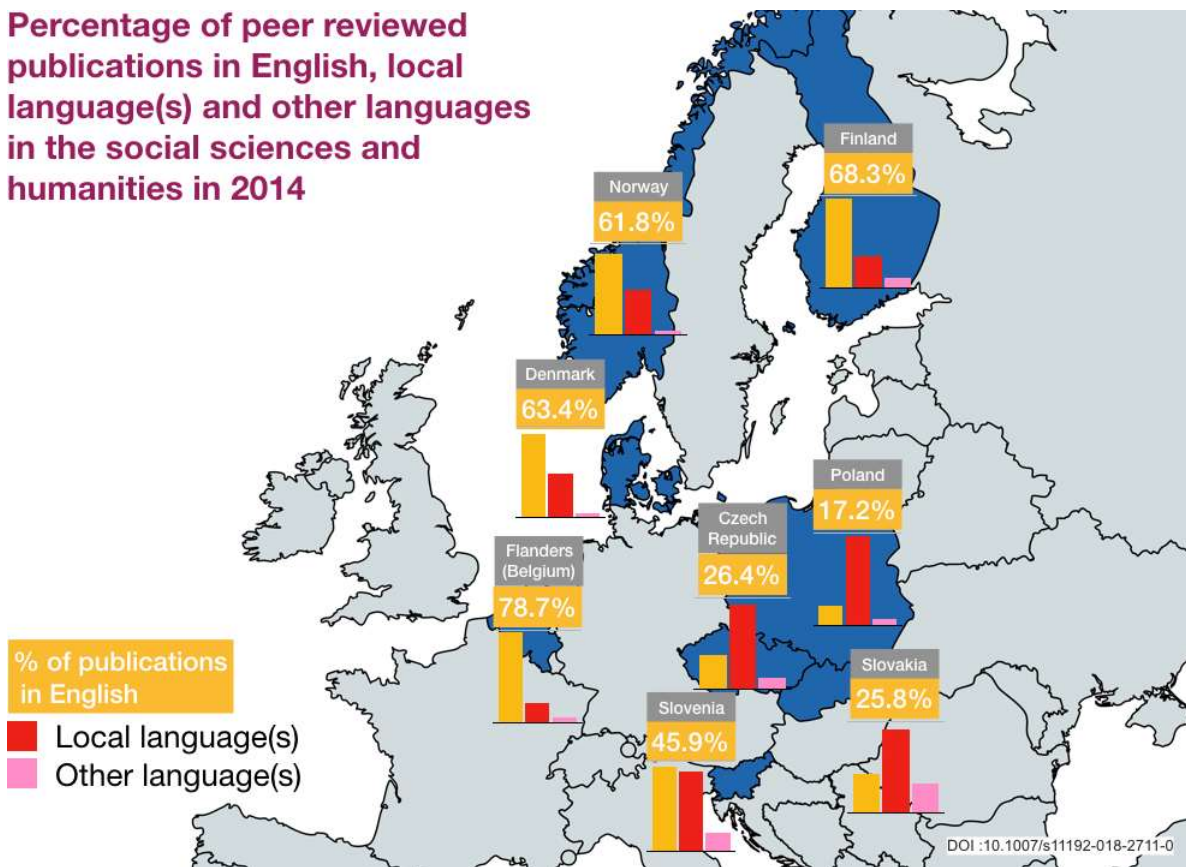


Balanced multilingualism in scholarly communication

Percentage of peer reviewed publications in English, local language(s) and other languages in the social sciences and humanities in 2014



Multilingualism in scholarly communication is needed, on one hand, to govern strategies for internationalization and research excellence, and on the other hand, for strategic increases in societal relevance and participation.¹ Balanced multilingualism means giving consideration to a variety of communication purposes related to different areas of research; therefore all languages are needed to fulfil these purposes, in a holistic manner without exclusions or priorities. Policy-makers, leaders, universities, research institutions, research funders, libraries, and researchers are invited to sign the Helsinki Initiative to promote multilingualism in scholarly communication (www.helsinki-initiative.org).

¹ This text is based on Sivertsen, G. (2018) 'Balanced multilingualism in science', *BiD: textos universitaris de biblioteconomia i documentació*, 40, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1344/BiD2018.40.25>; and Kulczycki, E., Engels, T.C.E., Pölonen, J. et al. (2018), 'Publication patterns in the social sciences and humanities: evidence from eight European countries', *Scientometrics*, 116: 463, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11192-018-2711-0>. This text is distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons CC BY license, which permits unrestricted use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original works are properly cited.



Multilingualism is the international way of communicating science

Research policy, evaluation and funding systems need to balance international excellence with the local relevance of research. English has increasingly become the international language of science, even in various fields across the social sciences and humanities. Other languages, which have had this role before, seem to be losing ground in international communication. Moreover, science needs to be communicated to various members of society, thus when at work, it is always prioritized, funded, organized, performed, communicated, interpreted, applied, and taught in certain societal and cultural contexts. Different languages are spoken and written in these contexts.

