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Towards a typology of edited books and conference proceedings according to the applied peer-review procedures

Iva Melinščak Zlodi

Key objectives of the study and significance

- 1 The distinctiveness of scientific communication in the field of social sciences, and even more in the humanities, have been presented in detail in the existing literature, with regard to several key aspects: the language and format of publications, the frequency of collaboration in authorship, and the focus on non-scientific audiences. One of the aspects in which the literature in the field of Humanities and Social Sciences (HSS) is vastly different from science, biomedicine and technology is the large proportion of research results that are published in books and other types of publications, not exclusively journals. Such forms of publications are more difficult to evaluate because many indicators of impact, primarily those that rely on bibliometrics, are formulated so that they are most readily applicable to journal articles.
- 2 However, in the recent period, there is an increasing need to ensure a more objective and transparent evaluation of scientific research in the HSS. One of the possible solutions is to rely on standardized peer-review procedures. There are several reasons for such intentions (Kancewicz-Hoffman et al., 2019):
 - inadequacy of bibliometric and quantitative methods in the evaluation of research in SSH
 - the tendency of policymakers and funders to apply the same criteria to all areas of knowledge (and peer-review is perceived as the basic process immanent to all disciplines)
 - an attempt to give the new forms of publishing and communication that emerge within the open access movement the credibility of traditional forms.

- 3 Still, the peer-review process in HSS is not completely clear and unambiguous, even in journals (Pölönen et al., 2019), much less in other types of publications. The premise behind this research is that there are far greater variations in procedures of peer-reviewing edited books and conference proceedings than in other types of publications. Therefore, this research aims to gain insight into these variations, to identify the main aspects according to which publications can differ from each other and to distinguish between the most common types that occur in HSS with regards to peer-review procedures.

Design and Methodology

- 4 The research will cover a set of edited books and conferences proceedings in various disciplines within the humanities and social sciences (language and literature, archaeology, history, art history, philosophy, ethnology and anthropology, sociology, psychology, education, information and communication sciences), published with various presses, in different countries and languages; of which at least one editor is affiliated with the institution where the research will be conducted.
- 5 Sample of publications and respecting editors were chosen according to these aims:
- finding respondents who are easily identifiable and approachable (editors affiliated to one research institution)
 - since this is the exploratory research, there is no need for a sample to be strictly representative, but it would be desirable that various disciplines from HSS are represented, and that different international (European) examples are represented (conferences held at and books published in different geographical areas)
 - respondents have to be the ones best able to answer the questions concerning details of peer-review procedures (therefore authors of articles/chapters are not identified as appropriate, but editors are)
 - as discovering current practices was the aim, it was decided to include proceedings published during the last 5 years (2015-2019).
- 6 A set of publications was identified through a bibliography recording the scientific production of one European higher education and research institution. 146 publications were found to which editors were affiliated with that institution (81 edited scholarly books, 40 peer-reviewed international conference proceedings and 25 peer-reviewed national conference proceedings).
- 7 A questionnaire will be sent to the editors of the publications and their answers will help to determine:
- If and how is the publication related to the conference (not related to the conference, gathers papers resulting from the conference presentation and is published after the conference, gathers papers for the conference and is published before the conference)?
 - Were the papers collected through an open call, or were individual authors directly invited to participate by the editors?
 - What is peer-reviewed (abstracts before submitting full papers, complete manuscripts of articles, entire complete books)?
 - How many contributions were rejected based on the opinion of the reviewers?
 - How many reviewers participate in the process (one for each paper, two or more for each paper, one for the entire book, two or more for the entire book)?

- When is a review performed (before or after the conference, before or after completing the book)?
 - Institutional affiliation of reviewers (whether all or some reviewers are affiliated with the same institution as the authors and/or editors)?
 - Public status of the review (the review is single or double-blind, the reviewers are anonymous, or their identity is published¹, whether the reviews are open)?
 - What is the role of the editor concerning the review process (the editor determines the number of reviewers, the composition of the reviewers, the editor supervises the process, the editor gives the reviewers guidelines, the editor sends the author comments from the reviewers, the editor controls the compliance of the revised work with the recommendations of the reviewers)?
 - Editors-Reviewers Relationship (all reviewers are members of the editorial board, some reviewers are editorial board members, editors may not be reviewers)?
- 8 The results of the questionnaire will make it possible to identify some main types of edited books and conference proceedings according to their peer-review procedures. It will also be possible to see (within the chosen sample) whether some types are more prevalent in some disciplines, and in national as opposed to international publications.

An overview of the state of the art in the field

- 9 In some scientific communities, especially in a considerable number of European countries, where the performance-based research organizations funding is implemented according to the so-called Norwegian model (Giménez-Toledo et al., 2019; Sivertson, 2019), there is a clear need, when evaluating scientific contributions within the social sciences and humanities, to rely on the characteristic of publications that undoubtedly indicate their scientific character: an independent external pre-publication peer-review. For books (in which the review process is not as standardized as journals, but at the same time they represent a significant proportion of the scientific literature in the HSS), the benefits of assigning peer-review labels (Verleysen & Engels, 2013) or using existing 'open-identity labels' (disclosed reviewers' identities) (Kulczycki et al., 2019) are often considered. There is a considerable effort in establishing the reliability of such systems, but also in acknowledging ambiguity in identification of peer-reviewed publication (Pölönen et al., 2019), going on within the framework of the COST action 'European Network for Research Evaluation in the Social Sciences and Humanities' (ENRESSH, enressh.eu). However, these efforts have until now been primarily directed towards monographs, and far less towards edited books and conference proceedings.
- 10 Similar efforts have been evident within the OPERAS framework, especially within the HIRMEOS project, where the elaborate system of peer-review certification (Ferberda, 2019) has been recently developed for the Directory of Open Access Books (DOAB, doabooks.org), motivated by the need to ensure the credibility and reliability of open access resources. Again, this system of certification is primarily intended for monograph publishers, and less for edited books or conference proceedings.

Outcomes

- 11 The results of this research could contribute to the possibility to identify and describe distinctive types of edited books and conference proceedings according to their peer-

review procedures, and thus to facilitate the recognition of their scholarly value and reliability, despite their underrepresentation in the citation and bibliographic databases and consequent difficulties in establishing bibliometric indicators of impact in the scientific community.

- 12 Such description and labelling can play an important role in two contexts: the context of evaluating scholarly contributions and the context of building trust and reliability in new open access publications.

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NOTES

1. As this is the common practice in Central and Eastern European countries, (cf. Kulczycki et al., 2019).

ABSTRACTS

In the last years there is an increasing need to ensure a more objective and transparent evaluation of scientific research in the Humanities and Social Sciences. This short paper explores some of the underlying issues and suggests a study using the survey method based on a sample of 146 publications. The results of this study could contribute to the identification and describing distinctive types of edited books and conference proceedings according to their peer-review procedures, and thus to facilitate the recognition of their scholarly value and reliability.

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