Case Study 1

South African Review of Sociology

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Acronyms and abbreviations

ASSA	Association for Sociology in Southern Africa
ASSAf	Academy of Science of South Africa
DoE	Department of Education
HE	Higher education
ICTs	Information and communication technologies
ISI	Institute for Scientific Information
NRF	National Research Foundation
OJS	Open Journal Systems
OS	OpeningScholarship
PKP	Public Knowledge Project
SARS	*South African Review of Sociology*
SASA	South African Sociological Association
SASOV	Suid-Afrikaanse Sosiologie Vereniging
SPARC	Scholarly Publishing and Academic Resources Coalition
UCT	University of Cape Town
UNISA	University of South Africa

Introduction to the scholarly publishing case studies

This case study is one of four case studies of scholarly publishing practices carried out at the University of Cape Town (UCT) as part of the OpeningScholarship (OS) project, funded by the Shuttleworth Foundation and delivered through the Centre for Educational Technology. This project addresses the opportunities that 21st century information and communication technologies (ICTs) and open dissemination models could offer for enhanced communications and more effective knowledge dissemination in a South African university. In the case of scholarly publications, this is not a matter only of more effective dissemination of research results among scholars, but also the potential for new ways of tackling research communications and enhanced possibilities for ensuring the delivery of the university's mission and strategic goals, as well as enhancing the impact of its research.

The broader questions that the project asks are how the ICT systems that are in place could help deliver much greater intellectual capacity; how a university like UCT could make the most effective use of its research knowledge; and how it could avoid becoming a dependency, relying on its own intellectual output rather than on imported content. On the national level, the question would be how to use ICTs to grow access to South African (and African) knowledge to deliver the aspirations of national policy, as set out in the National Research and Innovation Policy and of the key objectives identified in the university's own strategy.

What is emerging increasingly, as universities across the globe engage with the potential of the internet to achieve international distribution for their research, is a recognition among many leading institutions of the strategic importance of doing as the Ithaka Report on scholarly publishing recommends and bringing scholarly publication activities closer to the core missions of universities (Brown, Griffiths and Roscoff 2007: 17). For example, at a recent symposium of the Scholarly Publishing and Academic Resources Coalition (SPARC) in the US, Catherine Candee, executive director, Strategic Publishing and Broadcast Initiatives, office of the president of the University of California argued that universities need to meet the challenges of modern society and in order to do so need to have an adequate publication and communication system. Equally, Harvard University, faced with what Stuart M. Shieber, recently appointed as Officer of Scholarly Communications at Harvard, described as the market failure of the traditionally accepted scholarly publishing system, decided that it 'needed to make as a statement of principle that that scholarly writing should have broadest availability possible' (Shieber, Candee and Smith 2008).

The case study approach was chosen in order to provide multiple perspectives that could then be mapped against the broader context in order to highlight both the opportunities and the constraints that are encountered in attempts to maximise the potential of ICTs in university communications. The selection of case studies aimed to cover a range of scholarly disciplines as well as varied strategies for the use of ICTs in scholarly publishing. These were selected not only to profile effective and innovative use of ICTs for communication at UCT or explore situations in which the use of ICTs could improve performance, but also to reflect the ways in which UCT's strategic research goals are (or are not) being achieved through its research publication practices.

The research questions asked were:

- How can an institution such as UCT best build collaboration for scholarly communications across the institution?

- How effectively is UCT making strategic use of publishing activities on campus to profile the institution's mission, particularly in relation to international developments and best-case examples?
- What could an ICT system such as that at UCT offer in terms of new and opened up communications in teaching, learning and research?
- How can the ICT systems that are in place help deliver much greater intellectual capacity, allowing the university (and by extension, the country) to rely on its own intellectual capital rather than on imported content?
- What lessons can be learned from those departments making effective use of ICTs and new approaches to research dissemination?
- How can existing projects – both departmental initiatives and donor-funded projects – be coordinated to achieve an effective and collaborative institution-wide scholarly communication system?

What policies and practices would need to be encouraged if the university is to achieve the maximum impact for its scholarly communications for research, teaching and learning, and community engagement?

Background: the OpeningScholarship project

For universities, the changes brought about by new information technologies go beyond simply easing information transmission – although this itself is potentially a powerful tool; they are affecting the way research is conducted, how teaching and learning takes place, and how scholars, students and the broader community communicate with one another. Most important, new modes of production are developing, increasing the potential for non-proprietary approaches to knowledge production in collaborative enterprises. There is a growing movement worldwide, using the potential that the internet offers for democratising knowledge, aimed at providing open and equitable access to information and knowledge; in particular, access to publicly funded research.

For a university like UCT this offers both challenges and opportunities. A major opportunity could be to use publishing activities being carried out by its academics to add to the reputation of the university and to further its goals. This potential is cogently expressed at the outset of the influential Ithaka *Report into Scholarly Publishing in a Digital Age:*

> We will argue ... that universities give up too much by withdrawing from publishing. They give up the opportunity to enhance institutional reputation and prestige. They reduce their ability to influence what gets published – and, therefore, not only what gets read but also who gets hired or promoted. They give up an opportunity to enhance the quality of what is published through the rich dialogue that is enabled by bringing editors into the fabric of relationships among scholars. And, as is often decried by open access advocates, universities sometimes must pay excessively high prices to gain access to published scholarship .... There is a great need, as well as a great opportunity, to revitalize the university's role and capabilities in publishing. (Brown *et al*. 2007: 6)

These new opportunities pose questions in a context like that of South Africa, about where the responsibility (and the advantage) lies for the dissemination of scholarship. There is no major scholarly publishing industry

in South Africa and the dissemination of research knowledge is handled in a patchy way by a variety of voluntary efforts and mostly small public benefit and commercial enterprises. Unlike the USA, where a number of leading universities are reclaiming scholarly publishing, using a variety of innovative models, in South Africa, the universities still do not – with the exception of UNISA Press – consider journal publishing as part of their mission.

