

Publish or / and perish in Geography

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Introduction

“Publish or perish” is a slogan familiar to many geographers who are aware of the competitive ranking and funding system in the Anglo-American universities. To put it shortly, universities, departments, disciplines and scholars need publications to be able to illustrate their impact in the scientific field – if not, their funding is directly or indirectly reduced. In the United Kingdom, the assessments are routinely used for the core resource allocation that comes from the public central authorities (Batty 2003: 761). During the latter part of the 1990s this systematic evaluation reached Finnish universities – though still with rather moderate implementation and outcomes.

The issue where and how publish has become widely debated topic in Human Geography in the early 21st century (Hancock 1999; Gutiérrez & López-Nieva 2001; Harris 2001; Minca 2001; Samer & Sidaway 2001; Short et al. 2001; Dunford et al. 2002; Short 2002; Batty 2003; García-Ramón 2003; Gregson et al. 2003; Johnston 2003; Minca 2003). There are three major issues. First, what kind of exclusion and inclusion mechanisms there are in the publication arenas and what outcomes it has for Geography? Second, how international are the publication channels of geographers, especially so called major international peer-

reviewed journals of Geography? Third, what is the role of English as the language of communication and publication by geographers? My aim in this article is to reflect shortly on these three questions by looking at the international publishing profile and impact by Geography departments in Finland.

International publications that count

It is becoming a norm in Science, and increasingly in Geography as well, that in the university evaluations only those publications count that are published in peer-reviewed international journals with certain impact factor. The bigger the impact factor of the journal, the better it is to publish there for the department and the author. Some evaluation systems take into account also books and book chapters that come out by recognised international publishers. The long-term impact of certain articles is measured through the amount of cites the article has received (for classics in Geography, see Barnes 2001: 418). There are still national and local exceptions of this norm. For example, at the University of Oulu three articles in national peer-reviewed journals count as much as one article in international journal. The rest of articles do not have real impact in the evaluation.

To rank journals most common is to use the Institute of Scientific Information Science Citation Index and Social Science Citation Index database (ISI database). It contains 18.7 million articles, reviews or book reviews published in certain academic journals from 1986 onwards but not all journals are taking into account. Furthermore, the journals in different disciplines are ranked according to their impact factor. To define the recent impact factor of a particular journal is rather simple: the number of cites of that particular journal in all ISI database journals during last two calendar years is counted and that amount is divided by the number of articles published in that particular journal during last two calendar years. The highest impact factors have the journals *Annual Review of Immunology*

(54.455 in 2002), *Annual Review of Biochemistry* (36.278) and *Cancer Journal for Clinicians* (32.886). In 2002, the highest ranking journal in Geography, according to impact factor, was *Quaternary Science Review* (2.842) (ISI Web of Knowledge 2003).

In table 1 there are presented the top-ranking international peer-reviewed journals in Human Geography and how their ranking and impact factor have developed in 1992 – 2002. It is worth to mention that many human geographers publish also in other geographical journals than in those listed below and journals outside the field of Geography. In the analysis on British geographers, Johnston (2003) found out that physical geographers publish often in interdisciplinary journals whereas human geographers mostly in journals within Geography.

Table 1. Rank and impact factor of selected journals of Human Geography.

	rank			impact factor		
	2002	1997	1992	2002	1997	1992
Progress in Human Geography	1	4	5	2.762	1.618	1.415
Annals, AAG	2	7	2	2.586	1.379	1.776
Transactions, IBG	3	2	4	2.574	2.063	1.672
Economic Geography	4	6	8	2.460	1.385	1.000
Environment and Planning D	5	1	1	2.377	2.149	2.130
Geoforum	6	16	14	1.848	0.523	0.528
Antipode	7	3	3	1.566	1.693	1.735
Political Geography	8	9	6	1.520	0.987	1.239
Environment and Planning A	9	10	11	1.463	0.945	0.869
Area	11	14	7	1.256	0.798	1.152
Professional Geographer	13	12	10	1.403	0.875	0.935
Urban Geography	16	11	13	0.988	0.918	0.614
Geographical Analysis	18	13	9	0.949	0.800	0.936
International Journal of GIS	21	8	-	0.821	1.093	-
Geographical Journal	22	15	15	0.791	0.675	0.444
Journal of Historical Geography	23	5	12	0.780	1.514	0.641
Applied Geography	28	17	16	0.816	0.381	0.368
Geography	29	18	18	0.308	0.347	0.330
Geographical Review	30	19	17	0.288	0.118	0.589

