



EUROPEAN POLICY BRIEF



Disseminating the Social Sciences and Humanities

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This policy brief addresses the dissemination of knowledge in the SSH from two standpoints: language (translation); format (books vs articles) and modes of circulation (especially the issue of open access).

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INTRODUCTION

The dissemination of the Social Sciences and Humanities (SSH) differs from how knowledge in the natural sciences is spread in specific ways that must be taken into account in order to develop the adequate mechanisms, devices and formats. Two major differences will be discussed in this policy brief: the issue of language and that of format: books *vs* articles, in print and in electronic formats. The process of peer evaluation which is similar in both the SSH and the natural sciences, will not be addressed in order to concentrate on the modes of circulation, and more specifically on the dissemination of printed materials (rather than verbally as is the case with lectures at conferences).

EVIDENCE AND ANALYSIS

1. The issue of linguistic diversity in scholarly publishing

Despite its anchorage in national institutions, the unification of a global scientific field has been marked by the adoption of shared theoretical frameworks, common verification procedures, and a more or less formalized language. In order to facilitate transnational communication, the results are disseminated in English (with some exceptions, in France, mathematics scholars publish in French). English therefore plays the role of a universal language, as Latin did in the pre-modern period in Europe, and as artificial languages like Esperanto were expected to do without finding any resonance in the scientific field.

In the SSH, the circulation of knowledge is characterized by linguistic diversity, requiring the mediation of translation more often than in the natural sciences. However, one can observe the growing role of English in the globalization era, a role which partly results from the institutional push for internationalization and partly from the rise of international research organizations like the European Commission: whereas in the 1990s and the early 2000s, projects submitted to the European Research Framework Program could still be in a language other than English¹, this is no longer the case. No one will contest that adopting a common language is crucial in order to foster the international circulation of knowledge, but does this mean that all scholars in the SSH should switch to English in all circumstances?

1.1. Linguistic diversity as an epistemological added value

Some disciplines such as economy and psychology have followed the example of the natural sciences: the most important journals in these disciplines are in English. Other disciplines such as law, history or literary studies are much more linked to national languages. These discrepancies across disciplines stem in large part from their history: the institutionalization of law, history and literary studies was more deeply connected to the creation of national identities than that of economy and psychology. Should this state simply be considered as « backward » in the evolution of the SSH towards a unified global field?

This unification is hindered first by the objective conditions of the production of knowledge, i.e. the fact that research is organized at a national level and that the international circulation of scholars is still a limited phenomenon – limited in time (shorter or longer visiting professorships and fellowships) and in scope (the permanent recruitment of foreign scholars is much less frequent in the SSH than in the natural sciences) [Fleck, Karady, Duller ed., Forthcoming]. Secondly, fluency in English is unevenly distributed across scholars: native speakers hold a clear advantage over non-native speakers. This linguistic inequality creates a bias which has much more negative consequences in the SSH than in the natural sciences because of the greater importance given to written expression and interpretative analysis as well as less firmly standardized (and universally canonized) conceptual formulations. Conversely, in countries like the Netherlands which have switched to English, experts observe that younger scholars who have never written any academic work in their native language seem to have lost all sense of nuance, depth, vividness. The quality of their writing is poor and the problems this raises are hardly ever acknowledged.

However, beyond these objective impediments, it can be argued that linguistic diversity is not only an obstacle to the production and circulation of knowledge in the SSH. Linguistic diversity can be regarded as an advantage from two standpoints: epistemological and societal.

From an epistemological standpoint, linguistic diversity reflects the different national traditions in the SSH [Heilbron, 2009]. Translation appears as a *powerful epistemological tool for relativizing and criticizing concepts* [Cassin 2004; Sapiro 2008, 2009] that invites researchers to be more reflexive about the « academic unconscious » [Clément et al. 2006].