In South African universities (and UCT is no exception) there is a general assumption that scholarly publishing is not the job of the university. Although the university tracks and supports authorship in accredited publications, to ensure a revenue track through Department of Education (DoE) subsidies, the OS project found that there were no central university records of journal publishing activities taking place in university departments and research institutes. There were also no records of which academics were editors of local or international journals. While it is difficult to back this up, given the paucity of the available records, the OS researchers gained the impression that UCT, with the possible exception of the Law Faculty, is comparatively low on the scale of South African universities when it comes to the number of journals edited or published by its researchers, nor is it one of the South African universities considering the establishment of faculty or institutional repositories. In other words, in spite of its considerable investment in an ICT infrastructure, UCT does not yet seem to have recognised its potential use to enhance the university's publishing efforts, profile its research output and improve its research output to the public.

The role of local journals tends in any event to be underestimated in South Africa, as a result of an emphasis on scholarly rankings and evaluation based on international impact. In fact local publications could (and should) play an important role in providing a better knowledge of what is being done within a country or region and helping to create networks of researchers nationally and within comparable countries (Guédon 2007).

Executive summary

This case study describes the use of ICTs in the publication of a scholarly society journal, *South African Review of Sociology* (SARS), in a context in which the Scientific Editor is a senior member of an academic department at UCT. The journal is of particular interest as a case study for three reasons:

- It provides insights into the challenges and opportunities that are faced in society publishing in a South African context.
- It explores the problems faced when an editorship of a journal is held by a senior academic who receives little or no institutional support in the publishing endeavour.
- SARS is in talks with an international commercial journal publisher, which is currently canvassing for South African humanities and social science journals to add to its list. We examine the implications of such a relationship, and what the implications may be for local knowledge production and scholarly publishing, as well as the journal's response to the potential of open access publication.

The case study reveals the difficulties faced by small society publishers struggling to ensure the survival of established journals that represent significant knowledge capital, but which are undermined by an environment characterised by a lack of national and institutional support for scholarly publishing; rapid technological development; shrinking library budgets and increasing international competition.

The questions raised in this case study are: what advantages would there be for the university if it were to invest in supporting journal publishing; what advantages would be offered by digital and open access publishing; and what ICT systems and platforms might facilitate effective journal publishing?

Findings

The fact that there is so little support for scholarly publishing in South Africa is causing the country to fall behind international developments, with South African journals struggling for survival as print journals rather than grappling with what is happening internationally. At the same time leading international universities are investigating ways in which online publishing can profile university research and start to place research dissemination at the centre of their operations. Given the very poor representation of African social science publications in the global arena, this is even more important than in the north, where such issues are now receiving considerable attention.

Rationale for the selection of SARS

The *South African Review of Sociology* (SARS) was chosen as a case study for the OS project because it exemplifies the primary issues and challenges experienced by a journal published by an academic society (in this case, the South African Sociological Association). The journal is also of interest in that, after decades of self-publishing, it is currently in talks with an international commercial publisher to take over its publishing operation and as such, represents a growing trend in South Africa. This scenario highlights some of the concomitant dangers of small independent publishers taking the 'lifeline' of international commercial publishing because they are unable to continue without financial and infrastructural support.

The issue of valuable intellectual capital leaving South African shores and becoming part of an overseas publisher's list speaks to UCT's mission statement,[1] which states the university's desire to 'recognise our location in Africa and our historical context' and its commitment to 'value and promote the contribution that all our members make to realising our mission'.

Nationally, the Department of Science and Technology's investment in the ASSAf scholarly publishing initiative demonstrates a desire to grow South Africa's intellectual capital. Internationally, there is an increasing awareness among leading research universities of the strategic value offered by digital publishing for universities that wish to leverage the strength of their research efforts.

Objectives

The objective in investigating SARS's publication strategy was to identify both positive and negative dynamics inherent in an editor of a society journal fulfilling his/her tasks from within a university; and to gain a sense of how the publication efforts of such a journal are contextualised in the institutional framework.

1 http://uct.ac.za/about/intro/

The case study also aims to examine how a journal based in a university department and struggling to continue its publishing operation independently could use ICTs (in this case, online publishing and electronic journal management systems) for greater efficiency, to disseminate its research better and ensure its sustainability.

Methodology

Given the time limitations of the OS project and the difficulty of securing interview time with senior academics and other role-players, a preliminary desk review was undertaken to establish SARS's online visibility and journal profile, as well as any other data such as publication policy, management structure and historical legacy. Preliminary discussions were also held with the journal editor, at his request and with members of the journal's editorial board. Their concern was to evaluate the options that faced them: of following the recommendation of the Society Board that the journal move to publication with Taylor & Francis (T&F); or of following the recommendations of the ASSAf report to choose an open access route (Gevers and Mati 2006).

Following the desk review, a questionnaire was compiled on the specific issues of journal context, editorship, editorial boards, peer review, authorship, bibliographic indexing, finance, online publishing and marketing/visibility. The intention behind the five-page questionnaire was to establish an overall picture of the journal and ascertain its approach to formal aspects of the publishing endeavour.

The intention was to interview the Specialist Editor of SARS with the questionnaire as a basis for discussion. In doing the case study interviews, we did not envisage that any of the respondents would answer every question on the questionnaire, but rather that the list of questions would serve to tease out the issues pertinent to the journal in question.

