

BUILDING A REPUTATION IN GLOBAL SCIENTIFIC COMMUNICATION: A SWOT ANALYSIS OF SPANISH HUMANITIES JOURNALS

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Abstract. This paper analyses the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats (SWOTs) faced by Spanish humanities journals and explores the role these journals play as tools for the transmission of research against a global academia. The dataset is comprised of the replies to twenty semi-structured surveys that were administered among ten editors of Spanish journals in the area of the humanities and ten Spanish humanities researchers with extensive publishing experience in national and international journals. Main findings are discussed in terms of internationality, predominance of English and Spanish as scientific languages, research assessment, visibility, credibility, quality assurance, editorial expertise or open access. Moreover, they point at far-reaching implications for both parties, compelled to seeking academic acceptance and researching credibility in today's global scholarly communication while at the same time supporting the national science system through publication in national journals.

Keywords: Humanities journals; National journals; Spanish researchers; SWOT.

INTRODUCTION

In the areas of the social sciences and humanities (SSH), Spain's contribution to the total world article production for the decade 2005-2015 rose from 1.6 to 3.4% (SJR 2015) and the number of SSH Spanish journals registered in the Scopus® database more than tripled from 67 to 297 titles (Scopus 2016). By 2005 the Journal Citation Reports/Social Sciences Citation Index (JCR/SSCI) registered two Spanish journals only and today 50 journals are listed and rated with an impact factor (Thomson Reuters 2016). Against this background, Spanish national scholarly journals seem to be on the rise; however, Spanish researchers, like many European counterparts, are encouraged to shift from national

to mainstream, top-tier, high-ranking or prestigious journals published outside Spain (i.e. international) with a view to gaining scholarly recognition and boosting the scientific power of the country in the highly competitive global academic arena (Duszak & Lewkowicz 2008; Lillis & Curry 2010; Bennett 2014; Muresan & Pérez-Llantada 2014; Hyland 2015). A journal has built a reputation in academia when it has become established as a reference journal in a particular area or discipline, makes informed contributions to the researching community and is given credit for it. The standing of a scientific journal is a long and complex process in which other closely-related issues such as reliability, credibility, visibility, recognition, achievement or quality are involved.

This paper discusses the findings from a survey conducted among ten researchers and ten journal editors in Spain with a view to investigating the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats (SWOTs) of national journals within the humanities and against a global academia. “National journals” is used here as the inclusive term to encompass all scholarly journals which are published in Spain regardless of their domestic or international scope and their ranking or impact factors (if any) in national or international databases and index lists. “Spanish journals” or “domestic journals” will be used in this study as an alternative to “national journals” – also “local”, “small”, “emerging” or “peripheral” in the existing literature (e.g. Bennett 2014; Salager-Meyer 2014, 2015; Bocanegra-Valle 2017).

To the best of my knowledge, there is no previous research that has investigated the SWOTs of Spanish humanities journals in one effort or is based on a dataset gathered directly from stakeholder groups (in this case, researchers and editors). Current literature provides very interesting accounts on particular issues; however, there is a paucity of empirical studies, the strengths of domestic journals have been under-researched and discussions have so far been based on the authors’ own perceptions and experience – e.g. the problems (in terms of weaknesses and threats) faced by national journals of any discipline around the world (Salager-Meyer 2015); the opportunities that online environments offer to humanities journals (Tomlins 2001); the opportunities and threats of humanities journals (Joseph 2007); the threats (Giménez-Toledo 2013; Jiménez 2016), weaknesses (Rodríguez-Yunta & Giménez-Toledo 2013), and opportunities (Abadal & Rius-Alcaraz 2008; Jiménez 2016) of Spanish SSH journals. This study, therefore, aims to partly fill this gap.

THE CONTEXT

The journal publication “business”

The editing of Spanish academic journals is, at present, an altruistic endeavour which requires editorial board members to combine editorial duties and their own researching tasks expecting no particular return (Rodríguez-Yunta & Giménez-Toledo 2013; Jiménez 2016).

Most Spanish humanities journals are produced at universities, research institutions or scholarly societies (i.e. by non-profit publishers) and therefore depend on external funding (Osca-Lluch & Haba 2005; Abadal & Rius-Alcaraz 2008; Rodríguez-Yunta & Giménez-Toledo 2013).¹ If published by university presses or state-supported institutions, journals must adapt their strategic development to an anticipated funding that may vary significantly each year. When journals are published by scholarly societies or associations, they are usually distributed as a benefit of membership. This implies that the journal's budget will depend upon the membership levels and institutional subscriptions gathered each year. To compensate this situation, long-established or well-positioned journals (with some international reach and highly-rated by national index/abstracting lists and databases) may be recouped by for-profit publishers who ensure the continuation of the journal.

Another important issue is the double role played by researcher-editors and editorial board members as prosumers, compelled to produce a publication outlet for researcher-colleagues while at the same time doing their own research and trying to place their studies in other outlets. In most cases, these editors are not rewarded in return by their home institutions – a reduction of teaching hours has long been claimed among Spanish university teachers to compensate their time on journal editing. Also, with a view to preventing institutional inbreeding, scholars undergoing the Spanish research evaluation system for promotion or incentives will be unfavourably assessed against articles published in journals in which the author has any editorial duties or in any outlet from the author's institution.