Source: Gutiérrez & López-Nieva 2001; ISI Web of Knowledge 2003.

International publishing profile and impact of Geography departments in Finland

It is difficult to measure the international publishing profile and impact of Geography departments. To make a profound analysis the quality of publications should be evaluated one-by-one and how these publications have advanced geographical knowledge. This is time consuming since it would take weeks even from an experienced reviewer. Furthermore, the reviewer would need nothing less than a full knowledge of Geography. After Alexander von Humboldt no geographers have pretended to possess it.

Nevertheless, in contemporary competitive funding system the universities, departments, disciplines and scholars have to be evaluated and regularly. According to Garcia-Ramón (2003: 3), Citation Indexes are becoming the reference point in national boards for measuring the quality of publications. Indexes are also used to rank individual scientists and research institutions. Currently the data is available in 14 scientific fields, however, not including Geog-

raphy. The United States and its research institutions are clearly the leading country among the highly cited scholars (66.7% of all) and institutions (18 out of top 20 ranking institutions) in scientific fields of ISI with particular density of them in the megalopolis Boston – Washington and in the west coast of California. USA is followed by the United Kingdom in the concentration of highly cited scholars (8.2% of all) with most cited institutions in London and Cambridge (Batty 2003).

One common, easy and fast method to measure international publishing profile and impact in Geography is to use ISI Science Citation Index and Social Science Citation Index database (ISI database). In the database there are all above mentioned human geographical journals as well as tens of other international journals in which geographers publish. However, it does not contain geographical journals with national profile (in Finland, for example, *Terra*, *Nordia*) or journals with low international profile (in Finland, for example, *Fennia*, *Nordia Geographical Publications*).

To illustrate the problems and possibilities of evaluation (see table 2) I have meas-

Table 2. International publishing profile and impact of Finnish Geography departments, 2003.

	total amount of staff professors in 2003	cumulative amount of ISI articles by current professors	amount of ISI articles with only one author	total amount of authors in ISI articles	cumulative amount of ISI article cites (excl. own)
Helsinki	9	38	14	31	120
Joensuu	4	6	3	8	3
Oulu	6	37	19	45	103
Turku	4	25	0	35	546
total	23	106	36	113	772

NB. Data based on ISI articles by current Geography professors and their ISI citation, 1986-2003
Source: ISI Web of Knowledge 2003.

ured the current international publishing profile and impact of Geography departments in Finland. However, I have simplified the analysis. First, I use only the ISI database. It is the most recognised database but it does not contain all international peer-reviewed journals nor books or book chapters. Second, to measure the department profile I use only the publications by Geography professors that were department staff in the autumn 2003 – in Helsinki (9 professors), Joensuu (4), Oulu (6) and Turku (4). Naturally, I'm aware that currently many younger scholars publish in top-quality journals, including those counted by ISI. To simplify further, all the ISI publications by professors in and outside geographical journals are counted to the current affiliation of professors regardless under which affiliation they were written (table 2). The ISI database reaches until the year 1986 when some professors were already active in the field whereas other professors finished their PhD in latter part of the 1990s.

There are two possibilities to count the international impact of publications. First, it can be measured by summing the impact factor of journals concerning the year in which the publications appeared. Second, one can count the so far total amount of cites the articles have received in other ISI database journal articles. Here I use the latter citation method. However, I have excluded the self-citations by the authors themselves to evict the "artificial" rise in the amount of cites (table 2).