When considering the interview scenario, we hoped that editors would view the OS investigation as non-threatening and supportive. Once the journals for case study were identified, we approached editors via email, stating the project's objectives and requesting their participation. All of the editors approached were amenable in their response and interviews were scheduled.

Although editors agreed to interviews and were responsive to email correspondence, it was implicit that only one interview slot was realistic in terms of time constraints. Interviews were therefore tailored to gain as much information as possible in a limited time while keeping the approach conversational. Journal interviews lasted between an hour-and-a-half and three hours and took place at the UCT offices of the respective editors.

Journal background and profile

SARS is the official journal of the South African Sociological Association (SASA). As the journal's website[2] states, the primary purpose of the journal is to: 'promote the development of sociology and the social sciences in South and Southern Africa. It does this primarily through inviting, refereeing, and publishing high quality and original scholarly articles.' Established in 1969, the journal was previously published under the title *The South African*

2 http://www.sasaonline.org.za/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=46&Itemid=75

Journal of Sociology and subsequently as *Society in Transition.*[3] It has been publishing under its current title since 2006. The Editor is appointed by the SASA Board.

SARS is primarily a subscriber-based, print journal. Subscriptions are managed through the society, and SASA members receive the journal free of charge (as well as qualifying for a reduced rate for the annual conference) as a benefit of membership.[4]

The journal produces two issues per volume, with the most recent published issue being Volume 38(2) (2007). Copyright of all material published within the journal is vested in SASA. The journal is accredited by the Department of Education (DoE), which entitles the institutions to collect publication subsidy for their academics who author articles in the journal. This in itself is of potential advantage to the university, as the UCT Research Office has acknowledged.[5] If university support could help ensure that this accreditation status is retained by ensuring timely, continued production of journal issues, this would undoubtedly be of advantage to those UCT scholars publishing in the journal and could earn enhanced revenues for the university.

SARS is one of only a handful of pure sociology journals published in South Africa (although other political, anthropological and cultural studies journals do publish research within the discipline). The most prolific of these journals, *Social Dynamics* (the in-house journal of UCT's Centre for African Studies) has been published bi-annually since 1975, and is currently negotiating a relationship with international commercial publisher, Taylor & Francis.

The field of sociology is generally considered to be saturated with international content. SARS receives most of its submissions from southern African authors, and has a rejection rate of 80%.

SASA as a scholarly association: history and context

SASA itself provides an interesting case study that casts some light on major issues facing South African social science research publications. The history of sociological associations is closely linked to the apartheid state in South Africa and to support for and resistance to apartheid ideology. The first professor of sociology in South Africa, appointed at the University of Stellenbosch in 1932, was in fact the architect of apartheid, Hendrik Verwoerd (Alexander *et al.* 2006). In this phase of development, sociology was concerned mainly with apartheid-focused policy issues, such as 'native administration'. In a second phase, professional sociology dominated, leading to the formation of departments of sociology in South African universities and the first professional association, the Suid-Afrikaanse Sosiologie Vereniging (SASOV), in 1967. SASOV voted to be a whites only organisation, causing a radical divide in the discipline, and in 1971 the Association for Sociology in Southern Africa (ASSA) was formed as a regional association that rapidly took on a strong anti-apartheid political identity (Alexander *et al.* 2006; Webster 2004) – a commitment to public sociology. As Webster notes, '[d]uring the eighties, ASSA became an academic forum for a rich and vibrant sociological community in close dialogue with the new social movement struggling against apartheid' (Webster 2004: 30–31).

It is interesting to note that it was its public and political focus that provided the vibrancy that characterised ASSA in this period. This provides a challenge for scholarly publishing in South Africa: the loss of dynamism

3 These name changes are in themselves problematic, as they have the potential to create a disruption in the bibliographical tracking data for the journal.

4 Tina Uys (former SASA treasurer, managing editor and president), pers. comm., 22 September 2008.

5 Interview, 7 April 2008.

that has resulted in the transition from oppositional scholarship to the professional and often managerialist approach of a post-apartheid social science scholarship. This is reflected in an organisation such as SASA, which was founded in 1991, merging the two previous associations (Alexander *et al.* 2006: 223). Membership of SASA appears to have fallen, averaging about 100 members in the last decade (out of about 350 sociologists in the country, which is in itself a declining number). There have been times when the organisation has barely functioned, according to Alexander *et al.* (2006). In comparison, the American Sociological Association has 13 000 dues-paying members and 5 000 delegates at its annual conference (Burawoy 2004: 15).

The discipline faces a number of challenges particular to this period in South African higher education (HE) development, from rising student numbers, declining social science departments, the loss of key academics to government and consultancy, falling salaries and, most importantly, conflicts and contradictions in government policy about the strategic focus and the public role of the social sciences. Whereas the Human Sciences Research Council, under the leadership of Mark Orkin and then Olive Shisana, has been successful in defining its public role and positioning itself strongly in the field (Webster 2004; Alexander 2007), supporting this role through investment in a strong open access publishing programme, Alexander argues that SASA's performance has been mixed, but that it has fallen short in its ability to protect the position of sociology in the system:

> However, our own professional organisation, SASA, can also play a role. In the past it has been too quiet. It did not take the initiative in actively responding to the NRF [National Research Foundation] over ratings, did not speak up when Mbeki belittled sociology, and does not, unlike the natural sciences, engage with the NRF and policy makers on a regular basis. We could have more influence than we do. But strengthening our organisations is also about improving our scholarship and its impact. (Alexander *et al.* 2006: 239)

As far as society publishing in this context is concerned, Burawoy provides a critical perspective on the outcome of what he regards as an excessively 'professional' approach to scholarly journal publication, arguing that there is a particular conformity in articles in the major American society journals of sociology, arising from an evaluative approach to content and a long drawn-out peer reviewing process that, he argues, 'provides a damper on innovative, unconventional and critical research' (2004: 16).

