WHY SHOULD POLISH SOCIOLOGISTS WRITE ARTICLES FOR FOREIGN JOURNALS?

In exact and natural sciences, which claim themselves to be advanced, it was a long time ago that it was a scientific journal rather than a book that became the basic form of publishing, and the journal article was recognized as the main kind of a scientific publication\(^1\). In these fields, as Thomas Kuhn taught us\(^2\), scientific research is conducted within the framework of paradigms and consists in adding bricks to the edifice of knowledge until a given paradigm becomes irrelevant and another revolution will result in the emergence of a new paradigm. It is the journal article that is such a brick – a contribution. Books in such fields include course books or retrospective reflections, and Kuhn sarcastically commented that “a scientist who writes such a book risks tarnishing his reputation rather than enhances it”.

In the humanities and social science, however, the book maintains its relevance and significance. The book has a lot of unique advantages: it enables scholars to present the extensive, complex and multilateral analysis of an issue as well as to give an overview of the results of a large research project or to lay out and substantiate a developed theoretical concept. It is the book – written in the language that is intelligible for educated people – rather than the article in a specialist periodical that is the medium which helps scientists to communicate with the society and to influence its intellectual elites, and then its broader social circles. What provides

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the best evidence of the great role of the book is the case of Kuhn himself: it was *The Structure of Scientific Revolution* that made his ideas widely known and influential far beyond the circles of academics who read specialist scientific journals.

It is hard to imagine sociology without its greatest works – such as David Riesman’s *The Lonely Crown* or C.W. Mills’ *The Sociological Imagination* – or even without some less significant books in this field. The importance of the journal article is still growing, though. It should be pointed out that a lot of famous books in world sociology are collections of articles, which were by no means written as chapters of planned books, such as, for example, Robert Merton’s *Sociological Theory and Social Structure* or Herbert Blumer’s *Symbolic Interactionism: Perspectives and Method*. In Poland, in accordance with the Law on Higher Education amended in 2011, a “thematically cohesive collection” of chapters in books or of articles in journals may be the form of a doctoral thesis in social science as well.

In this text I will answer the question why Polish sociologists – while not neglecting their own monographs – should join this trend and write articles for scientific journals, especially articles for international periodicals. What I mean here is the journals with cross-border reach – their titles do not have to include words like *International* or *European* – they may even contain Polish, such as “*The Polish Sociological Review*” – an established journal with a 50-year tradition.

Some of the advantages of publishing in journals are quite obvious. First of all, the journal is intended as a place of publication of some smaller, detailed works. By publishing in periodicals one can more quickly communicate and disseminate research results, and make them part of the rapid current of science. It also enables fast reaction of the scientific community, through quoting or criticizing one’s work by other authors. Journals are a kind of noticeboard – a widely recognizable place in which everyone interested looks for the newest publications and important information in their own field. Periodicals thoroughly select “manuscripts” sent to them; thus, they include works which are important and indispensable for specialists in particular subjects; they help them to be up to date. In science, it is all about being first, so publishing in the journals which come out quickly enables authors to confirm their lead.

Less obvious advantages are more interesting.

Journals have their own hierarchies, which are well-known to scientists. Some of them are formed in the course of an informal exchange of researchers’ subjective opinions, while others are based on the quantitative analysis of the quotes from the articles published in a journal in other periodicals. Authors aim at publishing their articles in the best possible journals. Not only do they mean to make their articles commonly known, but they also want them to be published in a medium
that is highly valued, popular and often quoted; to put it shortly – a “prestigious” one. This is not an easy task. It is not enough to publish a scientific text. It also has to undergo the process of evaluation and needs to be reviewed. Placing a text on one's own website or even on an institution's frequently visited site is not equivalent to its publication. It is only made available to the public. It is not the matter of a medium because the text included in an Internet magazine or the one announced by a journal in the on-line first mode are actually publications. As a result, in sound science the value of an article may be assessed on the basis of the prestige of a journal which evaluated and published it, as well as on the basis of the position of this periodical in hierarchies of journals (a lot of publishers provide information about this position on their websites).