According to table 2, the average amount of ISI publications (i.e. articles, reviews and book reviews in journals of ISI Science and Social Science Citation Index database, 1986–2003) by one current Geography professor in Finland is slightly less than five (4.61).

Some professors do not have any ISI publications and no professor so far has over 20 publications. Roughly one third (34.0%) of the articles has been written by the professor alone and two-thirds (66.0%) as co-author. However, there are many articles (28.3%) with four or more authors (ISI Web of Knowledge 2003).

About one fourth (24.5 %) of the publications by Finnish Geography professors have not been cited, if the self-citations by the authors themselves are excluded. Quite many publications without cites are book-reviews. The average amount of cites per article is 7.28. However, the amount of all cites is expected to rise because some articles were written very recently. More than ten cites have received 18.9% of the publications by Finnish Geography professors. Just for curiosity, over half (55.0%) of the studied publications are self-referential i.e. include references to earlier ISI publications by the author(s) (ISI Web of Knowledge 2003).

Three publications with most international impact, according to the amount of cites, were published in *Nature* (211 cites), *Science* (90), and *Environment and Planning A* (50) – this including also citation by the author(s) of the publication (ISI Web of Knowledge 2003). For comparison, Dunford et al. (2002) in their study about the articles in the journal *Regional Studies* in 1981–2002 found out that 13% of all articles have not been cited and 20% had been cited more than ten times.

International journals of Human Geography?

In Human Geography the question what is an international journal is more difficult to define than in Science. Gutiérrez & López-

Nieva (2001: 67) studied 19 above mentioned Human Geography journals (see table 1)– included in the ISI database – and their publications in 1991-1997. The outcome was that most journals did not seem to have a high international profile if the nationality of article authors or of editorial boards members is counted. Almost three out of four (73.4%) articles in these journals of Human Geography came from the USA and the UK and the great majority of editorial board members are either British or Americans.

How these “international” journals then fit to measure the international profile and impact of Geography departments in Finland and what kind of outcomes one can make out of the results of the analysis? The answer is complicated. As a whole, the profile of Finnish Geography professors in the ISI database is rather low with few exceptions. Just looking at the simplistic and cruel numbers of the ISI database, in the UK and in the USA there are some Geography professors that have alone more ISI publications than all current 23 Finnish Geography professors together. The current Finnish university system so far (solid tenure position of professors, practically same salary regardless of research activity, relative modest influence of publications in departmental funding, etc.) does neither have “a stick” nor “a carrot” concerning publishing. Despite this we Finnish Geography professors should publish more actively in the journals included in the ISI database – even just for visibility and to prevent in advance that Geography and/or Geography departments would possibly perish due to “low measured impact” when the “scientifically objective” measuring

based on international scientific databases will one day be implemented with full rigor.

Nevertheless, there are also broader implications in international publishing. Garcia-Ramón (2003: 1-3) argues that the Anglo-American Geography has become undisputed hegemony in Geography (see also Short 2002) – at least in such Human Geography journals that are counted in the ISI database. For many geographers in these journals “there is no place for the ‘Other’ [geographical] traditions” than that of the Anglo-American (see also Minca 2001: 287; Gregson et al. 2003). This issue is accentuated with exclusionary and masculinist Anglo-American refereeing systems (Berg 2001) and need of current references from the Anglo-American geographical literature (Minca 2003: 166).

The debate about “international” journals is linked to another issue that is the increasing dominance of English as the mode of expression of geographical knowledge. Despite much of the best geographical literature is not in English it is increasingly becoming the basic language of text in many geographical journals (Harris 2001). There is a trend towards linguistic homogenisation in the language practices of journals (Short et al. 2001). Garcia-Ramón (2003: 2) indicates that English as a global language privileges the geographical discourse of Anglophones and excludes those not feeling so comfortable in English. The question of language is important because language also represents also the way of thinking, and a framework for expressing our experiences and ideas (see also Minca 2003: 164 – 166).