Journal delivery and open access

Even though the humanities show a strong attachment to the printed page (Tomlins 2001; The Knight Higher Education Collaborative 2002; Adema & Ferwerda 2014), electronic or digital editions supplemented

1. 79% SSH Spanish journals according to Rodríguez-Yunta and Giménez-Toledo (2013).

by traditional or print volumes are on the increase. The majority (if not all) of Spanish humanities journals have initiated the transition from print to digital, either by displaying the main journal features on line or by providing partial- or full-text access to journal content. Humanities journals with a longer tradition have become “hybrid journals” (Adema & Ferwerda 2014) and responded to the print-to-digital shift by keeping a small print run. The youngest journals, however, have been created and developed as online-only journals from start. The availability of software, like the popular Open Journal System (OJS), is facilitating this transition by assisting editorial teams in the edition and publication process from start to finish.

There is a strong tendency to adapt Spanish humanities journals to the open access (OA) model (i.e. free and unrestricted access to full-text articles), especially if these are published at universities – a good example is the University of Santiago de Compostela Press which has recently adapted all its journals to the gold OA model. This trend is promoted, on the one hand, by the Spanish Act of Science² and, on the other, by publishers themselves who need to reach a wider readership and gain more visibility (hence, more citations and impact rise).

Researchers' evaluation and accreditation

Spanish scholars are evaluated and qualified for tenure-track positions or promotions by ANECA (the Spanish National Agency for Quality Assessment and Accreditation). Likewise, tenured scholars (Senior lecturers and Professors) and state-funded researchers are entitled to receive a reward (known as “sexenios” and in force in its present form since 2005)³ by submitting their research published during a six-year period to CNEAI (the Spanish National Commission for the Evaluation of Research Activity). This six-year research activity is assessed against a set of criteria which differs among disciplinary areas – the humanities spread across two main strands: (i) history, geography and arts; and (ii) philosophy, philology and linguistics.

2. The *Spanish Act of Science, Technology and Innovation 14/2011* is in force since June 1, 2011, and contains a text (Article 37) regulating the OA dissemination of research.

3. The *sexenios* were initially established as economic supplements of productivity. Today they also imply a reduction in teaching hours and the possibility of performing a number of academic tasks such as the supervision of PhD students or the participation in PhD committees. For a discussion about this reward system and assessment indicators, see Giménez-Toledo et al. (2007), Ruiz-Pérez et al. (2015). Particularly for the case of how they impact upon Humanities scholars, see Burgess (2017).

Even though studies in other publication outlets (books or book chapters) are valued, journal articles are undoubtedly the cornerstone for a favourable evaluation across these humanities areas (Joseph 2007; Žic Fuchs 2014). As it occurs in other European contexts (Duszak & Lewkowicz 2008; Bennett 2014; Bocanegra-Valle 2013; Muresan & Pérez-Llantada 2014) and worldwide (Lillis & Curry 2010; Lee & Lee 2013; Hyland 2015; Salager-Meyer 2014; Zheng & Gao 2016) the inclusion of a journal in particular abstracting/index lists provides a positive evaluation measure for research recognition and scholarly accreditation, and articles published in top-tier journals are highly valued from the outset. In the Spanish case, articles published in national journals may have an opportunity if they are contained in other (mainly national) lists or, if only at the discretion of the evaluation committee, they comply with a set of assessment criteria (see next subsections). These two last issues sow mistrust in the system, for many humanities researchers believe that these criteria are not straightforward and feel at a disadvantage if publishing in national journals.

Alternative databases and lists

From the assessment criteria above, it becomes clear that there is an alternative road (although apparently not so straightforward) for journal articles published outside the scope of the Web of Science and Scopus. Some of the most relevant databases and index lists which are acknowledged by research evaluation committees and contend for prestige among Spanish researchers are the European ERIH PLUS and the Spanish CIRC, CARHUS+ and MIAR.

The European Reference Index for the Humanities and the Social Sciences – that is, ERIH PLUS (<<https://dbh.nsd.uib.no/publisering-skanaler/erihplus/>>) – emerged from the European Reference Index for the Humanities (ERIH) lists, created in 2008 and developed by the European Science Foundation (ESF). ERIH had a special focus on the humanities and in 2014 it was extended to include the social sciences and a reorganisation of journal categories. As of December 2016, it contained 7,338 SSH journals, 575 of which were published in Spain and covered all disciplinary areas in those fields.

In the national context, CIRC (<<http://clasificacioncirc.es/inicio>>), or Integrated Classification of Scientific Journals, offers the most comprehensive classification of scholarly journals within the SSH. As of December 2016, CIRC contained 37,540 journals, national and internation-

al journals usually showing middle and high ratings, respectively.⁴ CAR-HUS+ (<<http://agaur.gencat.cat/en/avaluacio/carhus/carhus-plus-2014/index.html>>) contains 5,430 journals and uses similar (although less stringent) inclusion criteria to CIRC above. Last, the “Information matrix for the analysis of journals” or MIAR (<http://miar.ub.edu/>) contains 3,677 SSH journals, 418 of which are Spanish.

Quality assurance

In order to be assessed positively, Spanish journals are required to meet a set of quality assurance criteria laid out by the FECYT, the Spanish Foundation for Science and Technology – see Delgado López-Cozar et al. 2006 for a complete list. These so-called “FECYT criteria” or “FECYT requirements” are the main reference for journal quality in Spain and positively qualify those journal articles submitted to the researchers’ evaluation and accreditation system. They mainly deal with journal information, journal dissemination and editorial process. Audited journals are awarded a “seal of excellence” for three-years subject to renewal under the same quality criteria. As of December 2016, 126 humanities and 128 social sciences journals were qualified as excellent.

Internationalisation of journals

Spanish journals are gradually driving towards internationalisation in pursuance with some of the FECYT quality criteria and with a view to widening their reach and availability. The level of “internationalisation”, “internationality” or “internationalism” of scholarly journals in Spain is measured with regard to a number of requirements like presence of foreign authors and advisory board members, capability to promote co-authorships among scholars from different countries, or geographical distribution of readers, subscribers and citers. These and other issues (like choice of publication language, see next subsection) lead to publication patterns that help to rate the openness of a journal and determine its international reach (van Leeuwen 2013; Zheng & Gao 2016). In this drive towards internationalisation, journals endeavour to emulate the profile of global journals and, among other actions, are gradually including the adjective “international” in their title.