From a societal standpoint, publication in national languages is a *condition for reaching a non-academic audience and getting media attention*. SSH knowledge demands to be used by ordinary citizens and should therefore reach this audience. Linguistic diversity is thus crucial for maintaining contact between academics and the society they live in and for returning the public investment in academia by giving easy access to research results. Another necessary condition for the dissemination of knowledge to a non-academic readership is the production and translation of books.

1.2 The social conditions of the international circulation of knowledge in the SSH

Translation is thus a major vehicle for the circulation of knowledge in the SSH. However, translation is time-consuming and costly. Moreover, it can introduce errors and misunderstandings, acting as an obstacle rather than facilitating communication. The two issues are related: translators are often poorly paid (when they don't do the work for free), as is the case for many students and scholars, in countries like Argentina for instance. In many Western countries, literary translation has become a recognized profession, with its own associations and claims, distinct from technical translators. However, there is no specific training for scholarly translators, who, within professional organizations, are usually associated with literary translators. On the other hand, translations are not

¹ For instance the FP6 *ESSE* network – “Pour un espace de sciences sociales européen” – was in French.

recognized in academic curricula, apart in disciplines such as philosophy or ancient languages, and scholars seldom have translation experience.

Solutions to these problems exist – at least in part - but they have not been devised together and specifically for the SSH.

Funding is a material condition for supporting the translation of the SSH by trade and academic publishers, and to ensure professional translations. There are four main sources of support: State subsidies; funding from international bodies; private foundations; academic resources. The conditions vary for books and articles. The latter seldom get subsidies other than academic.

- **State subsidies:** many countries support the exportation of the national production but it is more often the case for literature than for scholarly books². Some countries like France, Germany (Goethe Institute) and Italy have funding policies for the exportation of SSH books in translation³. In France, there is a public funding policy for upmarket books (literature and SSH) in trade publishing, which includes support for books in translation from foreign languages into French and from French into other languages⁴. While some countries (such as Tunisia) implemented programs for the translation of classical texts only, France is one of the rare countries supporting the translation of foreign contemporary works into French, including the SSH. Regarding journals, in 2012 the French Centre National du Livre allocated 2.2 MK€ to the online platform *Cairn* to translate a selection of articles and abstracts from French SSH journals into English. The program was cut two years later. The question can be raised about the impact of such a program if the English translations are on a platform providing access to French journals which are ignored by scholars who are not Francophone.
- **International bodies:** In the 1950s UNESCO launched a large-scale project in order to foster the translation of “representative works” not only in literature but also in philosophy and science, based on the suggestions of experts from many countries. This program which favored among other things the opening of the Western book market to non-Western cultures was abandoned in the globalization era, and there are no contemporary equivalents. However, translations in the SSH can be funded in the framework of EU research projects. The European Union has implemented a translation policy for literary works within the program Creative Europe Culture, which contrary to the former Culture program is no longer open to scholarly non-fiction. The circulation of the SSH in Europe would largely benefit from such a program beyond the European projects.
- **Private Foundations:** some private foundations provide aid for scholarly translations, such as the Fritz Thyssen Foundation (Germany), whose aim is to support science and research at universities and research institutions. The Volkswagen Foundation also supports translations of “outstanding German academic books and papers”.
- **Academic Resources:** Many translations are funded by universities or research institutions (such as the National Centre for Scientific Research – CNRS – in France, research centers, the new Excellence Laboratories, or the Segretariato Europeo per le Pubblicazioni Scientifiche in Italy⁵) as well as research agencies (the National Agency for Research, or ANR, in France), but it is not a coordinated policy and the

² For instance the Dutch Fund of letters finances translations from Dutch of both fiction and non-fiction, but very rarely scholarly books.

³ In Italy, the Ministero degli Affari Esteri e della Cooperazione Internazionale gives incentives and prizes (Premi per la traduzione) for translations of very recently published books inserted in wider programs, e.g. book series or special events on publishers’ requests. The German Research Fund in collaboration with the Thyssen Foundation started the Program “Humanities International” (Geisteswissenschaften International) in 2008, which funds translations from German into English with the aim to support original publications in German. The budget amounts to 600 thousand Euro per annum.