While there is an established hierarchy of journals, there is no such hierarchy with regard to joint monographs or post-conference volumes. The value of texts included there may be sometimes assessed on the basis of a publishing series in which a given volume appeared, of the name of an editor and a publishing house, or of the significance of the conference the output of which a given volume presents. However, no one has built such ranking of joint publications based on specific criteria, which would be analogous to journal hierarchies. This poses a serious problem when trying to perform different evaluations. In the “parametric evaluation” of scientific institutions carried out by the Ministry of Science and Higher Education of Poland, all books, irrespective of their substantive value, were calculated in the identical way. Chapters in joint works were evaluated using the same method. As a result, since no way of differentiating their value has been developed yet, they received a very small number of points. Consequently, in the case of better scientific institutions, they were automatically eliminated from the basis of a parametric evaluation, in which only a certain quantum of the highest scoring works were assessed.

That is why one may evaluate the achievements and capabilities of an author on the basis of the titles of journals in which they publish their articles. Publishing in top periodicals of a scientific disciplines, either domestic or international ones, is a measure of one's scientific mastery. In order to define a researcher's position in science, we do not need to read his or her texts and investigate what new elements they include – it is enough to know the prestige of journals he or she publishes in. When an author submits a serious application for a grant or a post, the first information that is expected from him/her is the list of five recent publications. Looking

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at the titles of journals they appeared in, we form our preliminary opinion about the applicant, which will guide our further reading. On this basis the position of an institution or even a branch of knowledge is also evaluated. In the United States, for example, rankings of sociology faculties are published. They are ranked according to the number of articles published by their employees in the top ten of the most frequently quoted sociological journals.

When we send an article to a journal, our work becomes subject to the procedure of a detailed evaluation and the same refers to us ourselves as researchers. The hierarchy of journal titles determines the hierarchy of publication achievements.

The higher we climb up this ladder the more valuable scientists we are. The publication is an “academic banknote”, which can be used for buying a title, promotion, recognition or a grant.\(^4\) Scientific banknotes have different face values as the number of publications itself is not a measure of scientific achievements, just like the number of banknotes of unknown face value one has in their wallet does not indicate the wealth of a person. Therefore, in a well-organized system of science there are journals in which it is very difficult to publish an article (the rejection rate in the “American Journal of Sociology” and the “American Sociological Review” reaches 90%!). Such journals constantly enhance their attractiveness and stratification position as all authors would like to publish their works in the periodicals where it is the most difficult to do. Moreover, the editorial team makes sure that the position of their journal as measured by its “impact” will not deteriorate and that it will be still desirable to publish an article there.

Journals provide us with the basis for self-categorization. As sociologists, we know that the concept of looking glass self: we can see our reflection in other people’s eyes and in social mirrors; these looking glasses tend to be distorting but the ones made in Poland usually show a flattering image. Thus, a junior research worker is informed about the appraisal of his/her work by the boss, and this appraisal is by and large positive. Reviews of a doctoral thesis written by scholars proposed by the boss are hardly ever critical. When a candidate applies for the post in a competition, he or she submits opinions written on his/her own request. Only if a person submits applications for grants, he or she receives reviews whose authors remain anonymous for the applicant. Only when one sends an article to a good journal, either domestic or international, he or she has a chance of getting a double blind review for the first time in his/her professional career. That is why the article

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\(^4\) J. Pękala, *Mechanizm „peer review” na przykładzie polskich czasopism naukowych* [The Mechanism of “Peer Review”. The Case of Polish Scientific Journals], The Institute of Sociology at the University of Warsaw 2009, non-published MA thesis.
which has been anonymously evaluated in the scientific market without any informal recommendations and has been chosen for publishing by an established journal may serve as the basis of reliable self-categorization. If authors wish to have their value measured, they have to undergo such evaluations.

When we write an article with the intention of publishing it in a good journal, we know the level and requirements of this journal and we are aware of the fact that our text will be admitted only if the reviewers decide that we have met these requirements. Reviews are a kind of “scientific panopticon”, and “the reviewer hides within the author himself” as he feels his eye on him already at the stage of writing\(^5\). When we are disciplined (the double meaning of this word is very useful here), we try to write as good text as we are capable of writing, and before sending it we collect comments from colleagues and undergo the procedure of peer reviewing – the quality control conducted by competent specialists appointed by the editor, unless the manuscript is rejected outright, at the initial review. As each text is anonymized and only the editor knows the name of the author, in no way can the reviewers’ opinion about the author influence the assessment of his or her work. We will be thoroughly reviewed, we may receive the text back for revision, which might be quite serious. Sometimes, we may even have to revise it again. The text greatly benefits from such work of editors and reviewers, and thus we, the authors, benefit as well.

