

## Open Access and Journal Publication in the Social Sciences and the Humanities

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Open Access opens up many new opportunities for communication among researchers and can help to make research and research findings visible and accessible, thereby enhancing the impact of the work in question. This applies not least at the national level, particularly with regard to doctoral dissertations, monographs, conference papers, journal articles, etc. What is needed are readily accessible high-profile channels of good quality, and the universities and members of the research community alike have a major responsibility in bringing these about. Reaching one's target readers is decisive. A failure to establish that crucial link means failure for the entire endeavour; there can be no research communication, further accumulation of knowledge or broader collaboration without interested readers and users. Open Access can already point to many positive achievements — *DOAJ*, *Directory of Open Access Journals*, for example — that have opened doors and windows.

Open Access can also help to spread Swedish research in the international arena. But making research and research findings available is not enough. Again, the crucial link is scholars abroad who take note and make use of the work. There lies the proof of its merit. The quality of scholarship is validated when scholars

operating in other, foreign arenas value it as a positive contribution.

## Visibility in the international research community

We confront a question there is no getting past: How can Swedish researchers in the Humanities and Social Sciences initiate dialogues on the international scene? How can a little country with a language spoken by only nine to ten million people gain recognition? Sources of research funding in Sweden today stress the importance of publishing in “reputable” international journals. As a medium, the journal is well-established, and it is difficult to envisage a replacement. Similarly, although the prevailing system of peer review may have its faults, we have yet to see a better alternative. It is important, however, that the research community strive to assert its interests and assume a greater measure of control over the journal market. That is to say, researchers must attain a greater measure of autonomy vis-à-vis journals than they have today. Secondly, they must work to ensure free access to articles via the web — through, for example, quality-assured open access titles. These two steps can render the market for scientific literature more accessible and augment the flow.

It is also important, however, to create new effective channels of communication that reach out into the world, to gain recognition as actors in the global scientific system. One way is to contribute to forceful and platform-like channels on the web through Open Access, channels that are mindful of maintaining high standards. Prerequisite to attaining this objective is participation in a specific discursive community of scholars. Membership in such a community affords familiarity with — and in time a command of — the conventions of various genres, such as the journal article. Both peer review and the mechanics of citation indices largely operate on the basis of shared discursive conventions.

Studies have found that Nordic research has attained quite some “visibility” in the *Social Science Citation Index*. Scandinavia and other small countries, e.g., The Netherlands, have been successful in “breaking” into the Anglo-American hegemony, whereas countries like Germany and France remain more or less excluded (Ingwersen 2000). Scandinavian scholars in the Social Sciences have assimilated the conventions of Anglo-American social science, for when we speak of international publication, we are talking about Anglo-American publication. The extent of “publication” differs quite widely, however, between disciplines.

Disciplines like Psychology and Political Economy have developed standards of scientific quality, which are reflected in the international flora of “quality journals”. The same applies to sectors of Political Science and Sociology, albeit relatively few Swedes in these fields are published in international journals. Estimations of

the standard of the work done in subjects like Social Work, Journalism, Gender Studies, Information Science, or Literary Studies vary widely — which is also reflected in the amount of work published in the respective fields.

Studies have found that the closer to the Humanities a given journal is, the greater the number of rejected articles. The chief factor behind this pattern is a relative lack of consensus regarding standards of scientific quality. A high proportion of rejections indicates a discrepancy between the editor's/reviewer's idea of scientific quality and that of the authors. Given that formulas for the journal article presume to reflect the conventions of the genre, it follows that texts that deviate from the model are lacking in one or another respect — e.g., badly written, poorly structured — in the eyes of one's "peers" (Swales 1986, White 2004).

In the Humanities, in many disciplines it is uncommon for researchers to take part in dialogues with members of other disciplines or colleagues in other countries. This is true of some disciplines in the Social Sciences, as well. In these areas, absence from the international scene may reflect absence from the national scholarly community, which, for that matter, is becoming more and more international in many respects. Swedish researchers have developed small discursive communities, which in turn have developed some parochial genre conventions that are not in alignment with the conventions of the international community.

### **Promoting research communication across frontiers**

These are issues that must be discussed in every research funding institution and post-graduate programme in the Humanities and Social Sciences if we are to see any improvement in the standard of our research in terms of quality, relevance and the interest it arouses among international publishers. Publishing through Open Access can facilitate the process. In the longer term Open Access may in fact have a tremendous potential to augment international research communication to the betterment of research.

One main reason why Scandinavian researchers come out rather well in citation studies like the above-mentioned is the Norwegian publishing house, Universitetsforlaget, which puts out numerous widely respected journals in the Humanities and Social Sciences (Ingwersen cf. 2000). A concerted effort to create new, or to develop existing journals and other fora into similarly well-reputed channels on the more fruitful Nordic or European level may improve the current situation and build bridges to the international research community. Such an effort requires considerable work, commitment, creativity and intensive networking — but it will be amply rewarded.