⁴ The funding for translations from French to other languages covers either 30% to 40% of the translation costs (by the Centre national du livre or by the French Ministry of Foreign Affairs), or part of the acquisition rights (by the Institut français). Another source of financial support for translations (into English only) is the series « French voices » which offers a grant to encourage translation projects. For English language translations, the French government also subsidizes the French Publishers Agency based in New York, which acts as a literary agent representing some of the French publishers with a selection of its own titles, more than half of which are non-fiction [Sapiro ed., 2014]

⁵ The Segretariato Europeo per le Pubblicazioni Scientifiche (SEPS) is a non-governmental organization created in 1989, which brings Italian universities together. Authors can ask for funds for translation when they have a contract with a foreign publisher, a selection is made through an external expert review and a final decision by the inner committee of the SEPS. The Dutch Academy of Sciences used to have a fund for translating articles, but it served its purpose, i.e. helping scholars switch to English, and it no longer exists.

access to this kind of support is unequal across institutions, depending on their resources and the specific policies of their own. However, one can distinguish two different strategies: 1) funding of articles, books or book chapters that were accepted by a foreign journal and/or commissioned by a publisher abroad; 2) funding the translation of already published journal articles or a selection of them in another language (usually a selection) without preliminary demand. The French CNRS has launched such a program. As already suggested, the funding of translations by the source institutions does not ensure the work's reception in other countries. The example of the *Revue française de sociologie*, which did not get more citations in English journals since it is available in English translation [Gingras and Mosbah-Natanson, 2010], should lead us to rethink this translation policy and probably focus on the first option (leaving aside the option of switching entirely to English or multilingual publications which exist in some domains, especially in area studies). However, the success of the English version of the French demographic periodical *Population* indicates that a translation strategy can work if it is part of a broader strategy of internationalization [Gingras and Mosbah-Natanson, 2010]. This also raises the issue of the modes of distribution: the French journal *Annales*, which received a special subsidy from the CNRS over 4 years to translate the abstracts and a selection of articles, recently decided to publish the English version of the journal with Cambridge University Press.

Alongside the issue of subsidies, a SSH translation policy should give rise to a reflection on the specificity of the social conditions of practicing translation in this domain. Whereas students and scholars are not familiar with the practice of translation, which requires training and experience, many professional translators translate scholarly texts without being acquainted with the research domain. Thus, while their translations may read as fluent in the target language, they can be filled with conceptual errors and misunderstandings which compromise the proper transmission of knowledge. There is a tension, not to say an incompatibility, between professionalization and specialization in the translation of the SSH. As part of the solution, translation should be part of the training in the SSH and become eventually a path to professionalization. Some translation studies departments have already introduced specific training in this domain, but the practice of translation as an epistemological experience should be part of graduate training in the traditional SSH disciplines. Moreover, some countries like France propose residencies for translators translating from their language to spend some time in the country and reconnect with the local culture.

In addition to the material conditions for translations, the flows of translation across languages in the SSH are unequal: most translations circulate from the centers of the global field of SSH to its peripheries. It is much more difficult for a Hungarian scholar to get translated into other languages than for an American. This is not only due to the scarcity of linguistic skills but also to the power relations between both the publishing and academic fields [Sapiro, forthcoming]. This experience leads some scholars in peripheral countries to choose English as their working language. This means however that only a small part of the national production in the SSH achieves international recognition. Conversely, publishers are more and more reluctant to translate books from English, since they are supposed to be accessible in the original to the world academic community. However, experience shows that students (and many scholars) prefer to read in their own language, and that the foreign books best known in a national academic field are those that are accessible in the national language.