4. At present, it is not possible to quantify how many of these journals are national (personal communication with one of the CIRC developers).

Language of publication

The majority of Spanish journals publishes articles in Spanish and also welcomes articles in other foreign languages (mainly English). It may be the case that journals published in some regions and having another official language (i.e. Catalonia, Galicia or the Basque country) also accept the regional language. Regardless of article language, the inclusion of title, abstract and keywords in English is common practice. As of December 2016, 50% Spanish journals were classified by ERIH PLUS as multilingual, 43% Spanish-only, 5% English-only, and 2% used other languages. Spanish journals with a multilingual policy prevail; however, a closer examination of this first group reveals that Spanish and English are the *de facto* publication languages.⁵ This tension may be explained by most humanities disciplines representing “sites of potential resistance to the implicit privileging of publication in English” that is encoded in current national research productivity and assessment procedures (Burgess 2017: 15).

THE STUDY

The main aims of the research were to identify the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats (SWOTs) faced by Spanish humanities journals and explore the role these journals play as tools for the transmission of research against a global academia.

Informants

There were two groups of informants from a number of humanities disciplines and serving at nine Spanish universities (i.e. Alicante, Almeria, Cadiz, Complutense de Madrid, Las Palmas, Murcia, Polytechnic of Madrid, Salamanca, and Zaragoza).

The first group (see table 1) was made up of ten experienced scholars (23 years' mean researching experience), all of them tenured full-time academics. They had published articles in journals edited both inside and outside Spain; however, as is common practice among the humanities, other publications prevailed (e.g. books and book chapters) and journal articles accounted for about a third (or even less) of their total publica-

5. *Ibérica*, a journal with a multilingual policy, is a case in point. Although it encourages submissions in five languages, English was the most preferred option with 69.1% of total published articles, followed by Spanish with 27.2% (Bocanegra-Valle 2014).

tions. Also, the percentage of articles published in Spanish journals exceeded by far the percentage of articles in foreign journals (Re1 and Re5 are two exceptions probably due to their disciplinary areas) and there was one researcher with no international articles (Re9).

Table 1. Informant researchers.

Participant Id.	Disciplinary area	Position	Researching experience (years)	Articles Spanish journals (%)	Articles foreign journals (%)	Other publications (%)
Re1	Applied linguistics	Senior lecturer	15	15.3	17.3	67.4
Re2	Archaeology	Senior lecturer	20	16.3	08.7	75.0
Re3	Medieval history	Senior lecturer	20	30.3	05.3	64.2
Re4	French literature	Professor	40	24.1	09.1	66.6
Re5	Translation studies	Senior lecturer	20	15.3	30.7	53.8
Re6	Linguistics	Senior lecturer	25	20.0	13.3	66.6
Re7	Greek studies	Professor	25	29.1	11.5	59.4
Re8	Latin studies	Professor	28	26.6	13.4	60.0
Re9	Arabic & Islamic studies	Senior lecturer	25	20.0	00.0	80.0
Re10	German studies	Senior lecturer	15	07.0	09.3	83.7

The second group of informants comprised ten journal editors and represented the history and practices of ten humanities journals in ten different areas (see table 2). Informant editors had an added value to this study because they were all researchers with publishing experience as well as editors. As the number of volumes attest, these journals were a consolidated reference in their corresponding disciplinary areas. Most journals were multilingual and published by university presses once a year in both print and electronic formats. They were all listed in the main national databases, more than half had been awarded the FECYT seal of excellence, the majority was indexed in ERIH PLUS and three of them were contained in the most prestigious international index lists (i.e. JCR and Scopus).

Table 2. Informant editors and journals.

Participant Id.	Disciplinary area	Publisher	First published (vols.)	Frequency	Format	Language	Main lists/databases
Ed1	Cultural studies	Society	1993(49)	Quarterly	Hybrid	Multilingual	JCR, Scopus, ERIH PLUS, FECYT, CIRC
Ed2	Languages for Specific Purposes	Society	1996(32)	Biannual	Hybrid	Multilingual	JCR, Scopus, ERIH PLUS, FECYT, CIRC
Ed3	Linguistics	University	1993(23)	Annual	Hybrid	Multilingual	FECYT, CIRC
Ed4	Modern & contemporary history	University	1989(27)	Annual	Online	Spanish	ERIH PLUS, CIRC
Ed5	English studies	University	1988(28)	Annual	Hybrid	English	ERIH PLUS, CIRC
Ed6	Applied Linguistics	University	2002(15)	Annual	Hybrid	English	JCR, Scopus, ERIH PLUS, FECYT, CIRC
Ed7	French studies	University	1984(26)	Annual	Print	Multilingual	ERIH PLUS, CIRC
Ed8	Translation studies	University	1996(19)	Annual	Hybrid	Multilingual	FECYT, CIRC
Ed9	Archaeology	University	1998(18)	Annual	Hybrid	Multilingual	CIRC, Latindex
Ed10	Literature	University	1980(52)	Biannual	Hybrid	English, Spanish	ERIH PLUS, FECYT, CIRC

Surveys, data collection and SWOT analysis

Data were collected by means of a semi-structured survey (see appendix 1 and 2) initially distributed among 15 researchers and 15 editors via email. 23 surveys were completed and returned, and a closer examination of the replies led to a final selection of informants on the basis of the relevance of the replies. In addition to the survey, the websites of the editors' journals were examined for a better understanding of the journal and the editors' comments. The perspectives of these two key groups of people (primary source) and the journal websites (additional source) were brought together in order to get the most complete and objective results in this SWOT analysis.