In South Africa, he argues, an evaluative system borrowed from the natural sciences means that 'sociologists, along with other social scientists, will now be rated on their international standing, itself measured by peers from foreign universities and publications in "international" journals ... South African sociologists are being asked to compete with Western sociologists on their hyper-professional and lavishly funded terrain' (Burawoy 2004: 24).

Against this background, the challenges facing a society journal in South Africa emerge more clearly, in contrast to the powerful scholarly societies of the USA and Great Britain, which can use their dominant position to manage journals that both profile their disciplines in a powerful context and provide a strong revenue stream to support the society's activities, often in partnership with commercial publishers (Zeleza 2003). As Burawoy argues (2004), it is problematic to try to benchmark South African scholars' publications against American sociology, but equally problematic to resort to a narrow definition of the 'local'. What is needed is rather to identify the universal in the particularity of South African scholarship, or, as Zeleza argues, to recognise the parochial in American scholarship and the international in African publication (Zeleza 2003).

The publication of SARS, in the context of its scholarly society, therefore poses a number of questions about the transformation of HE in South Africa, about the relationship of South African scholarship to its global context, and about the mechanisms for managing effective scholarly communications in South African social sciences.

Publishing a society journal in South Africa

Society and other small, informal publishers face a difficult task. There are large professional societies worldwide with substantial resources whose publishing wings rival those of small commercial publishers, and equally powerful societies that partner with large commercial publishers; but in Africa society journals are generally under-resourced and lacking in the expertise to publish effectively in the current electronic environment.

Zeleza lists five challenges facing African scholarly journal publishers (including scholarly societies):

- The dependability of their institutional base.
- The availability of financial resources.
- The state of editorial capacity.
- The quality of submissions.
- The development of marketing and distribution infrastructures. (Zeleza 2003: 405).

Society journals are generally published in one of two ways: they are either self-published by the society itself; or the society maintains the editorial function of the journal (handling submissions, peer review and editing), while the publishing is managed by a commercial publisher with a list of multiple journals. Independent 'self' publishers adopting the former route of publication face an added challenge in that they are not only competing with professional organisations with experience and resources at their disposal, but are also producing only a single journal in competition with a dominant international publishing industry that has elaborate systems in place which are able to produce multiple journals, and also generate substantial revenue from bundling their products. In addition the latter have the power to leverage subscription deals that effectively tie university libraries to their journal packages.

One of the biggest challenges for small, independently published journals is distribution and marketing. Management of a subscriber list is a specialised function, and smaller publishing operations often do not have the required computer software or expertise to manage this task effectively. Marketing of a single title (as opposed to a list) is also an arduous exercise – not only because you are competing with bigger players with extensive resources, but also because the industry is more receptive to titles which are marketed as part of a list.

Zeleza describes how in Africa since the 1980s there has been a decline in journal publishing as a result of financial constraints, managerialist policies that require universities to generate their own revenue, and pressure generated from the crisis in journal subscriptions in northern countries, which effectively squeezed out subscriptions from other regions. In Africa (and this includes South Africa) publishers are reluctant to take on the financially marginal business of journal publication, preferring to concentrate on the profitable school textbook market (Zeleza 2003: 406–407).

Management structure and conflict in society publishing

In trying to understand the dynamics of society publishing, it is useful to consider the management structures which underlie the society publishing exercise. Given the wildly varying status and resources available to different societies, it is difficult to generalise about society publishing. The one thing, however, all society journals have in common is that they are being run in an environment where an academic organisational structure is undertaking the professional role of publishing. The mere desire to produce a top-quality research publication is not enough to ensure the sustainability of a journal – real expertise and resources are required.

One of the difficulties in the society management structure is that the interests of the journal are sometimes not concurrent with the interests of the society. Many societies see the existence of a respected associated journal as key to their enterprise of developing their discipline, and in some cases will infer that the journal's standing is indicative of the society's standing. This does not mean, however, that society and journal management will see eye to eye on strategic management decisions. A society may, for instance, have the development of emerging authors at heart and place pressure upon its editor to publish the work of inexperienced authors, while the journal's Editorial Board may have resolute ideas about issues of peer review, quality control and citation rate.

The issue of split focus between society and journal management is exemplified in SARS. As the SARS Scientific Editor has stated: 'They [the society] want more aggressive marketing. They think that is going to make us more serious as a journal. I think that's actually a misunderstanding. To become more prestigious we really need to get ISI [Information Sciences Institute] rating … almost an impossible task [given than another South African social science journal, *Social Dynamics*, is already on the list].' This perception of what constitutes a journal's success is a common issue of conflict between society and journal management. A society's goals of market presence and status need to be reconciled with an editor's desire for good author profile and increased citation; and the management of both enterprises needs to reflect this synergy.

The issue of an editor's autonomy is an important one. While the support of the associated society is crucial to the success of a society journal, it is also crucial that the editor be trusted and left to her/his devices in terms of running editorial matters as she/he sees fit. This is, after all, why they have been elected to the position. The SARS Scientific Editor mentions a tension that he has experienced with the SASA Council: 'There have been complaints that the papers authored by black scholars have a higher refusal rate than those authored by white scholars.' This comment highlights a scenario in which a society's lack of understanding of the issues of peer review has lead to its criticism of an editor's decision-making.