Consequently, a broad reflection should be conducted about how to favor translations of SSH books across languages and ensure the quality of these translations. This reflection could be organized by the European Commission and should include the construction of a comprehensive database of translations, similar to the UNESCO Index Translationum, which was not updated since 2009. This would considerably favor the monitoring and critical study of book translations in the SSH.

2. Publishing formats in the SSH: journals and books

Despite the new possibilities of free dissemination of knowledge thanks to the internet, publishing in edited formats is still the norm in the SSH. This norm ensures a process of selection and evaluation as well as formatting and proof editing. However, the publishing landscape is far from being unified. In some countries (like the US and the UK), the SSH are mainly published by university presses and private academic publishers, while in other countries such as France, Germany, Italy and Argentina, a significant share of scholarly books get published by trade publishers, and thus reach a non-academic audience. This applies to books (2.1) as well as to journals (2.2).

A major evolution since the 1990s is the *rise of electronic publication*, which offered new opportunities for the circulation and dissemination of the SSH but also challenged the traditional publishing of scholarly texts. A second evolution is the *appropriation of knowledge by private conglomerates specializing in educational and/ or academic publishing*, which monopolize the access to research output in journals and books and render it unfairly expensive. This appropriation threatens dangerously to restrict the access to knowledge not only for a non-academic readership but also for scholars, since many universities have interrupted their journal subscriptions and stopped buying books because they cannot afford the high costs. The solution offered by these groups for open access is also very expensive (« gold open access »), creating inequality within the academic community and forcing the research institutions, including the European Commission, to pay twice (as producers and as consumers).

2.1 Books

Books play a major role in the spread of knowledge in the SSH among both an academic and a non-academic audience, as previously mentioned. No scientific journal has ever sold as many copies as Piketty's book *Capital in the XXIst Century* in the world, and this is true of many much less successful books.

Books get much more attention from the media than scientific journals which are considered to be too specialized for a broader audience. Reviews of scholarly books appear in specialized intellectual magazines such as the *London Review of Books*, *The Times Literary Supplement*, *The New York Review of Books*, *L'Indice dei libri del mese*, *En attendant Nadeau* (formerly *La Quinzaine littéraire*) as well as in newspapers like *Le Monde*, *The New York Times*, *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, or *Il Manifesto*.

Within academic circles, *books ensure the spread of knowledge beyond the borders of disciplines and of countries*. Indeed, books are more often cited than articles when crossing disciplines and geographic borders. For instance, it is Bourdieu's books in English rather than his articles in French that are cited in American journals [Sallaz and Zaviska, 2007; Sapiro and Bustamante, 2009]. The same is true for Edward Said's work in Francophone journals [Brahimi and Fordant, forthcoming]. Particular scholars' works such as e.g. Jürgen Habermas and Niklas Luhmann consists of books only (their shorter pieces are mostly not academic).

The book publishing landscape in the SSH is split into five segments:

1. general trade publishers (like Le Seuil in France, Suhrkamp in Germany, or Einaudi in Italy);
2. publishers specialized in scholarly books (like Polity Press in the UK, Il Mulino in Italy, Amorrortu in Spain and Argentina, Mohr Siebeck in Germany or Vrin in France);
3. educational publishers (like Pearson in the UK, Belin in France, Oldenburg in Germany);
4. university presses (Oxford UP being the oldest and one of the most prestigious);
5. radical publishers (like Verso in the UK, Les Prairies ordinaires in France, Ombre Corte in Italy).

In most European countries, as well as in Latin America, trade publishers are the most prestigious, but the relative importance of each publisher varies from country to country. In France, scholarly books released by trade publishers can receive public subsidies, but this is not the case in many other countries. Moreover, university presses are subjected more and more to economic constraints, mainly due to the reduction of library budgets and to the fact that they have to invest in costly subscriptions to scientific journals [Thompson, 2005].