The survey, initially administered in Spanish, was divided into three sections. Section 1 served to profile the researcher and the journal under the responsibility of the surveyed editor (see tables 1 and 2 above). Section 2 posed five questions regarding issues of general concern among Spanish humanities scholars and helped to clarify replies in section 3. Section 3 contained five questions that addressed the SWOTs. Two versions were designed, one for researchers (see appendix 1) and another one for journal editors (see appendix 2). Both versions contained some identical questions and others were written differently to match the researchers and editors' perspectives – that is, the information to be elicited from researchers was about the researchers themselves, and the informa-

tion to be elicited from editors was about their experience as editors and researchers and about the researchers that published in their journals. Once the replies were gathered, they were classified into each category (that is, as a strength, weakness, opportunity or threat) in an order from the most to the least recurrent reply. After this, connections between the SWOTs were established so that it was possible to map the close positions of some of the categories and provide a benchmark for discussion.

As expected for a SWOT analysis, a set of SWOT categories pertaining to publication practices of Spanish researchers in national scholarly journals surfaced from sections 2 and 3 in the survey. The internal and external appraisals of the target issue that emerged from the replies to the survey contributed to respectively identify the strengths/weaknesses and the opportunities/threats. Firstly, the internal appraisal mainly judged the formal and strategic features of national journals as research dissemination tools: “strengths” and “weakness” are features inherent to national journals and national journal publishing; the former describes the positive attributes and the assets of the situation whereas the latter are those negative issues that can create problems if not changed over time. The external appraisal scanned the research evaluation policies as well as the institutional, economic and competitive environment governing publication practices: “opportunities” are external issues that feature positively in national journal publishing and that can be potentially rewarding if explored. Like the strengths, they represent the positive forces that act upon and work in favor of national journal publishing. “Threats” are also external issues but they exert a negative impact upon national journal publishing unless strategies are adopted to address them. Like the weaknesses, they represent potential problems to be faced.

FINDINGS

The analysis of the surveys yielded ten strengths, ten weaknesses, six opportunities and six threats. These are summarized in a SWOT matrix (see table 3), and presented in turn below.

Table 3. A SWOT matrix for Spanish humanities journals.

Strengths		Weaknesses	
S1	Wide journal scope	W1	Overpopulation
S2	Spanish as a research language	W2	Lack of impact factors
S3	Drive towards improved quality	W3	Low readership
S4	Less competitiveness	W4	Low periodicity
S5	Publication training	W5	Lack of punctuality
S6	Additional publication opportunities	W6	Lack of transparency
S7	Non-profit publishers	W7	Lack of debate
S8	International projection	W8	Amateur management
S9	Attention to domestic issues	W9	Insufficient institutional support
S10	Tendency to open access model	W10	Poor funding
Opportunities		Threats	
O1	Boost to Spanish scientific research	T1	Eventual disappearance
O2	Boost to researching institutions	T2	Conformism
O3	Internationality	T3	For-profit publishers
O4	Societal impact / academic networking	T4	Alternative publication avenues
O5	Use of technologies	T5	Fake open access
O6	Research assessment	T6	Protectionist journal policies

Strengths

Respondents have identified ten main strengths.

Spanish journals tend to have a general scope and cover a wide range of topics within a particular disciplinary area (S1) – e.g. literature, linguistics or phonetics-related studies will be covered by a philology journal. As respondents observed, this fosters research interdisciplinarity and increases the number of target journals for article submissions. This general scope may be narrowed down with the edition of special issues.

Respondents noted that the fact that Spanish is the most popular publication language among the majority of journals strengthened its position as robust language for the dissemination of research findings (S2). Respondents also remarked that thanks to the use of the Spanish language, their work could reach many researchers in Latin America – where a group of emerging countries are conducting very relevant research in particular disciplinary areas. Last, participants reported that the learning of Spanish as a foreign language may also be promoted among non-Spanish speaking scholars who feel attracted to some published findings.

Participants highlighted the increased quality of Spanish journals as of late (S3). They perceived a general trend towards more rigorous publication practices, the implementation of thorough peer reviewing and the adoption of quality requirements. They also recognized and valued that many journals were attempting to reach a higher status and seek recognition both at home and abroad (e.g. more visibility, inclusion in databases and index lists).

If compared with top-tier journals, the number of submitting authors is considerably lower. For obvious reasons, competitiveness is also lower (S4) and, so these participants felt, the chances of getting published are higher. They also viewed as particularly positive that these journals welcome submissions from both novice and experienced researchers. National journals can provide less experienced researchers with opportunities for learning “the tricks of the trade” and get experience (S5). They may provide rejected articles from top-tier journals with a second chance; also enable valuable research which has a limited local interest or is not able to reach the expected standard of mainstream journals to get published and known (S6).

Participants claimed that they were particularly happy about journals edited by non-profit publishers and independent from the large foreign commercial publishers (S7). They argued that knowledge is at the service of society, which happens to be funding the research carried out. In the participants’ view, journals convey a country’s investment for knowledge dissemination and promotion; hence, knowledge is at the foremost and not subject to trading by private companies.

Issues of internationality, understood in terms of the international projection of Spanish journals (S8), and the visibility national journals provide to domestic issues (S9) were also reported as very valuable strengths. Participants argued that national journals support promising investigation which is necessary in a local context but of minor interest elsewhere.

Last, the general trend towards the implementation of the OA model across journals was perceived as a relevant strength (S10) and participants argued in favour of its benefits – i.e. free, universal, faster and easier access, more visibility to research and researchers, more citation counts, more impact.

