

COST ACTION CA15137

MC meeting, Lisbon, 8-9 March 2018



Working group 3
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Are book publications disappearing from
scholarly communication in the social
sciences and humanities?

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Introduction

- The purpose of this study is to analyse the evolution of the shares of scholarly book publications in the SSH in Flanders, Poland and Slovenia
- In the SSH book publishing takes a prominent role, both in terms of communicating with international peers and with a broader intelligentsia (Hicks, 2004; Verleysen & Engels, 2014)
- Several criticisms of scholarly book publishing have been voiced
 - Steven Harnad, for example, advised against book chapters already in 1986
 - In an overview of 2005, Chris Nederman warns that in academic evaluation contexts book chapters and edited volumes are hardly taken into account
 - Blaise Cronin, among others, points out however that in some humanities disciplines the publication of a monograph remains a requirement for obtaining tenure (in the US and Anglo-Saxon context); at the same time the immanent disappearance of the scholarly monograph has been predicted (Thompson, 2002)

What is the share of book publishing?

- For the Nordic countries a share of 4,9% of monographs and 29,5% of book chapters is reported (NordForsk, 2018)
- Edited volumes, however, are included in only a few systems (see Kulczycki et al, 2018, presented yesterday), making it difficult to study the evolution of the total share of scholarly book publishing, especially over longer time spans
- Engels et al (2012) reported stable shares for the humanities and a declining share for the social sciences, for the period 2000-2009, i.e. when book publications were not taken into account in the Flemish PRFS
- Kulczycki et al, 2018, shows considerable difference from country to country, with stable shares in some (including Flanders), potential declines in others (including Slovenia), and large fluctuations in others (especially Poland)

Factors that may influence book publishing

- Factors relating to publication processes
- Factors relating to the findability and visibility of publications
- Factors relating to academic evaluation contexts

Publication process

- May be slow when publishing in an edited volume (cf. Harnad, 1986)
- With e-publishing some volumes may produce contents as quasi-journals, yet most still have the traditional 'wait until everyone is ready' approach
- Book publishing may not be whole compatible with the 'be first' requirement in many fields. In humanities, however, this may be less important
- Self-publishing and printing on demand may stimulate book publishing

Findability and visibility of publications

- Physical entities are more difficult to get into your hands than electronic entities
- Book publications are under-indexed in international systems, especially in citation systems
- Citations of books are hard to trace, even in the most advanced 'open' systems like Google Scholar and Microsoft Academic

Academic evaluation contexts

- A requirement for publishing a monograph in view of tenure may be getting less common in the humanities
- Lists of publishers, book series, peer review labels and listing of peer reviewers have emerged in the frame of evaluation processes and PRFSs in several countries, making peer review of book publications (somewhat) explicit
- Comprehensive coverage databases may reaffirm the importance of book publications in a more formal way

In sum, aim of the study

- Analyse the evolution of the shares of scholarly book publications in the SSH in Flanders, Poland and Slovenia
- For the years 2004-2015 for Flanders and Slovenia
- In the case of Flanders, the GPRC label for books was introduced at the end of 2009/beginning of 2010 in the context of the expansion of the local PRFS to non-WoS publications from that year onwards
- For the years 2011-2015 for Poland, allowing us to benchmark the considerable change around 2013 with fluctuations observed over a longer timespan in Flanders and Slovenia

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- To contribute to the ASLIB Journal of Information Management special issue on book evaluation 😊



All suggestions welcome !