Academic book publishing is evolving with the development of the internet. In order to increase the circulation of the SSH books, in particular the out-of-print books, many university presses decided early to digitalize their backlist. Most of these titles are cost money, but they remain less expensive than those published by private publishers. Electronic platforms such as the French National Library Gallica or the American Project Gutenberg give free access to digitized books and journals the copyrights of which have expired. The traditional printed book is being challenged by the rise of electronic publishing. While most scholarly books can now be bought in electronic format, more and more titles are first published as e-books, with an option of print-on-demand, in order to reduce the storage costs. University presses are also using the internet for giving access to the critical apparatus (footnotes or endnotes) and related materials such as tables, graphs and illustrations. Very few publishers provide free direct access to SSH books through the Creative Commons license. The price of scholarly books varies significantly from one country to another: while in France, the average cost is between 20 and 35 € (with the exception of books in legal studies, which are much more expensive), the price can easily reach 100 £ in the UK, a price tag that most scholars and more and more libraries cannot afford.

2.2 Journals

Most scientific journals have to find an economic balance between the costs of production and the sales profits. Production costs used to include the administrative and editorial work (formatting, proofreading), as well as the printing expenses. Many journals are published by academic or trade publishers, but the production process is conducted autonomously by the editorial team. In some cases, the administrative and editorial work is undertaken entirely by scholars in order to spare production costs. The digitalization first introduced additional expenses but opened new possibilities for the circulation of journals, especially abroad. It also became a new source of profits, with the possibility of selling articles separately in addition to the sales of single issues. The conglomerates specializing in academic publishing such as Elsevier, Springer or Sage immediately discovered how to increase their profits by hosting these journals on their portals. While the administrative work has largely been automated, reducing the personnel costs, these conglomerates imposed on scientific publishing harsh conditions and high prices, requesting that the rights for articles be ceded to them without any perspective of open access after an embargo period, unless charging the author(s) huge sums (between 2000 and 3000 €) if s/he chooses the (« gold ») open access option. These practices lead to protest within the SSH scientific community. The Harvard faculty published a statement against it and granted Harvard non-exclusive rights to make their future articles open access. This policy was followed by more than 40 universities around the world [Suber, 2013]. They created repositories giving green (free) open access to the works produced by their faculty. Besides repositories, platforms for sharing research such as Academia.edu and Research Gate have developed.

Fortunately, this business model is not the only one that exists. Most of the American SSH journals are published by university presses. While Global Open Access policies are limited to the STM (Science, Technology, Medicine), four distribution circuits can be distinguished [Thompson, 2005]: 1) the private platforms managed by non-academic intermediaries (virtual libraries and digital warehouses), which give a rather costly access to academic works; 2) the digital warehouses, which are back office technology support systems; they constitute a minor business model because they are based on the consumer transaction model, which doesn't generate many income; 3) the scholarly corpus model sharing data in order to give a fair access to it like the above mentioned Gallica; 4) the scholarly community model, supported by Universities and by thrye Mellon foundation (like the non-profit Project MUSE), or the French portal OpenEdition, which is supported by the CNRS. In France, electronic journals that do not depend upon a publisher gathered on the portal *Revmes.org*, which provides free open access to 436 journals in French (as a part of OpenEdition). This portal offered an opportunity for younger scholars to create new journals and thus renew the research landscape. Regarding journals published either by trade or by academic publishers, most of the past issues of have been digitalized on a free access platform called *Persée*, thus creating a vast archive of the SSH. Current issues were released simultaneously on the platform *Cairn*, which proposed a fair business model in agreement with trade publishers, with a two or three-year embargo and then green open access to the journals.

However, this model has been challenged by the 2012 Recommendation of the European Commission on access to and preservation of scientific information, which encouraged all EU Member States to put publicly-funded research results in the public domain in order to strengthen science and the knowledge-based economy. The six months to one-year delay which granted access to the publication was not compatible with the two to three year embargo initially adopted in order to ensure the viability of the journals. The French government thus decided to compensate trade publishers for their loss.