Weaknesses

Participants noted that there are too many journals (W1), which makes journals compete among themselves and works against the visibility of some papers. Also, the scattering of references leads to a citation drain. Some journals are exerting themselves to become excellent journals, but the low inflow rate of proposed submissions (mainly due to this excessive offer) is one of the major obstacles for the application of strict scrutiny in view of quality.

The lack of an impact factor was expressed by the majority of respondents as a major weakness (W2). The subsequent view that emerged is that this could be alleviated if journals were otherwise contained in

reputable national and international lists which rated their relevance or quality. In the participants' words, a journal which lacks an impact factor or is missing from reliable and prestigious international and national lists is doomed to disappearance.

Participants observed that, as a consequence of W1 and W2, the number of readers is too small (W3), and this has a negative effect upon research visibility and citation counts. Journals "need to grow" by improving their dissemination and reaching a wider audience. Also, they should endeavour to overcome parochialism. Participants felt that journals should address local concerns but against a broader context. This would help to appeal foreign researchers, generate interest on Spanish journals beyond the most immediate researching community and raise readership.

Next, there come two time-related weaknesses. Spanish humanities journals are generally published once per year (twice at the most and in very few cases). This low publication frequency (W4) has immediate negative consequences like delays upon the impact and visibility of published research because it takes longer for a study to come to light and be cited; it also takes longer for its author to get to be known. Importantly enough, the communication of research findings is delayed, even outdated when they come out, and this can get to be particularly detrimental to some disciplinary areas (e.g. archaeology). Also, peer review reports usually take longer, thus keeping the research at an impasse that increases researchers' frustration if the paper is eventually rejected. A relevant issue is that publication times are not strictly met (W5), therefore working against journal reliability and credibility. By way of example, it may be the case that a journal appears "once a year" or "in Spring" (which is too a vague statement), and from its website it becomes clear that the target has not been achieved (e.g. it is Summer time and the Spring volume is not out yet).

Lack of transparency regarding the reviewing and publication process (W6) was another weakness highlighted by participants. They argued that information in journal websites is often poor or outdated, guidelines for authors are often too general, or detailed information regarding assessment processes, publication ethics or OA options are usually missing. Also, peer review reports are sometimes too short and not as thorough as expected.

Many participants voiced the need for more debate (W7). They believed that journals should not only adhere to the publication of original articles and book reviews (as is usually the case), but also work as an open source of discussion by including other sections which are frequent

in mainstream journals – that is, interviews to renowned scholars, critiques or “a response to” notes.

The next three weaknesses are interrelated, were observed by all participant editors, and offer different views on the internal management and publication of the journal. Editors and editorial teams usually have little editorial experience and editorship is not professionalized (W8); rather it is regarded as an academic task which researchers themselves (either as editors-in-chief or editorial board members) undertake to strengthen knowledge advancement in their disciplinary area and support Spanish academia. Moreover, institutional support is clearly insufficient (W9) and funding is poor (W10). As participant editors claimed, these three weaknesses pose medium- and long-term problems that put journals at stake.

Opportunities

For all participants, the existence of national journals gives prestige to Spanish scientific knowledge in general (O1), and to researching institutions in particular (O2). If state-funded, they contribute to making a part of the scientific investment profitable. When journals publish quality work, they also help to raise the country’s scientific output and to place Spanish research at the cutting edge of global scholarship. Participants claimed that institutions are strengthened thanks to the publishing activity of their researchers; departments are boosted and publishing bodies (usually university presses) gain support. The prestige and the visibility of Spanish researchers are therefore also enhanced, and there is an increased awareness of the country’s researching power against a global academia. Thanks to national journals, so participants noted, it is also possible to map the latest research (trends and findings) in a disciplinary area and provide both researchers and editors with clues to guide their research and their journal policies, respectively.

Issues of internationality were also observed by this group of participants as opportunities for researcher empowerment and journal growth (O3). The use of the Spanish language helps to spread Spanish-written research across Latin-American countries. Actions that aim at more internationalized journals (see strength S8 above) were understood as an opportunity for greater dissemination in the short term, and greater impact in the long run. The widespread requirement of articles containing some sections in English (title, abstract and keywords) can help to raise awareness of the disciplinary research carried out in Spain, encourage interest among non-Spanish-speaking researchers and act as a springboard for further follow-up. The insertion of these English sections appears to

be particularly important for those disciplines with a strong connection with Anglophone countries (e.g. English studies, Linguistics).

Both participant researchers and editors referred to the opportunity that publishing or collaborating with a journal entails for building academic networks and making their own communities prosper (O4). Thanks to article publication or editorial work, researchers become visible and are contacted for cooperation at different levels – like networking or the establishment of relationships with stakeholders around the country or abroad (peer reviewing tasks, project collaborations, PhD committees or research stays were the examples provided).

Participants noted that the increasing use of web-based tools and computer-based technologies for the management of journals open up new avenues for research dissemination and more professionalized editorship (O5). They can also help to minimize some of the weaknesses identified above (W5, W6, W8). Websites enhance the visibility of a journal and, if OA, unrestricted access to full texts is made available to a worldwide readership. Participants observed that academic social networking sites (e.g. ResearchGate) can also help to promote the journal and boost its visibility. Likewise, participant editors explained that journal-management software helps them to harmonize information across journals and anticipate information gaps. Also, because processes are automated and accelerated, they help to meet deadlines more easily at the same time they provide journals with more transparency.