The role of language in scholarly communication can easily become invisible at an international level as countries come together to formulate and implement research policies. English as a shared international language seems necessary to achieve the aims of exchanging knowledge, for example within the EU, where there is a single 'market' for knowledge, research and innovation, and for recognizing and supporting excellence across countries. These are legitimate concerns for public policy. Nevertheless, other policy goals are increasingly being prioritized at the European level as well. Responsible Research and Innovation (RRI) "implies that societal actors (researchers, citizens, policy makers, business, third sector organisations, etc.) work together during the whole research and innovation process in order to better align both the process and its outcomes with the values, needs and expectations of society." The aim of European Open Science agenda is to enable easier access to scientific results, which includes Citizen Science: the "ability of the public to understand science and engage with scientists." To fulfil these responsibilities towards society, science needs to be multilingual.

Research policy often emphasizes the importance of international competition between countries, institutions and researchers. Accordingly, evaluation and funding processes are likely to be influenced by mainstream research evaluation criteria, where procedures are in place for selecting and incentivising publishing in the most influential English language journals covered by the commercial citation indexes, notably Web of Science (WoS) and Scopus. Several bibliometric studies show that these databases present an impoverished picture of multilingualism in scholarly communication. Less value, if any, is given to multilingual and multimedia communication.

Countries differ considerably in terms of the languages used in scholarly communication. Yet, multilingualism plays an important role everywhere, especially in the social sciences and humanities (SSH). A recent study comparing publication patterns in eight European countries shows that Nordic and Western European countries produce a considerably higher share of English language peer-reviewed publications than Central and Eastern European countries, where the majority of publications are in national languages. This means that internationalization policies should not only be balanced with regard to societal responsibilities, but be designed also with due consideration for national context. In the Western and Northern European countries, research has potential to benefit society more if scientific/scholarly results were increasingly communicated in national languages, in addition to English. In Central and Eastern European countries, research has potential to transcend geographical boundaries if results are increasingly communicated to international experts, in addition to national audiences.



Call for recognizing the true value of multilingualism

It is up to the international and national research policy-makers, evaluation and funding systems to fully recognize the value of multilingualism in scholarly communication, in order to foster a greater balance between the demands of international excellence and the local relevance of research. The dissemination of research knowledge beyond academia constitutes an important pathway to societal impact in all fields. In the SSH, a great deal of original research is concerned with locally relevant topics, focused on a specific national language, heritage, culture and society. Research published in languages other than English can be international and meet standards of excellence. The value of national language publishing and societal interaction need to be recognized both in terms of metric-oriented and expert-based evaluation systems and funding procedures. This includes performance-based research funding systems, research assessments, research organizations' internal funding-models, hiring, promotion and funding decisions, as well as international and national project funding.

Sustaining a balanced approach to multilingualism requires a healthy infrastructure for national language publishing. The social and cultural context of national language journals is unique, and cannot easily be replaced with publication channels published in other countries, let alone international platforms. In addition to communicating research results to local audiences, national journals also support local research communities. Especially in smaller countries, the market for national language publishing is too small for commercial publishers to get involved. Therefore, national journals are often not-for-profit and published by research institutions or learned societies. They may not be able transition to an open access publishing model without losing income from subscriptions and membership fees. Their transition to open access needs adequate resources to maintain high standards of peer-review and research integrity in national language publishing. This transition also has to promote multilingualism, which in turn enables open science to fulfil its goal of providing equal access to researched knowledge.

Balanced multilingualism as research and policy strategy

Ultimately, research is international but multilingualism keeps locally relevant research alive and creates impact. International and national research policy and evaluation regimes need to support a greater balance between the demands of international excellence and the local relevance of research. Balanced multilingualism means giving consideration to a variety of communication purposes related to different areas of research; therefore all languages are needed to fulfil these purposes, in a holistic manner without exclusions or priorities. The struggle for recognition, promotion and support of local publication languages mostly takes place at national level but multilingualism in scholarly communication is an international concern.

All signatories of the Helsinki Initiative on Multilingualism in Scholarly Communication (www.helsinki-initiative.org) support the following recommendations, and recommend their adoption by policy-makers, leaders, universities, research institutions, research funders, libraries, and researchers:

1. Support dissemination of research results for the full benefit of the society.

- Make sure researchers are merited for disseminating research results beyond academia and for interacting with heritage, culture, and society.
- Make sure equal access to researched knowledge is provided in a variety of languages.



2. Protect national infrastructures for publishing locally relevant research.

- Make sure not-for-profit journals and book publishers have both sufficient resources and the support needed to maintain high standards of quality control and research integrity.
- Make sure national journals and book publishers are safeguarded in their transition to open access.

3. Promote language diversity in research assessment, evaluation, and funding systems.

- Make sure that in the process of expert-based evaluation, high quality research is valued regardless of the publishing language or publication channel.
- Make sure that when metrics-based systems are utilized, journal and book publications in all languages are adequately taken into account.

Helsinki Initiative on Multilingualism in Scholarly Communication has been prepared by the Federation of Finnish Learned Societies (TSV), the Committee for Public Information (TJNK), the Finnish Association for Scholarly Publishing, Universities Norway (UHR) and the COST Action "European Network for Research Evaluation in the Social Sciences and the Humanities" (ENRESSH).