campus in the countryside 110 km north of Reykjavík and offers bachelor's and master's degrees in business, law, and the social sciences. Founded in 1918, Bifröst was in earlier decades a business college run by the cooperative movement in Iceland.

Paid editorship

During the journal's first year, it was run off one page on the school's web site, using the web site management system, with links to PDFs of the articles. The editor, a social science faculty member, was not paid specifically for work on the journal. A graphic designer was hired to lay out the articles at the end of the year, create a cover, and manage printing.

During the journal's second year, a 20% staff position (one day a week) was defined and a new editor hired. This had a positive effect, as it changed the editorial work from something that was done in off-hours, as one of the various pro bono duties of an academic staff member, to something with a defined amount of staff time.

The new editor brought in the Open Journal Systems (OJS) system. The university computer staff provided space on a Unix server, and the editor was able to handle the installation and administration himself. Most layout responsibilities were also shifted from an outside graphic designer to the editor. The editor, who is also a social science faculty member, has good amateur computer administration, word processing and desktop publishing skills; long experience of academic writing; and is a native English speaker with good Icelandic skills.

Articles are edited in OpenOffice (although Word or

InDesign could also be used). PDFs are created by printing to Adobe Distiller, as the OpenOffice PDF export engine is of inferior quality. Creating a style template for text, figures, and tables was key to making the layout more efficient. Doing layout in-house reduced costs significantly, and increased quality, as the previous graphic designer did not have experience with academic publishing. But a graphic designer was hired to create a cover for the printed version of the journal. However, the InDesign files for the cover are owned by the university, not the designer. That means they can be revised each year at a lower cost than if all work was outsourced to a designer.

Paid peer review

The editor and his supervisor made the decision to pay a small honorarium for peer review. This amounts to €90 if the review is completed within four weeks; else €60. While this is a token amount, the editor feels that this has had a positive effect on the speed and quality of reviewers' work, though it is hard to say for sure. However, the process of transferring these relatively small sums abroad to reviewers abroad can be cumbersome. As the journal's scope is broad, it is not always possible to rely on the same reviewers over and over again and much time and effort goes into finding appropriate reviewers.

Defining the scope

While the journal published many working papers in its first two years, the editor has tried to move towards having mostly peer-reviewed articles. The journal's policy is to publish only articles which have a connection to Iceland in some way. As the journal is subsidized by an Icelandic university which receives a mixture of tuition and public funds, the management sees the journal as serving the Icelandic scholarly community.

Printing costs

During the journal's first two years, a fixed number of copies of the journal (150-200) were printed, either entirely by offset or with a offset cover and digitally printed content. Copies were distributed free to authors and to Icelandic libraries. Leftover copies were stored at the university office. Printing costs were quite high – on the order of €15-20 per copy – and not all copies were used.

During the journal's third year, the editor analyzed the

costs of moving to a print-on-demand system. It looked as if sending printing abroad, to one of the major print-on-demand portals such as lulu.com, could reduce printing costs by at least 50% without any reduction in quality. Although that means printing the cover of the journal digitally rather than by offset, the quality difference is negligible. On-demand printing appears to offer better text print quality, binding quality, and cover paper quality than traditional printing. This savings stands up to the cost of shipping printed books from England and of paying Icelandic VAT and customs processing costs on their arrival in Iceland. Much other quality printing in Iceland is now done abroad, so the journal is not an exceptional case.

One of the major pluses of print-on-demand is the ability to print a smaller number of copies. The plan for the future is to limit the print run to about 60, just those necessary for distribution to libraries and authors. A link from the journal website to the Bifröst “store” at a website like lulu.com allows anyone, anywhere, to order a nicely printed and bound version of each year’s journal for about € plus shipping costs, at no cost in labor to the journal’s management. But as the same information is available in PDF form for free, most readers will probably choose to download single articles and print them out at home.

Citation formats

In the past, scholarly journals have typically required a particular citation format. These formats have been important components of journal identity and in particular, compliance with them has been a notable component of the social control exercised by the journal publishing process. During the journal’s first year, the APA style was required, but it soon became obvious that the three main academic fields at Bifröst have differing citation traditions, and that since articles are most often read individually, little attention is paid to whether a given journal issue has a consistent citation style. Therefore the decision was made to permit authors to use any citation style they feel is appropriate. However, authors are required to be consistent, to use care in allowing readers to trace the sources of what they say, and to follow commonly accepted bibliographic conventions.



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Cultural attitudes towards open access

Especially within the library community in Iceland, there is a very positive attitude towards open access in Iceland and considerable awareness of the movement. Open access provides many benefits to users in remote communities, where small institutions do not have the ability to pay high subscription costs, and it also opens up new and more flexible publishing outlets for Icelandic scholars. Outside the library community, though, much work remains to be done in explaining the benefits of open access to scholars and university administrators. Within Iceland, Bifröst is a leader in encouraging open access publication, as Bifröst faculty who publish articles in the *Bifröst Journal of Social Science* receive bonuses from the university.

There are a few other Icelandic open access journals, notably *Stjórnmal og stjórnsýsla*, published by the association of Icelandic political scientists on a custom-designed Mambo platform. For the most part, though, scholarly publishing in Iceland proceeds under the old subscription-based models and articles have little visibility in search engines. The analytical complexity of the incentives involved in traditional and open access publishing is sufficiently great that many people in academia may not have time to fully grasp the nature of the changes underway.

The future

Growth in open access publishing in Iceland is highly likely. Open access periodicals can put information on the web more quickly and at a lower cost than traditional journals. The fundamental value added by a journal is that it identifies good work (saving users time spent judging and evaluating), provides a stamp of approval for good work through the review process (thus giving authors the means to be heard), assists with formatting and editing, and provides a way to store scholarship so that it can live on into the future. Old-style periodicals which rely on the distribution of printed copies provide this same value, but incur the extra costs associated with managing subscriptions and printing. The *Bifröst Journal of Social Science* is one of several journals to show that the open access model can deliver high-quality scholarship to the Icelandic academic community at a low cost to university budgets.