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Are book publications disappearing from scholarly communication in the social sciences and humanities?¹

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Introduction

Publication patterns in the social sciences and humanities (SSH) are diverse. 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). Nevertheless, many criticisms of scholarly book publishing have been voiced. Harnad (1986), for example, advised against contributing chapters to edited volumes given the long delays that may occur in the publication process. Nederman (2005) warns that in academic evaluation contexts book chapters and edited volumes are hardly taken into account. In some humanities disciplines, however, the publication of a scholarly monograph is a requirement for professors to obtain tenure (Cronin & La Barre, 2004); yet the immanent disappearance of the scholarly monograph has also been predicted (Thompson, 2002). As systemic information on such evolutions is limited, this paper investigates empirically the evolutions of the shares of scholarly book publications using comprehensive publication data collected in Flanders (Belgium), Finland, Norway, Poland and Slovenia.

Several factors may influence the choices of SSH scholars to publish chapters, edited volumes or embark on a monograph. We distinguish between (1) factors relating to the research process itself, (2) factors relating to the process of publication, (3) factors relating to the

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findability and visibility of publications, and (4) factors relating to academic evaluation contexts. With regard to the research process the way research in parts of the SSH is organized, with collaborative work and empirical research becoming more frequent, may result in book publishing, in particular the collaborative model of the edited volume, becoming less evident. In terms of publication process, the delay that may occur when publishing edited volumes may be a reason for avoiding such publications, especially for empirical research. On the other hand, e-publishing results in the publishing process of some volumes being rather similar to that of many journals, and self-publishing and printing on demand may actually stimulate book publishing. In terms of findability and visibility of publications the fact that most books still appear as physical entities only puts book publishing at a disadvantage compared to journal publishing, where most articles appear as digital entities (too). Digital entities are often easier to find, which may be an important factor in an era of increasing internationalization. Especially in the case of open access publishing, digital entities become also more accessible and hence can reach a broader, and global, audience. E-books have these characteristics too yet represent only a small share of scholarly book publishing. Moreover, books are often not indexed in international systems, especially citation indexes. Indeed, even in the most advanced open systems like CrossRef, Google Scholar or Microsoft Academic citations to and from books are hard to trace. In academic evaluation contexts, book publishing has had different statuses, with monographs requirements on the one hand and negligence of edited volumes on the other hand. This may gradually be changing, with requirement for a monograph becoming less common in the humanities (e.g. in the format of PhD theses and in view of tenure) and comprehensive coverage databases which identify those book publications that are peer reviewed explicitly. Indeed, several performance-based research funding systems make peer review of book publication explicit through lists of book publishers, book series, peer review labels and listing of peer reviewers. Overall, we observe drivers that may cause book publishing to increase as well as drivers for book publishing to become less common. We therefore decided to investigate empirically the evolutions in terms of shares of book publishing in five European countries.

Empirical evidence regarding the evolution of the share of scholarly book publications in the total volume of scholarly publications in a given country is rare. The main reason lies in the fact that in most countries comprehensive coverage data are not readily available. Indeed, even where full coverage national publication databases are in place, several of them do not include edited volumes as a publication type that may be peer reviewed (Kulczycki et al, 2018). This is for example the case in most Nordic countries, for which a sizable share of monographs (4.9%) and book chapters (29.5%) among the SSH publications 2015 has been reported (NordForsk, 2018). As such the evolution of the share of book publications in the total volume of scholarly publications remains difficult to study, especially over longer time spans. What empirical evidence is available points to different evolutions. Engels, Ossenblok & Spruyt (2012) reported a stable share of book publications for the humanities for the years 2000 to 2009, a period during which book publications were not taken into account in the regional Flemish performance-based funding system. For the social sciences, however, they reported a smaller and falling share of book publications. In a comparison of data for eight countries, Kulczycki et al (2018) report, for the period 2011-2014 and a selection of disciplines, stable shares of monographs and book chapters for some countries (Denmark, Flanders, Norway), potentially declining shares for others (Finland and Slovenia) and considerable year-to-year variations for yet other countries (the Czech Republic and Poland). The overall evolution of the share of scholarly book publications, however, could not be studied as no data for a longer time span were available.

In this study we intend to fill this gap with an analysis of the comprehensive coverage data on the share of peer reviewed book publications (book chapters, edited volumes and monographs) that are available from Flanders and Slovenia for the period 2004 to 2015. We supplement these data with data on peer reviewed book chapters and monographs from Norway for the period 2005-2015 as well as data on all types of peer reviewed book publishing for the period 2009 to 2014 for Poland and 2011 to 2015 for Finland. This approach allows us to shed light on the share of book chapters, edited volumes and monographs in humanities and in social sciences in five different countries from Central, Northern, Southern and Western Europe, and to compare these shares and their trends across countries.