I know this from my twenty-five years as publisher of the journal, *Nordicom Review*, an outlet for media and communication research in the Nordic countries (Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway, and Sweden). The journal is published in hard copy, but is also available as an open access title on the web. Its aim is to make Nordic media research available to members of the international research community and to promote collaboration between Nordic researchers and colleagues all over the world. Some 1500 people and institutions outside the Nordic countries subscribe to *Nordicom Review* in hard copy. Distribution is the key factor here. Provided the quality of the contents is good, wide distribution leads to republication (possibly in translation) in other journals and anthologies, and representation in widely accessible open access portals and platforms on the web. Nordic researchers in the field of media and communication research have the benefit of a journal that reaches far out into the world — an independent channel that is part of the research community.

Collaboration between disciplines and collaboration across national frontiers, with the aim of enriching the research environment, is vital to the development of fruitful discursive communities. It is also important for research communities themselves to create platforms to achieve long-term goals through national, Nordic and European programmes and projects so as to make their voices heard in the international research community. Open Access can be an important tool toward this end.

But first, a process of what I would call “creative self-examination” is needed — in the Social Sciences and the Humanities alike. We need to take a good look at the relevance of the questions we formulate, we need to develop fruitful theoretical perspectives and to refine our sensibilities regarding choice of methods. We need to consider the ontological and epistemological assumptions embedded in the various methods at our disposal and, not least, we must honestly assess the validity of our findings and the conclusions they support. The outcome of this process will depend on our degree of involvement in discourses outside our institutions and closest circles; that is, on our participation in national, regional and global conferences and networks and international postgraduate exchanges between universities. The importance of networking cannot be overstated.

In this connection, we should be mindful of the importance of a command of English, the lingua franca of our times. We need to have a functional command of English, alongside our native languages in our scientific work. All the evidence suggests that multilingualism stimulates creativity, intellectual versatility and effective communication. I should stress that I mean we need to improve our command of both Swedish and English. Communication skills in these languages should be part of undergraduate and doctoral programmes alike.

## How good a measure is publication in international journals?

A separate, but important issue is what measuring stick should we use in assessing the quality of research in the Social Sciences and the Humanities. How fair a measure is publication? Does something go lost, if we concentrate too one-sidedly on international publication? Some quality titles tend toward ever narrower specialisation; some seem inordinately trend-sensitive. The question is, what kind of research will we end up with? Is there a danger of trend-conscious conformity — or of 'Balkanisation', a splintering of the field — as a result? What are the consequences of the fact that what we call 'international publication' today is in essence publication in the Anglo-American sphere? Would the quality of our work perhaps profit from closer contact with colleagues in other cultures close to us, such as the German and French? This, of course, presumes we have a working language of these languages, as well. German and French literature is largely excluded from *Social Science Citation Index*, but each country is big enough to have its own research traditions and conventions.

More and better communication between research communities is of crucial importance if we are to preserve the proper role of Science in an age when responsiveness to external sources of finance ('marketisation') and new objectives for higher education both urge change. Research tends to be more and more administrative, and short-term perspectives prevail — at the expense of the long-term accumulation of knowledge. Again, Open Access has a dual potential to help counteract the pressures toward conformity, and to broaden research horizons through better communication and more frequent exchanges of knowledge.

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## **Svensk sammanfattning**

Hur kan svenska forskare komma till tals i det internationella forskarsamhället? Hur kan ett litet land och ett litet språkområde göra sig gällande. Vad är kvalitet i forskningen inom samhällsvetenskap och humaniora? Inom detta område ryms allt från ämnen som har utvecklat vetenskapliga standards, som kan avläsas i s k kvalitetstidskrifter, medan synen på vad den vetenskapliga standarden är inom andra ämnen i stor utsträckning varierar, vilket avspeglas i tidskriftsfloran. Inom flera humanistiska ämnen är dessutom artikelpublicering mycket begränsad och genrekonventionerna delvis lokala och därmed inte konkurrenskraftiga i internationell mening. Dessa frågor måste diskuteras och föras in i varje forskarutbildning - även om Open Access ger nya och vidare möjlighet till publicering.

En annan central fråga i förlängningen är vilken måttstock som ska användas vid bedömning av samhällsvetenskap och humaniora. Hur rättvisande är internationell publicering som tongivande måttstock? Finns det en fara med att driva frågan om internationell publicering allt för enkelspårigt? Vissa kvalitetstidskrifter riskerar att bli mycket specialiserade och andra mycket trendkänsliga - frågan är då vilken forskning vi får - finns det risk för ensidighet och likriktning. Sådana följder kan bli Open Access-publicering rätt använd bidra till att motverka.