Last, these participants highlighted the criteria for scholars' accreditation and research activity assessment laid out by Spanish national research agencies. These criteria were understood as stringent but representing opportunities for reaching high-quality research and publishing high-quality journals (O6). In the participants' view, the value to journal articles given by evaluation agencies in Spain together with the need for an impact factor and the progressive inclusion of journals in relevant national and international databases are (i) making researchers become more aware of the need for quality research publications, and (ii) forcing journals to strive for quality. Participants hoped that this assessment framework leads to a "natural selection" process in which journals adapt, evolve and perpetuate successfully – thereby minimising, or even eliminating, most weaknesses identified above (W1, W2, W3, W9, W10).

Threats

Participants' comments revealed that threats are connected with some of the previous concerns and, most importantly, that some of the weaknesses, even some of the strengths, may turn into threats if not properly ad-

ressed. For instance, lack of funding (W10), poor institutional support (W9) or the inability to get an impact factor (W2) may drive journals to exhaustion and final disappearance (T1). In line with this, participants claimed that a conformist attitude on the editors' and publishers' part is very damaging and may eventually lead journals to a dead end (T2). As both researchers and editors explained, journals should aim high and become competitive. They should endeavour to attain the quality standards that are expected for academic journals both at home (with the requirements established by assessment agencies) and abroad (with the example of reputed journals in a disciplinary area); they should work towards self-improvement and be reluctant to become the publishing outlet of second-rate or sub-standard research.

In relation to poor funding and journal quality above, participants feared that, unable to continue publication on a regular basis due to insufficient funding, some journals might turn to for-profit publishers once they have reached a reputation among national researchers (T3). Participants reported particular fears affecting the journal *status quo* – e.g. loss of control by publishing institutions, loss of Spanish as a main publication language in favour of English and, in the long term, less visibility and impact in the local context or less attention to domestic issues.

Many respondents voiced the emergence of alternative avenues for research dissemination like academic social networking sites, blog posts, personal websites or institutional repositories (T4). Although they do not stand for a proper publication in terms of accreditation or research assessment, these new expressions of scholarship help to bring attention to a wider array of scholarly work (e.g. unpublished papers, datasets, oral presentations) and provide researchers with the longed-for visibility and readership. This publishing practice may even be adopted by some authors, so participants argued, to bypass peer reviewing. Since these new publication avenues may become relevant in evaluative frameworks in the near future (i.e. altmetrics), participants believed that they might challenge the ecosystem of scholarly writing and, particularly, journals.

For some respondents the benefits of the OA model (S10) might be at stake if poor funding leads to article publication charges, pay-for access or subscription-based models (T5).

The last threat refers to the overprotection of national journals (T6). Participants argued that national journals should avoid too a parochial scope, offer a window of opportunity to a more global readership and be willing to implement changes as necessary. Moreover, editors should strive for internationality (as explained for S8 and O3) and pursue an international projection by keeping a balance between national and

international traits. In the participants' terms, protectionist practices lead journals to isolation.

DISCUSSION

This study has found that the SWOTs pertaining to national journal publishing in Spain are shared by both researchers and editors. Moreover, the discussion that follows shows the closeness of the identified SWOTs and the inter-related concerns they encompass. By way of example, a strength could be a weakness at the same time: Spanish as a publication language (S2) is a contributory factor that narrows down readership (W3) and debate (W7) in an international context outside Spanish-speaking countries. It may also hinder the recruitment of regular reviewers and skilled publishing staff (W8).

Findings have revealed that these SWOTs are the natural consequences of (i) the current researchers' assessment criteria that prevail in Spanish researching institutions; (ii) structural or technical deficiencies that impact on the ways journals are edited and published; and (iii) the long-established publishing practices that have dominated national journal publishing in the last decades.

The assessment process to be followed by Spanish researchers for accreditation, academic rewards and research recognition has increased the pressure to publish the results of their scholarly work, particularly via research articles in reputable journals. The current Spanish assessment criteria have impacted on the publication practices of all disciplinary areas, and particularly among the SSH, therefore consolidating the publication standards of research articles and redefining researchers' publication behaviour (Bordons & Gómez 2004; Žic Fuchs 2014; Ruiz-Pérez et al. 2015; Burgess 2017). Unlike other areas, this is in itself a big step among the humanities; having alternative publishing avenues like monographs or book chapters, the humanities need time to naturally respond to the requirements of this new mode of research dissemination. Also, the extensive offer of academic journals and the problems (weaknesses and threats) to be faced by national journals which struggle to attract manuscripts and survive have led them to a fragile situation (Giménez-Toledo 2013).

As figures in the introduction attested, it is evident that the number of Spanish high-ranking journals is on the increase but still very low, and that national journals are not generally on the high road towards research accreditation; this situation discourages Spanish researchers who complain about the marked dependency of assessment criteria on impact

factor, particular that contained in JCR (Ruiz-Pérez et al. 2015). The main consequences that surface from the bonus award to articles published in mainstream journals were studied by Žic Fuchs (2014: 162), who found “mass migration of the best research articles to foreign journals”, and “increasing neglect of Spanish journals” amongst the most remarkable. In the same vein, Salager-Meyer (2015) showed concern for the outflow of national research and pointed at how this practice hindered national journals development; in particular, she talked about the “domestic drain” to refer to those researchers who preferred “to submit their best papers (i.e. the most original, ground-breaking and/or scientifically robust ones) to English-written journals with a high impact factor” and the difficulties faced by national journals “to attract stellar research” (Salager-Meyer 2015: 21; also Salager-Meyer 2014). To overcome this situation, journal quality appears to be the most effective solution, and so has been attested in the literature (Rodríguez-Yunta & Giménez-Toledo 2013; Salager-Meyer 2014; Jiménez 2016). The overpopulation of national journals would decrease as a part of a natural process or either, as Rodríguez-Yunta & Giménez-Toledo (2013) suggest, by implementing merging or co-editing policies. The number of proposed submissions would rise and articles would be selected upon their proved quality. The opportunity is, thus, to reach the required publication quality standards and indexation in prestigious lists.

