

COST ACTION CA15137

MC meeting, Lisbon, 8-9 March 2018



Book evaluation

Peer review labels of book  
publications

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What motivates authors to opt for such a label? Discussion of a survey proposal

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# Some context

- In performance-based research funding systems (PRFSs) evidence of peer review is typically considered a minimum requirement of included publications. In research evaluation processes at different aggregation levels peer reviewed publications are considered an important element of information.
- Originating from the sciences, pre-publication peer review has become a widely accepted standard in publishing of new results, also in the social sciences and humanities (SSH).
- The notion of peer review remains challenging because of the variety of practices – from the editorial to the double-blind – across SSH fields, because of the differences in journal and book publishing, and because of cultural differences.
- Consequently, it is not always clear whether a publication channel applies peer review, or whether a specific article, chapter or book has gone through pre-publication peer review.

# Peer review of book publications (1)

- Particularly for book publications their peer review status is often be unclear
- In book publishing, the expected market for the book is crucial. From the publisher's perspective, this market potential is essential to assess and may be the all important argument in whether to publish or not.
- Publishers in Western European countries seldom make peer review of book publications, if it happened, explicit. In some Eastern European countries, however, the practice of mentioning the reviewer(s) in the colophon of a book is common.
- Series are common yet formally identified series (including ISSN, series editors and peer review procedure) are rare
- For anthologies, some fields have a strong tradition of intervision by colleagues that may resemble or outperform peer review in terms of rigor and effectiveness

# Peer review of book publications (2)

- For monographs and anthologies alike, review of the full content may be challenging to achieve (e.g. my own experience with Springer books).
- In some contexts, authors are required to state whether a book publication is peer reviewed. This leaves much room for subjectivity and may lead to over reporting and inconsistencies if left unchecked
- Yet the alternative of top-down identification of peer review of book publications may be even less appealing, as it necessitates decisions by the responsible authority for which insufficient information is available
- In sum, much of the current practices in making peer review explicit may be insufficient in a formal setting like a PRFS (e.g. in Flanders the relevant law states that peer review should always be independent from the authors and cannot be organized by authors themselves).

# Peer review labels

- As a partial response to this, peer review labels have been introduced in three countries:
  - In Flanders, since 2010, the Flemish Publisher Association has introduced the 'Guaranteed Peer Reviewed Content (GPRC) label. The label is applied to book publications only.
  - In Finland, the Federation of Finnish Learned Societies introduced the Label for Peer-Reviewed Publications in 2014. The label is applied to journal contributions and book publications alike.
  - In Spain, the CEA-APQ (Academic Publishing Quality) label was introduced in 2016. The label is applied at the level of book series, mainly from Spanish university presses.
- In the introduction of the survey, the working of the peer review label in each country will be elaborated

# Why do authors opt for such labels?

- Superficial answer: in order for their publications to be fully taken into account in evaluation processes and funding distribution
- Yet this is in all likelihood not the full answer as, e.g., formal recognition of peer review may not matter to all, peer review may be valuable to some whereas others see it as a burden
- In addition to quantitative data on the adoption of the labels, we are in search of more qualitative insights regarding the motivations for opting for a peer review label and regarding the perceived effects

# Who to address?

- All those that have published material that received a peer review label in Flanders, Finland and Spain, that is
  - Authors of monographs
  - Series editors
  - Editors of anthologies
  - Authors of book chapters
- Depending on the number of authors involved, a sample could be used
- Issue: how to address authors who have more than one labeled publication

# Possible questions (1)

- Why did you opt for a peer review label?
  - To proof that my work is scholarly; to advance my career; in view of inclusion in the PRFS; because the editor advised me; because my superior asked me to do so; ... (including 'other' field with possibility for explanation)
  - However, in Finland the publisher applies for the label, hence a rephrasing of the question is needed for FI, e.g. "To what extent did the fact that the publisher or book series uses the peer review label influence your selection of the publication channel?"
- How satisfied are you with the fact that your publication has the peer review content label?
  - Likert scale response
- Would you recommend colleagues to opt for a peer review label for their publications, resp. publish with a publisher or book series using the peer review label?
  - Likert scale response

# Possible questions (2)

- To what extent did the peer review process involved in obtaining the label improve the quality of your publication?
  - Likert scale response
- To what extent did the peer review label provide your publication with extra visibility within the academic context?
  - Likert scale response
- To what extent did the peer review label provide your publication with extra visibility outside academia?
  - Likert scale response

# Possible questions (3)

- To what extent did the introduction of a peer review label have positive effects on scholarly publication practices in your country?
  - Likert scale response, plus explanation in case of perceived positive effects
- To what extent did the introduction of a peer review label have unexpected or negative effects on scholarly publication practices in your country?
  - Likert scale response, plus explanation in case of perceived negative effects

# Possible questions (4)

- To what extent is the peer review label in your country effective in distinguishing peer reviewed content?
  - Likert scale response
  - Please list your suggestions for improved effectiveness
  
- To what extent is the peer review process underpinning the peer review label rigorous?
  - Likert scale response
  - Please list your suggestions for improving the rigor of the peer review process
  
- To what extent does the peer review label confer excellence upon your publication?
  - Likert scale response

# Possible questions (5)

- To what extent are you in support of setting up a peer review label at the international level?
  - Likert scale response
- In your opinion, are publishers well organized to set up the peer review process underpinning the peer review label?
  - Likert scale response
  - Please list your suggestions for improving the organization of the peer review process
- Please list here any further suggestions regarding this survey or regarding the peer review label in your country

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All suggestions welcome !

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