Nordia Geographical Publications – possible implications?

In 1995, in the launching of the new series of *Nordia Geographical Publications* and its *Yearbook* in English (NGP) the first editor Heikki Riikonen (1995: 1) mentioned that NGP presents a cross-section of the works done in Geography and by geographers in Northern Finland. In practice, this means the persons affiliated somehow to the Department of Geography in Oulu. Other aims were to publish papers held in symposia organised by the department or the Geographical Society of Northern Finland and publish papers in various themes of Geography.

What could be the role of NGP in these times of competitiveness in university and the international regime of impact factors? Gutiérrez & López-Nieva (2001: 54) state that “an international journal should have a policy of publishing high-level, international-refereed articles from authors from all the countries of the world; have an international editorial board composed of highly respected members from different countries; as a result, such journals should have a worldwide audience and a high impact factor”.

Well, NGP is a “regional” geographical journal published in English and it never will be “international” according to the ideals mentioned above. NGP will not be included in international scientific databases nor counted as a “peer-reviewed scientific journal” in the evaluation of department activities. Publishing it in English is an access to international audience but it might diminish the amount of readers in Finland.

Harris (2001) argues that diverse cultures possess an inherent richness, especially when appreciated in their own forms. This refers

to the right to publish in one’s mother tongue. Still all Geography departments in Finland have some kind of departmental publication forum in Finnish. Nevertheless, the cultural right of geographers should include the possibility to present ideas to international audience. Several scholars argue that especially native Anglophone geographers should learn more languages (Samer & Sidaway 2000; Harris 2001; Short et al. 2001; Garcia-Ramón 2003; Gregson et al. 2003; Minca 2003). Nevertheless, Finnish will never become broadly used or understood language among geographers outside Finland with the possible exception of Estonia. Garcia-Ramón (2003: 3) argues that one possible way to communicate and to reinforce interaction between native Anglophone and non-native Anglophone communities of geographers is to translate more books and articles into English.

I think here one finds a small niche for NGP. So far, in 1995 – 2002 in NGP there were published over 60 articles. Most authors are geographers from the University of Oulu. The biggest group of writers are PhD candidates, then research and teaching staff with PhD and finally professors. I see positive that younger scholars are encouraged to write in English but NGP should not become an arena for article drafts in English – an inclusive but poor draft replica of current Anglo-American geographical journals. To get visibility for articles it is better to send them directly to peer-reviewed English-language geographical journals whose number has risen substantially during the last ten years. One possibility for publishing Finland-related articles in English is *Fennia*, our “national international” geographical journal that is widely distributed around the globe. However, it is not part of the ISI database.

Human Geography is often dealing with local and regional issues whose contextual arena for academic and non-academic debate, discussion and implementation is not necessarily international *per se*. This means that we should not to forget publish in Finnish and also to develop original ideas independently of what is the current mainstream in Geography. Human Geography cannot be so visible in scientific databases than most disciplines in Science are. This means that we geographers should never accept the evaluation method I have used in this article but to stress also the important role of publications outside the scientific database journals.

Nevertheless, there is room for NGP as a journal that publishes in English well-thought observations by geographers from Northern Finland. The articles can also be

short reviews how we geographers here in Northern Finland reflect upon certain concepts, how we implement our locally and regionally enriched geographical theories in practice, and what kind of questions rise from “Other geographical traditions”. So far majority of NGP articles are related to Northern Finland. However, I did not see much (and in my mind not enough) “Other geographical traditions” – support is needed to promote own critical thinking and reflections. Nevertheless, NGP could be and remain a small and interesting visit card of the Department of Geography in Oulu and the Geographical Society of Northern Finland. This would mean that by publishing in NGP we geographers in Northern Finland would not perish and the broader community of geographers would become richer.

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