National journal publishing is riddled with structural (i.e. technical or formal) weaknesses that might be partly overcome, once again, if journals aspired to journal quality and rigorously applied the quality control requirements developed for that purpose by the FECYT and others. By way of example, Ruiz-Pérez et al. (2015) examined the publication regularity of 471 Spanish humanities journals listed in national databases and found that 226 (47.9%) titles did not meet publication deadlines. Weaknesses of a purely formal nature, such as W4, W5 and W6 in this study, are the most immediate features that work against journal credibility certainly because they generate distrust among researchers who need to place their work in reliable journals (Bocanegra-Valle 2017).

The little recognition of editorial duties (including peer reviewing) and the inexistent editorial training opportunities also work against national journals. Editorship is, most often, a marginalized academic activity, and editors are compelled to combine journal duties with their own teaching and researching so that journal editing “occupies a tiny space in their working schedule” (Salager-Meyer 2015: 26). This puts researchers under strain and leaves humanities journals at a disadvantage if compared with journals in other fields under for-profit publishers. As editors need to be assisted by other researchers who are not compensated either,

they often rely on researchers within the same institution or outside, but with whom they have some sort of academic links. This might be interpreted as institutional inbreeding (it was so by some of the participants). Also related to this is the need to offer well-grounded peer review reports so as to ensure content quality (and raise journal influence in the disciplinary area) but, again, peer reviewing is “a selfless process, one that is unpaid and that relies on a sense of professional or collegial responsibility if it is to work properly” (Tomlins 2001: 37). The difficulty of gathering a pool of skilled and learned reviewers, the almost inexistent recognition of this work as part of academic service or research activity and the increased workload at higher education and researching institutions are all issues that are common to journals worldwide (Hyland 2015) but feature prominently against national journals (Baladrón-Pazos & Correyero-Ruiz 2015; Salager-Meyer 2015).

Poor funding and institutional support is another hurdle for national journals that is neither recent nor exclusive to the Spanish context. By way of example, the review by The Knight Higher Education Collaborative (2002) illustrated how poor budgets and the lack of funding of non-profit organizations, which are responsible for the publication of most SSH journals in the USA, were leading to a permanent devaluation of these journals within the academy, redefining the notion of scholarly community and developing new avenues for the publication of academic works – like the University of Wisconsin Library’s website. These conclusions take us back to the fourth threat identified in this study (“alternative publication avenues”). Although journals increase the visibility of their publishing institutions (Abadal & Rius-Alcaraz 2008), most bodies give higher priority to other activities – like patents or projects with the private industry. Funding is thus reduced and this prevents editors from enhancing the journal (e.g. hiring proofreading and editing services) or undertaking long-term projects (e.g. higher publication frequency). Times of shortage or recession impact on the vitality of humanities journals, with delays in publication, a reduction of published volumes per year, the rising of subscription fees to balance out individual and institutional cancellations or even total disappearance. Lack of funding and lack of institutional support are issues that severely undermine editorship and may even be devastating for a journal (Giménez-Toledo 2013; Baladrón-Pazos & Correyero-Ruiz 2015; Salager-Meyer 2015).

Findings point at Spanish as the main publication language in national journals – Osca-Lluch and Haba (2005) found that Spanish was the sole publication language in 73% national journals, and for López-Navarro et al. (2017) the use of the Spanish language prevails in 80% of SSH articles published in domestic journals. The acceptance of Spanish as the

main publication language in most journals was argued in this study as a principled choice and as a timely response to today's global trend that regards English as the main language for scientific research. Contrary to other European countries (such as the Nordic countries or Portugal) where the national language is rarely used in scholarly communication and scientific publications are strongly biased in favour of English (Lillis & Curry 2010; Bocanegra-Valle 2013, 2014; Bennett 2014; Muresan & Pérez-LLantada 2014), the use of Spanish was reported in this study as a strength and an opportunity, rather than a weakness or threat. It is interesting to note that for some respondents this policy is an effective way to protect Spanish scholarly literature, to disseminate local knowledge, and to make space for the local concerns in the current global scholarly discourses. Thus, domestic journals perform as active "alternative centres of research" that yield healthy publishing endeavours (Hyland 2015: 43). Also, Spanish is ready to respond to emerging scientific issues that feature prominently in global publishing because terminology and communicative traits are evolving along with knowledge.

Another relevant issue is that when using the Spanish language for research and publication purposes scholars are deprived from the perceived disadvantage of writing in a foreign language. This disadvantage felt by Spanish-speaking scholars relative to their Anglophone counterparts was quantified by Hanauer and Englander (2013) as generating 11% more dissatisfaction and 21% more anxiety than publishing in their mother tongue. Finally, the SWOTs derived from those comments regarding the use of the Spanish language concur with van Leeuwen's (2013) bibliometric findings on the use of the German language in SSH research: separate patterns of scholarly communication exist on the basis of the expected audience so that Spanish scholars may be using Spanish when aiming at domestic and Latin-American researchers (that is, when publishing in national journals) and English when they are addressing a more international audience and hence publish in mainstream journals. An indication of this tendency is attested on the Web of Science: as of October 2016 it contained 0.55% articles written in Spanish and 91.78% in English (López-Navarro et al. 2017).

From this study it becomes clear that the internationalisation of national journals does not necessarily imply its "Englishization" (that is, dominance of the English language and its writing conventions in academic publishing). Spanish journals portray features of international projection – like increased contributions from foreign authors, co-authorships from different countries, provision of some article information in English (titles, abstracts and keywords), English versions for their websites, international advisory boards (usually participated by renowned

foreign scholars), foreign peer reviewers, inclusion in relevant international index lists both in Europe and Latin America (Bocanegra-Valle 2017). But most importantly is that national journals attain the highest international character by addressing local research topics and basic aspects of knowledge “which are of clear international concern” (Bordons & Gómez 2004: 190) so that they are able to reach out to the widest and most appropriate audience, both at home and abroad.