This comment echoes Zeleza's description of the difficulties faced by African editors in the wake of the depredations caused on African research capacity by the structural adjustment programmes of the 1970s and 1980s and the resulting decline of standards of research writing. Zeleza argues that this needs to be tackled on two fronts: one is to conduct widespread research and research writing development programmes and workshops; the other is to persuade established diaspora scholars to publish in Africa-based journals. In this regard, he berates university systems such as that in Ghana – and this is certainly true of South Africa – that undermine the potential for the development of high quality African journals through the self-fulfilling perception that African publications are inherently inferior, by rating 'international' journals more highly for promotion purposes (Zeleza 2003: 410–411).

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Societies have very different relationships with their associated journals in terms of how closely they can be said to 'hold hands'. Generally, the Scientific Editor of a society journal will be elected at the society's annual conference and the Editor is made accountable to the society through this forum. In most cases the Editor will automatically hold a seat on the society's Executive Council, an indication of the place and esteem held for the society's publishing role. It is interesting to note that SASA does not give the SARS Scientific Editor an automatic place on its executive, and one wonders about the extent to which this affects the relationship between the society and the journal, and thus reinforcing the Editor's involvement in the society's mission and inhibiting the society from coming to grips more fully with the intricacies of the publishing exercise.

The interview with the SARS Scientific Editor also revealed interesting issues of perception, as is exemplified in his comment: 'We wanted to move from a society journal to an international one … [My attitude] is that this is a parochial journal and the society wants to change that. I do not think this can work.'

As a society, SASA is introducing a number of changes aimed at improving the journal's quality, circulation and its role in promoting South African sociology. The changes are the result of the decision taken at the 2008 SASA Annual General Meeting in Stellenbosch, and include the introduction of a new approach to the editing and running of the journal, which will henceforth be done by an editorial collective comprising a minimum of four to six editors. This signifies a shift from the past system, where the journal was run by a single editor with the support of the editorial board. This change in editorial management structure was brought about in light of new plans to increase the journal's frequency from two to four issues a year.

The changes brought about by SASA are also in line with its ambition that the journal should play a proactive role in promoting, supporting and nurturing junior sociologists (i.e. those currently registered as either full-time or part-time Masters or PhD students in sociology, as well as staff members who have recently entered the discipline and have no publication record). SASA President, Simon Mapadimeng, argues: 'In the past, black African scholars in particular were marginalised by the publishing sector in South Africa ….The higher rejection rate of submissions by black authors is worrying as it suggests that there is no support given to ensure that their papers are upgraded to acceptable standards and eventually published. We believe that SARS, under the new editorial collective, should be better positioned to address this problem and play a key role in transforming sociology in South Africa.'[6]

The role of the SARS Scientific Editor

The SARS Scientific Editor is appointed by the SASA Board and has tenure of three years. The Scientific Editor is responsible for soliciting content, receiving submissions and managing the peer review process. The current Scientific Editor holds a senior teaching and research position in the Sociology Department in the Faculty of Humanities at UCT, and conducts all his editorship tasks over and above his departmental workload (for no financial remuneration). He receives no administrative or logistical support in this role. This situation is common among journal editors (of both society and general academic journals), in that many of them hold positions of responsibility in university departments, and most receive little or no financial remuneration for work done.

The SARS Scientific Editor currently receives no support or acknowledgement from UCT for work done on SARS, although his efforts are recognised at a departmental level. This lack of acknowledgement has been identified as a central issue by the OS project. It is not only problematic in that the crucial role of editorship (an invaluable

6 Simon Mapadimeng, in litt., 3 October 2008.

contribution to the knowledge society) is left to a single individual to manage on his/her own; but also in that the university does not track, develop or get any mileage out of this work.

Institutional support for journal publication: A comparative international case study

The case study of the conversion of one of Canada's leading sociology journals to an online open access format provides an interesting comparison with the situation of SARS from a number of perspectives (Haggerty 2008). The *Canadian Journal of Sociology* is a well-established generalist journal run out of the Department of Sociology at the University of Alberta. It was a University of Alberta entity, having been established at the university some 31 years earlier.

Interestingly, its major competitor is the *Canadian Review of Sociology*, a society journal. With an impact factor of 0.700, the *Canadian Journal of Sociology* ranks above a number of comparable American and British journals. When Professor Kevin J Haggerty was asked to take over the editorship of the journal in 2007, it had an electronic version online, but was managed almost entirely on paper, through the University of Toronto Press. The press handled journal submissions on paper and the outgoing editor suggested the use of Open Journal Systems (OJS) to provide an integrated platform to manage submissions and editorial processes. The new editor was interested in investigating the possibility of moving the journal to an open access model. The University Libraries at the University of Alberta support open access publishing and were able to offer an online hosting system using the OJS publishing platform.

As far as aggregators like EBSCO were concerned, it seemed that they would be willing to continue to list the open access journal in their offerings. This appeared to be because of their desire to keep as comprehensive a stable of journals as possible.

The journal has been helped by the availability of dedicated assistance and support, in the form of a highly competent editorial assistant and the availability of a dedicated person in the library to assist open access journals on campus.