Data and methods

Data for this paper were collected from five comprehensive coverage national publication databases. For recent descriptions of these databases (namely the VABB-SHW or Flemish Academic Bibliographic Database for Social Sciences and Humanities in Flanders, the VIRTa information publication service in Finland, the Norwegian Science Index in Norway, the Polish Scholarly Bibliography in Poland, and the Cooperative Online Bibliographic System and Services in Slovenia) we refer to Šile et al (2017) and Kulczycki et al (2018). For VABB-SHW (Guns et al., 2018), VIRTa and NSI all publications are classified according to the OECD Fields of Science classification (OECD, 2015) and hence reported as such. For the Polish PSB the organisational classification of publications allows reporting of overall numbers for SSH, social sciences, humanities, as well as Economics & Business, Law and History. In the case of Slovenia the classification of publications in COBISS according to the Universal Decimal Classification system was translated towards the OECD fields of science.

A total of 336.681 peer reviewed publications (each publication wholly counted at national level) are taken into account for this study. For Flanders, 48.200 publications published between 2004 and 2015, among which 73,8% journal articles and contributions to proceedings, 2,0% monographs, 3,7% edited volumes, and 20,5% book chapters are included in this study. For Slovenia, the total number of publications 2004-2015 amounts to 92.522, among which 63,8% journal articles and contributions to proceedings, 4,8% monographs, 9,4% edited volumes and 22,0% book chapters. In the case of Poland, the total number of publications (2009-2014) is 128.275, including 26,4% journal articles and contributions to proceedings, 10,6% monographs, 7,1% edited volumes and 55,8% book chapters. In Finland for the years 2011 to 2015, we count 40.057 publications, including 59,2% journal articles and contributions to proceedings, 3,8% monographs, 5,8% edited volumes and 31,1% chapters in books. Norway contributes with 27.627 publications from 2005-2015, of which 57,7% are journal articles, 38,0% are chapters in books, and 4,3% are monographs.

Results

We here present results for the share of monographs and the share of book chapters for humanities on the one hand and social sciences on the other hand. During our presentation at STI we will also present results per discipline and discuss the evolutions of the shares of edited volumes. In the tables below, shares are presented as they are calculated in the different national systems, meaning that for Norway the sum of the share of journal articles, book chapters and monographs is 100%, whereas in the four other countries the share of peer reviewed edited volumes needs to be added in order to get the full picture.

Humanities

Table 1 presents the share of monographs in the humanities per year per country. Similarly, Table 2 presents the share of book chapters in the humanities per year per country. For the period 2004/5 to 2015 the shares of both book chapters are rather stable in Flanders, Norway and Slovenia. The shares are also rather similar for Flanders and Slovenia, yet considerably higher in Norway. The share of monographs seems also rather stable in these three countries. Peer reviewed monographs, however, make up less than 4% of the total number of peer reviewed publications in the humanities in Flanders, around 5% in Norway and in most years considerably more than 5% in Slovenia. For the shorter time window 2011-2015 the shares in Finland seem rather stable for monographs and book chapters alike. The shares observed for Finland are similar to those for Norway. For Poland a sharp decrease in the share of monographs is manifest between 2012 and 2013, while the share of book chapters seems on a gradual decline since 2010 yet still at a comparatively high level. Overall, for humanities, the differences between countries in the height of the share of monographs seems the most striking observation.

Table 1. Share of monographs in the humanities.

Year	Flanders	Finland	Norway	Poland	Slovenia
2004	2,6				8,2
2005	3,0		4,7		6,7
2006	3,4		5,6		5,9
2007	3,4		6,7		6,1
2008	3,8		4,9		6,5
2009	2,3		5,9	13,9	5,6
2010	3,1		5,1	13,5	6,4
2011	3,2	4,6	5,4	14,3	4,8
2012	3,6	4,2	3,8	15,4	6,6
2013	2,4	4,3	5,3	5,7	7,7
2014	3,0	4,0	4,5	6,0	6,1
2015	2,5	4,9	3,8		7,2

Table 2. Share of book chapters in the humanities.