Also in this process of internationalisation the OA model and the use of computer-based tools appear to be the way forward. The digitalisation of journal content and its free access has multiple benefits and is probably the most rewarding option for national humanities journals in their attempt to increase dissemination, visibility and impact (Tomlins 2001; Abadal & Rius-Alcaraz 2008; Adema & Ferwerda 2014; Salager-Meyer 2015; Bocanegra-Valle 2017). Also, the use of computer-based tools in the editorial process is added value (Joseph 2007) which can compensate for editors’ poor editing experience and amateur journal management.

Journals should get rid of too strong an attachment to their publishing institutions. There was a time when journals were created with a view to expanding departments and research groups, or ensuring publication from particular researchers (usually well known to such departments and groups). This practice created a vicious circle of academic favours that nurtured institutional inbreeding. Jiménez (2016) referred to this as an inherited practice that, together with aversion to peer reviewing and fear of increased competitiveness and local power loss, have for long been the main obstacles to Spanish journal publishing. For some others, this is a taboo topic that needs further investigation (Giménez-Toledo 2013). Although gradually disappearing, many national journals have for long shown high numbers of articles authored by researchers from the publishing institution, authors who repeatedly published in the journal, or special issues edited by inside researchers (very often from the editor-in-chief’s network) (Rodríguez-Yunta & Giménez-Toledo 2013). Today, it is widely accepted that this is no longer acceptable, and even though journal quality requirements and researchers’ assessment criteria ensure that these practices are eliminated, many respondents to this survey reported that, as a consequence of a long-established behaviour, they still cast doubt on the credibility and integrity of domestic journals.

CONCLUSIONS

The insights gained from this SWOT analysis suggest that national journals “have strong reasons to exist” (Salager-Meyer 2015: 20). It has been

shown that, ideally, Spanish humanities journals should have a wide scope, implement issues of internationality to appeal to a global audience, adopt quality control measures, be suitably funded and published by non-profit publishers, support OA, make use of Spanish and English as main languages for research dissemination, be edited and managed by skilled and trained editorial teams with the help of computer tools, and be rated in reputable national and international index lists.

The time is ripe to encourage the publication of research articles in national journals and ensure the continued vitality of humanities journal publishing in Spain. As findings in this study reveal, researchers and editors quite agree on the SWOTs that feature in Spanish journals; thus, they can be further explored and taken to the greatest possible advantage. Since researchers can do very little to change the weaknesses and threats identified, it seems sensible that editors take a step forward and use this SWOT analysis to prioritize issues, build on the strengths, eliminate the weaknesses, exploit the opportunities, develop short- and long-term editorial strategies to counter the threats and respond proactively. In the same vein, the strengths and opportunities identified may be useful for researchers to accept the challenge of publishing in national journals, and for editors to enhance their journal and prosper. By way of example, national journals should keep abreast of the use of management technologies (O5), improve the quality of the journal (S3) and pave the road towards an OA model (S10) while at the same time addressing formal weaknesses (W5, W6), overcoming management obstacles (W8) and minimising related threats (T1, T3, T5).

The qualitative data discussed in this study reflects the views and voices of ten researchers and ten journal editors within the humanities; however, I feel that most findings and much of what has been said may be transferred to the social sciences – by way of example some of the strengths and weaknesses identified in this study were noted by Baladrón-Pazos and Correyero-Ruiz (2015) in relation to communication journals. The intervention of both groups of informants has served to provide complementary perspectives for a more reliable SWOT analysis and develop full awareness of the situation in view of journal strategic planning and decision-making. Despite the number of participants, semi-structured surveys have yielded a set of fairly diverse and rich data based on the diversity of humanities areas and the participants' perspectives as researchers or editors. However, further studies with larger populations of researchers and editors could be conducted so as to carry out a contrastive analysis as perceived by both groups. Also, studies of variations across humanities disciplines would also contribute to a deeper and more accurate description of SWOTs in Spanish scholarly journals.

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APPENDIX 1. SURVEY: RESEARCHERS' VERSION (ADAPTED FROM SPANISH).

Section 2. General issues.

1. When and why have you published in national journals?
2. Publishing in national journals is:
 - a) advisable/desirable b) necessary/obligatory c) useless/waste of time. Please, justify.
3. Please, share your views about the requirements laid down by Spanish accreditation and evaluation bodies.
4. Which language have you used for getting published in national journals? Please, justify.
5. When considering publishing your research in national journals, what issues do you value most and lead you to final decision?

Section 3. SWOT analysis.

6. In your view, what are the strengths of national journals?
7. In your view, what are the weaknesses of national journals?
8. In your view, what are the opportunities of national journals?
9. In your view, what are the threats of national journals?
10. Please, add any other comments you consider about the existence of national journals for the publication of scholarly works and the dissemination of research in your area.

APPENDIX 2. SURVEY: EDITORS' VERSION (ADAPTED FROM SPANISH).*Section 2. General issues.*

1. Please, provide a general profile of the researchers that submit their work to your journal (e.g. novice/experienced, Spanish/foreign).
2. Same as Researchers' version.
3. Same as Researchers' version.
4. What publication languages are accepted in your journal? Does your journal promote the use of a particular language? What submission language is the most widely used and what are the reasons behind?
5. What issues work in favour of the existence of national journals and, in your view, are most valued by your researching community?

Section 3. SWOT analysis.

Same as Researchers' version.

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