The article in a scientific journal has a very significant advantage over the chapter published in a post-conference volume. The conference lecture is addressed to specified circles, in which a lot is taken for granted. In turn, the article is directed to the whole academic community, and its content should become integrated into the impersonal system of knowledge. Thus, the article has to be self-comprehensive. The lecture has the form of oral transmission of knowledge\(^6\), and even if it has been written, it is meant to be delivered as a speech or a direct presentation. Lectures given at conferences are usually short because there is limited time and organizers tend to reduce the size of texts to a dozen or so pages. That is why post-conference volumes rarely include solid and extensive dissertations. Nobody delivers complete treatises at conferences, it would not make any sense anyway. However, texts of different level of advancement are presented there – later, in their full versions, they are annotated with expressions such as “new, revised, updated, enlarged, augmented version of the paper presented at…”

\(^5\) Ibidem.

There is also growing pressure, also in Polish sociology, on publishing in the English language, and a strong preference for the works in this language in the 2010 parametrization has probably reinforced it. Therefore, we are facing a difficult choice of the language of a publication: should it be Polish or English?

Sociology participates in two circulations of knowledge. It is an international science, in which the global community of sociologists communicates in the languages of international communication, the most popular of which is English. It is also a national science, integrated into the history, culture and language of its country, and fulfills a number of functions in the broader society: such highly valued “sociological imagination” may be disseminated in the society only in its own language, not in any foreign one. Therefore, sociologists should publish in two languages – they should use English for communication with the world and write in their mother tongue to reach their Polish colleagues, students and other domestic readers. There is no contradiction between these two tendencies – sometimes it is worth publishing the same texts in both languages. It is often pointless to publish a manuscript only in English, especially in Poland. The very fact of publishing an article “in English” or even “abroad”, is not a significant success if the journal has limited reach or low level – it is certainly not a bigger achievement than publishing it in “Studia Socjologiczne” [Sociological Studies], Polish quarterly journal, translator’s note).

What Polish sociology shows the deficit of, however, is not publications in the Polish language, but the ones in good international periodicals\(^7\). There are a number of reasons for that: one must write a good text, have it translated and, additionally, take into account the possibility that it will be rejected. Moreover, it does not seem obvious that it makes sense to publish abroad as it is possible to become a professor in Poland without publishing a single work in an international journal. The problem I want to emphasize is of a linguistic nature – what I mean here, however, is not the language as a means of communication, but as a tool for thinking.

For a Polish sociologist’s article to be published in an international journal it is not enough if it is interesting for the author and well written in English. What the author has to say must be said in terms that will be comprehensible for the audience that do not have the extensive knowledge of Poland. Thus, it cannot be taken for granted as it is in the case of a conference lecture. It must be presented in a language that is free of context references and allusions. The text must provide solu-

tions to a problem formulated “against a background of knowledge”, expressed in the language of sociological theory or at least of comparative analysis. In other words, “Poland” should be replaced with the value of a variable, theoretically or comparatively important.

Twenty or thirty years ago Poland was interesting for global sociology as a country. It was the time when a number of articles with the words “in Poland” in their titles appeared in international journals. At present, neither the issue of Poland nor Polish authors themselves are attractive any longer. Poland remains to be important and interesting, but as a strategic research site (Merton’s concept), in which unique values and combinations of sociological variables occur, rather than as an object. These values and variables enable the comparative analysis of theories and generalizations, all the more so because sociology is at a high level of development in Poland. Therefore, it is not the manuscripts with the expressions “in Poland” or “The Case of Poland” in the title, but the ones that are entitled “The Evidence from Poland” that will attract the biggest attention. Unique Polish experience must be conceptualized, interpreted and presented theoretically. Moreover, it must obviously be written in good, standard ELS – English as Language of Science.

Encouraging Polish sociologists to write good texts for sociological journals, and particularly to send them to renowned international journals, I did not appeal to the interests of sociology as a discipline because I have an impression that arguments referring to one’s own interest are more effective in Poland than the ones appealing to the common good.

**REFERENCES:**


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8 A. Sułek, op.cit.