Most of all, however, the Scientific Editor cites the supportive attitude of the university administration as a defining feature of the journal's success. This is worth quoting at some length:

> Looked at differently, however, I have not been so much a beneficiary of good luck, but have capitalized on the type of infrastructure, priorities and culture that should characterize a prominent research university. Repeatedly, I have heard anecdotes from editor colleagues who lament continually bumping up against an administration that does not recognize the importance of editing academic journals, and is consequently obtuse as to the need to provide even rudimentary support. The exact opposite has been the case at the University of Alberta. Everyone I have encountered recognizes the contribution made by quality journals, and the centrality of editors in ensuring their success. Moreover, they are attuned to the prestige value that can come from having such journals housed at your institution. Wherever reasonably possible, my university has provided the types of support (financial, institutional, moral) required to run a journal. If I was at a lesser university where the value of research and publishing was not as highly regarded I suspect that such assistance would not be as forthcoming. (Haggerty 2008)

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Institutional support for South African journals

One of the biggest problems SARS faces is publishing on time – another common issue among South African journals. The impact of not publishing timeously is far-reaching, and, other than the obvious issue of research being delayed in its dissemination, lateness has a significant impact on a journal's status. Editing a journal, managing the peer review process and seeing content through to print is an arduous, specialised role, not least when one is holding a full-time teaching and research position. It is therefore no wonder that many such journals fail to publish on time, with some journals being years behind. This situation affects author perceptions of the journal, as authors understandably (though not perhaps correctly) equate a journal's ability to publish on time with its rigorousness and overall status.

The failure of many small local journals to publish on time has a dangerously negative effect in reinforcing the perception of local journals as second-rate. One wonders what the effect would be if editors such as the SARS Scientific Editor were to receive logistical support or remuneration (or release from some of their teaching obligations) for their editorial work. It must, however, be stressed that timeous publication does not rely solely on an editor's ability to manage his/her workload efficiently.

The SARS business model

There is no standard business model for society journal publishing. Societies will generally adopt a hybrid business model based on their size and the resources that are available to them. There is, however, one thing they all have in common: the need for sustainability. Until now, most societies have adopted the strategy of selling print copies of their journal to a subscriber base (which, to varying degrees, partly comprises its membership). This approach has, however, not delivered the returns necessary to ensure sustainability, and societies have been forced to be creative in finding financial models that not only ensure their continued existence but also allow them to compete in the rapidly evolving online environment.

SARS is run on income from its subscriber base and some augmentation of funds from SASA. The journal, however, suffers from the predicament of dwindling subscriber numbers (a problem faced by most local journals). The SARS financial model is intrinsically bound up with SASA membership, because SASA members automatically receive print copies of the journal as part of their membership. In the past, this arrangement has been an assurance for society journals since they have been guaranteed a critical-mass subscriber base. A changing academic and economic environment has, however, meant that the nature and popularity of professional societies has changed quite substantially in the last ten years, as there are increasingly fewer tangible benefits to society membership. This has radical implications for SARS, as SASA membership currently accounts for approximately 50% of its subscriber base.[7]

SARS is self-published by SASA in that the society pays the costs of publication and retains copyright to all published material. Production is outsourced to an academic publishing service provider, Forum Press, which provides the same services to two other academic journals. In this system, the SARS Scientific Editor oversees submissions, peer review and general editing. Once material is accepted and bundled for a specific issue, it goes to Forum Press,[8] which takes care of production – known as 'pre-press'. This is done on a flat fee per page,

7 According to Tina Uys (former SASA treasurer, managing editor and president) SASA membership averages around 120 members a year (Pers. Comm., 22 September 2008), and Forum Press indicates that the total the total subscriber base is around 250.

8 Ian Raper, Director: Forum Press, Pers. comm., 12 August 2008.

per table and per scan or figure. Forum Press plays the role that would normally be fulfilled by a commercial publisher, in that it takes care of proofreading, page layout and readying for print. They also manage the print, although the cost of print is invoiced directly to SASA. While an issue is at print, Forum sends a mailing list of society and other subscribers to the printer and copies are despatched directly from the printer. Additional copies of each journal issue are then warehoused by Forum, whose circulation wing, Scientific Publishing Services, fulfils orders for back issues for a percentage of returns.

SARS' print run is about 250 copies, and it has never exceeded this. If 120 of those (48%) go to society members, it means that there is an independent subscriber base of around 130 subscribers. It is not clear how many of these are institutional. Electronic full text of all journal content is available on Ebscohost via subscription or on a pay-per-view basis where users pay a once-off fee to access individual articles.

Without having direct access to SARS and SASA's ledgers, it is not possible to speculate on the journal's current financial status. It is, however, safe to say that the current situation presents many challenges for long-term sustainability. SARS is typical of a society journal straining under the weight of a publishing model that is struggling in the current economic and academic environment. This may be one of the reasons that they have entered into talks with T&F.

A way forward?

It is widely acknowledged that South African journal publishing is in crisis. Many society and other journals do not have the resources to continue publishing under the prevailing circumstances of declining subscriptions, sharply increased print prices and soaring postage costs. Other than the costs associated with the traditional print publishing route, there are also costs associated with electronic publishing – and they are often severely underestimated. Even if content is given away freely, there are significant costs involved in formatting text for online publication, hosting and data curation.

The issue of abandoning print copies for online publication is a hotly debated one, and opinions and practices appear to vary quite widely between disciplines. Journals with dwindling print subscriptions are, however, increasingly finding that there are limited options. Not only have rapidly evolving indexing and search technologies made it impossible for journals seeking citation not to have an online presence, but in many cases it is simply too expensive to produce a print version of the journal. This is especially the case for small 'self'- or society publishers, who have little prospect for cross-subsidising or bundling content. Abandoning print is also not guaranteed to save a journal in economic crisis. As mentioned, there are still costs involved with electronic publishing, and the move into this realm requires specific expertise in decision-making about open access content and alternative ways of securing revenue.