Year	Flanders	Finland	Norway	Poland	Slovenia
2004	25,5				21,5
2005	21,8		43,2		30,5
2006	24,0		43,3		31,6
2007	25,0		44,7		25,9

2008	25,2		46,5		23,5
2009	29,1		40,4	58,1	32,2
2010	30,0		38,8	62,7	26,0
2011	29,5	43,5	39,0	59,0	33,4
2012	28,7	41,3	39,6	57,8	32,5
2013	34,4	47,0	40,9	48,7	30,0
2014	30,3	40,2	40,8	47,6	26,9
2015	28,0	38,0	37,9		30,9

Social Sciences

Table 3 presents the share of monographs in the social sciences per year per country. Similarly, Table 4 presents the share of book chapters in the social sciences per year per country. We observe different trends per country and per publication type. In Slovenia, both the share of monographs and the share of book chapters seem stable over the whole 12 year period that we could study. For Flanders the share of monographs seems stable although it is higher in the two most recent years, while the share of book chapters seems consistently on the rise since the introduction of the GPRC (Guaranteed Peer Reviewed Content, Verleysen & Engels, 2013) label. For Poland the stark decline in the share of monographs between 2012 and 2013 is matched by a still remarkable yet much smaller decline in the share of book chapters around the same time. In Finland the share of book chapters seems stable while the share of monographs has been declining gradually. A similar decline in the share of monographs in the total volume of peer reviewed publications in the social sciences seems to have occurred in Norway a few years earlier. The share of book chapters seems stable in Norway at close to one in three publications in the social sciences. Overall, for the social sciences, the slight yet different trends between countries in the shares of monographs (stable in Slovenia, declining in Finland, Norway and Poland, and possibly on the rise in Flanders) as well as book chapters (stable in Finland, Norway and Slovenia, declining in Poland, and on the rise in Flanders) stand out most.

Table 3. Share of monographs in the social sciences.

Year	Flanders	Finland	Norway	Poland	Slovenia
2004	1,3				4,0
2005	1,2		4,8		4,1
2006	1,2		4,6		3,9
2007	1,1		3,3		4,3
2008	1,7		6,3		5,2
2009	0,7		5,1	11,1	4,3
2010	1,1		3,5	11,5	4,2
2011	1,9	4,6	2,6	11,9	5,2
2012	1,6	4,4	2,4	12,0	4,7
2013	1,6	3,0	2,5	5,6	5,3
2014	2,1	2,9	2,6	5,0	4,1
2015	2,1	2,7	2,1		5,2

Table 4. Share of book chapters in the social sciences.

Year	Flanders	Finland	Norway	Poland	Slovenia
2004	12,9				17,0
2005	9,1		31,7		18,9
2006	11,2		31,2		16,0
2007	11,5		34,8		17,4
2008	13,4		34,6		18,5
2009	16,4		33,4	62,9	16,7
2010	14,5		32,7	65,9	18,1
2011	16,3	25,0	30,6	60,5	20,0
2012	17,5	27,3	33,9	55,6	17,6
2013	19,5	23,6	33,0	42,2	17,5
2014	19,5	24,3	31,0	41,2	17,9
2015	20,7	24,4	31,8		19,6

Discussion and conclusion

In this paper we discuss the shares of monographs and of book chapters among peer reviewed publications in the humanities and in the social sciences for Flanders (Belgium), Finland, Norway, Poland, and Slovenia. We study the period 2004-2015, as this is the longest timespan for which comprehensive coverage publication data from at least two of the countries are available.

The share of monographs among peer reviewed publications in the humanities seems stable in all countries except Poland. In the social sciences the share of monographs among peer reviewed publications is at a lower base than in the humanities. Also, a gradual decline of the share of monographs in the social sciences seems to occur or have occurred in Finland and in Norway, whereas for Poland we again observe a sharp decline between 2012 and 2013. This sudden change in publication patterns in Poland can be linked to the reforms that were implemented in 2011 and finally changed the model of academic promotions in 2013 (Kulczycki et al, 2018). For Slovenia, the share of monographs in both humanities and in social sciences seems stable over the whole period 2004-2015. In Flanders the share of monographs is the lowest among the five countries studied.

The share of book chapters in the humanities and in the social sciences seems stable in Finland, Norway, and Slovenia. In Poland we observe gradually declining shares of book chapters among the total volume of peer reviewed publications. In Flanders, the introduction of the GPRC label for peer reviewed books seem to have stimulated the publishing of book chapters, rather immediately in 2010 in the humanities and more gradually in the social sciences. The differences in the share of book chapters between countries remain large, with Norway and Poland at the higher end, Flanders and Slovenia at the lower end and Finland holding an in between position. With the current longer term trends, the shares may gradually converge.

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