In most countries, open access policies concern journals that get 50% funding from public institutions (France, Italy, Spain, as well as Argentina) and private foundations in the US (for the UK, it applies only to STM journals). The length of the embargo period varies from 6 months (Argentina) to 24 months (Italy), Germany and Spain having adopted 12 months. Apart from some cases like the Netherlands which recommends Gold Open Access, most countries recommend the publication of the accepted manuscript in repositories. In the UK, no open access policy has been adopted, but an exception was introduced to the copyright law for data mining in 2014 (like Japan did in 2010). Jisc (the Joint Information Systems committee, a British Education organization for digital services and solutions) also signed a pilot agreement with Springer to buy a single subscription to give access to 1600 journals (most of them in STM).

As a reaction, some scientific publishers like Elsevier have stiffened the embargo on the work they publish: they have forbidden the publication on repositories of any version of the papers and the sharing of papers on academic networks during three years following the publication, as a way to force the academic community to choose the Gold Open Access option in order to match the EU recommendations. As a consequence of these unfortunate developments illegal repository like Gigapedia, Library.nu, Sci-Hub etc. blossom and become used by increasing numbers of scholars even from developed countries.

Conclusion

In May 2016, the EU called to enforce the open access requirement for all publicly funded research within four years. However, a balance still has to be found in order to propose a fair business model for scientific journals in the SSH. Moreover, it is not at all sure that making the research results freely accessible on the internet will have more impact in its dissemination among a non-academic audience than the professional work publishers do advertising, distributing and promoting scholarly books in the public space, whereas the incitement to free open access may lead European trade publishers who still invest in the SSH, to abandon this sector of activity and to focus on non-academic essays.

The advantage publishing conglomerates try to take of the situation through the exorbitant “gold open access”, which obliges academic institutions to pay twice, once for access to the portals and once for publishing their results in open access, is a dangerous example of the private appropriation of knowledge, contrary to democratic schemes of the dissemination of knowledge. The European Commission should not encourage this trend as it has done by supporting “gold open access” publications, and should develop a reflection liable to improve the conditions of dissemination of knowledge in order to make new recommendations.

The European Commission could also play a role in organizing an international reflection on both the funding schemes for translations and the issue of training for a betterment of translation practices. The EC could also implement a program of aids to the translation of scholarly books. This would help make operational Umberto Eco’s word that the language of Europe is translation.

POLICY IMPLICATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

- Organize an international consultation to improve the conditions of dissemination of knowledge
- Organize an international concertation on the funding schemes for translations and the issue of training for an improvement of translation practices in the Social Sciences and the Humanities.
- Implement a European program of financial support to the translation of scholarly books

RESEARCH PARAMETERS

INTERCO-SSH sets out, firstly, to assess the state of the SSH in Europe. Secondly, it aims to outline potential future pathways that would promote cooperation across disciplinary and national boundaries, building on the excellence that already exists in European SSH. To achieve this, it is necessary to study the SSH in their socio-historical context. The project analyzes the process of institutionalization of seven academic disciplines in eight different countries (United Kingdom, France, Germany, Italy, Netherlands, Hungary, Argentina and the United States) to obtain an understanding of the sociological factors that have shaped the “academic unconscious” of scholars (i.e. the presuppositions underlying academic practice) and that facilitate or hinder intellectual cooperation and exchange. The project also investigates the already existing circulation of knowledge between countries and disciplines, encompassing an analysis of geographical mobility amongst scholars and an assessment of the circulation of ideas. These three perspectives help to identify the factors that enable or inhibit intellectual cooperation and to make suggestions to improve it. Using the tools of the SSH to study the SSH, this project also aims to help establish the “SSH studies” as a proper academic field of inquiry, providing the scientific means for assessing and guiding the development of the SSH.

PROJECT IDENTITY

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