In short, it is not merely an issue of money. Small, independently published journals are drowning in an ocean of new technology and massive international competition. In this situation many are faced with little option but to publish with commercial publishers.

Publication with Taylor & Francis

SASA was approached by a representative of T&F at a conference and, as the Scientific Editor puts it, the SASA representative was 'converted and started pushing for it', even though there has 'not been any serious debate

about the logic as to why we're doing it'. SASA is, however, adamant that they are not prepared to give up their copyright to published content, which has been identified as a potential stumbling block in negotiations. The Scientific Editor has also expressed reservations about losing the journal's African focus, which is not necessarily commercially viable. The major advantages appear to be financial relief from the increasing costs of keeping the operation afloat, infrastructural support – specifically in terms of web presence – access to international markets and the resultant status.

T&F appears to be soliciting South African journals quite aggressively and it has held a number of workshops for journal editors to persuade them of the advantages of this potential partnership. Part of their motivation appears to be the fact that the Web of Science is engaged in a process of widening the range of developing world journals that appear in the index. T&F has been working in partnership with UNISA Press, publishing selected journals from their list for the international market, with UNISA Press maintaining its South African market and the print edition for African subscribers. While the availability of lower cost subscriptions for African countries does address the issue of access, this is no substitute for the unrestricted and wide access that could be provided by an open access publishing model.

Presented with the advantages of open access publication, particularly given the potential for support from the ASSAf initiative and its government support, the Scientific Editor and some members of the Editorial Board were convinced that this would be the better option. As Zeleza (2003: 407) points out, 'publishing scholarly journals through partnership with commercial publishers is fraught with difficulties and can undermine a journal's intellectual integrity and affordability'. However, there was no immediate prospect of support either from the university or from the academy and it appeared that the society was keen for an immediate solution. It is unfortunate that South African intellectual capital is being lost to overseas publishers for lack of a support system in this country for its scholarly output.

Electronic publishing and its potential role in furthering the SARS

Publishing agenda

Financial aid is not the only form of rescue required by small society journals such as SARS. Other than the basic need to stay afloat, a journal's primary aim is to generate citation. To do this, available technologies need to be exploited as far as possible. The beauty of current online technologies is that small publications (irrespective of where they are located) can compete with larger players for visibility if technologies are used to their full potential.

There are many measures of success for a journal other than its impact factor (which is determined by number of citations generated proportionate to number of articles published in a given period). A reputation for good practice, sound peer review and good author relations are also markers of a journal's status; and there is potential for ICTs to make a significant impact in these areas. In order to suggest how SARS could better use available technologies, it is necessary to get an overview of the journal's current electronic status.

The journal's current electronic presence comprises two linked pages from the SASA website[9] -- one for author guidelines and one for back issues. This may appear adequate in terms of how the journal fits in with the overall society structure, but there are negative implications in the journal not having a home page of its own. If, for instance, one Googles '*South African Review of Sociology*', the result is a list of links to the SASA website. The journal title does not appear in any of these descriptors. One could argue that an intuitive browser would surmise that the *South African Review of Sociology* is associated with the South African Sociological Association (and the journal is clearly identified on the SASA home page), but this is not adequate in the large-scale harvesting of content that has been made possible by Web 2.0 technologies.

Clicking on the 'Back issues' link from the SASA home page takes the user to a page listing two SARS volumes and six back issues of *Society in Transition.* Links are identified only as 'SARS 38(1)' or 'SiT 35(1)' and it is not clear in which years the volumes/issues were published – a significant factor if, for instance, you are looking for 'that Brown article I think was published in 2006'. Clicking on a volume/issue opens a pdf file of that issue's table of contents (with the exception of the most recent issue, which delivers a 'Not found' error message). This is useful only because it enables you to see what was published in a particular issue – there is no abstract available for articles and there is no indication of how you can access any content.

It is extremely problematic that SARS article metadata (title, authors) is not available as searchable text. SARS 37 (2006), for instance, contains an article by Stephen Berrisford and Michael Kihato, 'The role of planning law in evictions in sub-Saharan Africa'. If one Googles this title, the only match is a link to a page on the website of the University of the Witwatersrand School of Architecture and Planning, which lists the article as part of its publication output (presumably because one or both of the authors is based there). Numerous searches using author names and combinations of keywords failed to produce a single result for the article, although there were plenty of hits relating to the authors, as they have published prolifically in the area of land issues and eviction. This is in all likelihood because the pdfs of the tables of contents on the journal website were generated from scans of the print versions, as opposed to being made from the open files in which they were originally generated (invariably desktop publishing programmes such as InDesign or QuarkExpress). Scanned pdfs are akin to images and no content within them will be picked up by a web search unless specialised technology has been applied in the scanning.

This scenario exemplifies two important issues. (1) One would assume that the issue of evictions in sub-Saharan Africa could be of universal import, and it is not inconceivable that an overseas researcher, for instance, would be searching for information on the topic. The SARS article on this subject (by two authors who appear to be prolific on the subject) is entirely invisible to such a researcher. Even if one was searching with all the article metadata at hand, it simply does 'not exist' in the online environment. The implications of this for loss of citation opportunity are obvious, and it is scenarios such as these that make the inclusion of journals such as SARS on the ISI list 'impossible'. (2) The situation does nothing for author relations and for the confidence of authors publishing locally. Visibility is a key issue for authors and the inability to source an article online reinforces perceptions of the inefficacy of publishing locally. An author cannot be blamed for choosing to publish elsewhere.

