

Upper and lower circuit in the publication of scientific journals

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Upper and lower circuit in the publication of scientific journals

I recently read in a blog a comparison between publishing in a journal edited by Springer and in an open access journal (Polese, 2021). The good-humored author writes that publication in the so-called top rank journals, usually edited in English, is as desirable and expensive as the latest type of iPhone; while publishing in the others is like having any generic old smartphone, with a broken screen: it works but does not impress. It was a metaphor on the reaction of the researchers towards the journals, indexes, and evaluations that rank them - dictating grants, awards, promotions, etc.

Polese was commenting on Plan S, launched in 2018 by twelve countries belonging to the European Research Council, based on the principle that science must be public. This project translates as public funding, data, and open access publishing for science. The timeline of Plan S envisaged 2021 as its implementation date, with its pace and conditions agreed upon by each national scientific community (Schlitz, 2018).

Even though it seeks public science, Plan S foresees the payment of fees. What fees? Fees paid by the authors to publish and by readers to access articles, remunerating editorial services. And how much does it cost? An extreme example is the prestigious journal Nature, which charges €9,500 to make research papers free to read (more than R\$50,000) (Else, 2020). Closer to home is the experience of trying to access an article and bumping into a publisher's paywall or receiving an e-mail that appeals to our vanity, claiming that our work has attracted attention and that the fancy-name publishers are interested in publishing it for a modest fee. This last form of publication is frequently said to be "predatory", even though the amounts requested for processing are much smaller: from US\$ 100.00 to US\$ 300.00 (less than R\$ 1,600).

What separates Nature and its processing fee from these e-mails that we frequently delete as spam is obvious: the value lies in the quality of the editorial work, which guarantees impact to the article and respect to its authors. The tags materialize into figures, corresponding to the quality and prestige of the work.

In Latin America, scientific publishing usually happens in journals edited by universities and scientific associations. We wouldn't need a Plan S since we already have public funding and open access. As in the top-tier journal environment, our publishing involves specialists in different positions: editors and assistants, editorial board, layout designers and programmers, authors, referees, and librarians, and translators, almost all employed by public universities.

However, we have a problem that threatens this successful system. Much of the work is voluntary: since publishing is not recognized as part of a professor function, their labor is not registered as part of the workload, nor does it appear in progressions or productivity reports. Editors and programmers are often students on short-term, low-value grants, compromising the continuity of editorial projects. In general, the financing of our journals covers only the payment of undergraduate research scholarships and the service of publishing houses. These oversee

formatting the papers following the specificities of scientific publishing, in which each graphic signal must be carefully picked, and the formatting parameters have become a computer language.

As stated above, the value of a journal lies in the quality of its editorial work. *Geosp* is indexed with Qualis A1 and its quality is recognized by its inclusion in Scielo. However, it is difficult to maintain this unpaid work while there are increasing technical demands, mandatory translations, accelerated publication pace, etc. The professionalization of scientific publishing is a necessity and is also in the best interest of universities and the entire scientific community. Our institutions are classified according to their productivity, and publishing is a requirement for obtaining graduate degrees. Beyond quantification, our research deserves better spaces for dissemination and preservation.

We, geographers, are familiar with the ideas of upper and lower circuits of the urban economy, as proposed by Milton Santos half a century ago. It suffices to remember that economic activities work through their differentiation and complementarity in terms of circulation, capital, volume, and technology - bigger in the upper circuit and smaller in the lower circuit. Moreover, technological modernization governs both circuits, well integrated in the upper circuit and signaling directions to the lower circuit (Santos, 1979). It is important to remember that one circuit is not better or worse than the others; the upper circuit is modern, while the lower circuit adopts different degrees of modern practices and logics.

Scientific publication by commercial publishing houses, said to be top-tier, belongs in the superior circuit. In which circuit does *Geosp* fit? Our journal is at the border between both circuits. On one hand, an almost symbolic budget and volunteer work; on the other hand, the specialization of the editorial board and the attention to the sophisticated norms of quality editing.

Milton Santos discussed the borders between circuits, stating that

The problem is to find the forms of relations between the two circuits that can open a dialogue between them and, at the same time, improve the situation of the individuals currently involved in the lower circuit, transforming the latter to improve its productivity. This solution should lead to an organization of space more capable of favoring the redistribution of national resources, and at the same time, an organization of production that authorizes a more equitable distribution of resources and men in space (1979, p. 289).

The recognition of editorial work as part of the activities developed in universities would allow to keep improving the journals, with less improvisation. As extension activities, as scientific dissemination, we have the means to increase the value of the editorial work developed in Brazilian and Latin American academia. We already have public science; it is up to us to build its continuity.

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