Apart from the inability to access content on the internet, there is also no indication of how one can subscribe to the journal. This is aggravated by the fact that its distributor, Forum Press, does not have a web presence. Forum is the only gateway for subscribing to the journal (other than becoming a SASA member) and if one did

9 http://www.sasaonline.org.za/

wish to subscribe you would need to have a previous print copy of the journal in hand to access the necessary contact details. One would, in short, have to go to some lengths to access the journal (whether in print or electronically), unless you were already receiving it, borrowing somebody else's copy or accessing it via your library.

Other than the internet, there are other technological solutions SARS could be using to publish more effectively. Electronic publishing management systems such as the open-source OJS and the proprietary ScholarOne products are not only commonplace in journal publishing, many would argue that they are crucial to publishing effectively.

OJS is a journal management and publishing system that has been developed by the Public Knowledge Project (PKP) in Canada through its federally funded efforts to expand and improve access to research. It can be downloaded free of charge on the internet. ScholarOne, a Thomson Reuters business, has three web-based, peer review workflow products – Manuscript Central, Abstract Central and Proceedings Central – and, like OJS, all three of these products are aimed at increasing efficiency and reducing internal technology costs in the scholarly publishing exercise.

OJS and Manuscript Central are essentially web-based online submission and peer review applications which automate the submission process and allow for easier administration, editing and reviewing capabilities. Using either of these systems, authors upload submissions onto a journal website and an editor will be informed of the submission via email. The editor is then able to assign a reviewer via the site database and the paper can then be tracked and monitored at every stage of its progress as it moves through peer review, revision and eventually publication. Editors, authors and peer reviewers all interface with the content through a web-based system and the different products have specialised tools for optimising various stages of the process. It is generally acknowledged that the management of the peer review process is one of the most arduous tasks faced by editors, and web-based systems such as these offer great relief in the administration process. They are also beneficial to authors, who can log into the system at any stage and access details of their paper's status. Systems such as OJS and Manuscript Central reduce the time taken to make decisions, eliminate paper distribution costs, decrease administrative overheads and ultimately can have the effect of increasing submissions.

The SARS Scientific Editor was not aware of systems such as OJS and Manuscript Central, but admitted that such a system would probably 'save' him time and effort, and was enthusiastic about learning more about the prospects of using such a system. When asked how he currently managed submissions and review, he responded: 'I keep a file with all this written down. It's tedious if I make a mistake or forget [something].' It was clear that he would welcome the support that an automated system could provide.

Lessons learned

For relatively little investment, the university could provide ICT support to increase the effectiveness of journals operating on campus. This could include:

- The provision of a shared open source journal management system that could make online journal editorial, production and distribution functions more efficient and more professional.

- Once a national platform for South African scholarly publication has been set up, as part of the implementation plan of the Scholarly Publishing initiative of the South African Academy of Science (ASSAf), it would be in the interests of the university to address the ways in which it could interface the journal publishing efforts taking place on campus with this national initiative, in order to profile UCT's contribution to scholarship.
- Bibliographical expertise and metadata management to ensure that journals are properly recorded for library purposes and university tracking of its own publications and their contribution to research.
- Advice on copyright policies and consistent copyright management, including the use of Creative Commons licences.
- Better integration of publishing functions so that journal editors can share expertise and create a community of practice.
- Advice on mechanisms to ensure search results and high citation impact.

Overall, the findings are that there would be strategic advantage in the university taking up its publications and championing them at top level. It could emulate Harvard and other US universities by setting up an Office of Scholarly Communications in order to maximise its effectiveness in research dissemination across faculties, the library and the administration.

Conclusion

SARS exemplifies the situation where a journal straining under the current effort of publishing could benefit enormously from better use of ICTs. In fact, SARS is exactly the kind of entity that ICTs can best empower. In its current situation SARS has no online visibility other than its presence on Ebscohost; and if a journal is not visible and it is not servicing its authors adequately it has little hope of survival – or, some might argue, reason for continued existence. The OS project hopes to make it clear that while the former could be true, the latter is not necessarily the case.

There is strong argument that the current DoE list of accredited journals is weighted with 'dubious' titles with little or no international presence, nor any citations outside of South Africa. A number of them have content dominated by one or two institutions and in some instances the same department that publishes the journal (Gevers and Mati, 2006: 58). While a review of the list may be required, it is important that a process whereby smaller entities such as SARS become casualties simply because they do not have the knowledge or resources to adopt the necessary technologies and adequately curate their metadata online should be avoided. Many journals such as SARS have proud traditions and have been publishing and making invaluable contribution to the South African knowledge economy for decades. To risk their closure or their forced move to commercial publishers outside the country simply for the sake of their survival is highly undesirable, and represents a significant loss to the country.

It is clear that journals like SARS require help. Editors such as the SARS Scientific Editor are overburdened with an array of responsibilities and the responsibility for mastering new technologies and staying abreast with developments in a rapidly changing environment cannot be placed squarely upon them. In cases such as SARS, where a journal has a supporting society, there is perhaps room for the society to play a greater supporting role;

but they can only do so if they are supplied with information on what is required and if it is in their interest to further invest in the publishing endeavour.

From the perspective of the institutions that house journal editors, a lesson has perhaps to be learned from the leading US, UK and Australian universities that are beginning to recognise the strategic value of scholarly publishing to a university that is able to use ICTs to enhance its reputation and demonstrate its public role in making knowledge available for the benefit of the public good. As Catherine Candee of the University of California put it: 'Publishing and communication enhances [sic] knowledge, not just scholar to scholar but scholar to student as well as to the public. In the digital realm, [there is] no reason to plan to enhance scholar to scholar communication without considering how to improve the knowledge, the creation and scientific output of the university to the public' (Shieber *et al.* 2008).

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