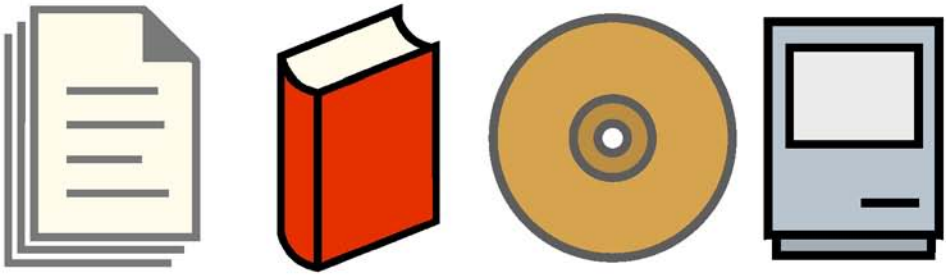
THE ACADEMICS' GUIDE TO PUBLISHING



ROB KITCHIN & DUNCAN FULLER

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Preface

This book has its genesis in three interrelated exchanges that have taken place over a number of years. First, we have had numerous discussions about our own, and colleagues' experiences of writing and editing, attending and organizing seminars, workshops and conferences, of liaising with editors and publishers, and career progression. In the main, these discussions have consisted of the swapping of notes about how things seemed to work, alongside much griping about apparent injustices and the lack of transparency of many arrangements, procedures and practices in the world of academia in general, and writing in particular.

Largely as a consequence of these discussions, our second set of conversations have concerned articulating a critical analysis of transformations in the nature and organization of higher education, the increasing pressures on researchers to be more 'productive', and the cultural and institutional politics surrounding publication. Here we have become increasingly alarmed by the recent restructuring of the higher education sector across different countries, the corporatization of many universities, the widespread adoption of business-like management practices, and the increasing pervasiveness of neo-liberal imperatives in shaping university life (see Fuller and Kitchin, 2004).

As a result of this unease, our third set of discussions have concerned how life could perhaps be made easier for students and colleagues who are caught within such transformations and pressures, but are unsure of how to successfully publicise their work, or even of the options available to them.

Together these exchanges have spurred us on to explore the 'rules' of publishing research, and the extent to which increased transparency and lucidity of the many aspects of publication might help unsettle traditional and new power relations within the higher education sector and disturb exclusionary and (self-)exploitative practices by allowing increased

scrutiny and reflection on what actually goes on, and how, in publishing research.

In many respects this process of explanation grew out of a conference we organized – 'Beyond the Academy? Critical Geographies in Action', held at Northumbria University in September 2001. While focusing on the politics, ethics and practicalities that academics face in feeding into policy, engaging in activism, undertaking consultancy work, contributing to local/national debates/politics, striving to engender change in local communities, and creating critical classrooms, this conference also had a recurring concern with what one participant (Jenny Robinson) called the 'production nexus' of publishing. A particular focus here was the seemingly 'black box' nature of publishing, the unwritten 'rules' of dissemination, and the growth and pernicious nature of research accountancy schemes.

It became clear from the dialogue at this meeting that many academics felt they were becoming increasingly drawn into a variety of new 'webs' of power, where status within these 'webs' was largely defined by research outputs. A focus here became what might be termed the 'performative and politicized dance of the academic', with academics simultaneously dancing in different ways (as teacher, supervisor, mentor, administrator, committee member, chairperson, researcher, writer, editor, reviewer, adviser, examiner, manager, conference organizer, activist) to different 'tunes' set by different parties (university, students, colleagues, collaborators, contributors, publishers, committees, academic bodies, research and funding agencies, research participants) (see Fuller and Kitchin, 2004). In addition, discussion also highlighted, ironically, just how little academic analysis there has been of how modern academics have been coerced into self-disciplining and exploiting their own labor for gain, what these 'gains' might be, and/or perhaps more importantly, who ultimately benefits.

From here, we therefore began preparing training materials for use by predominantly (but not exclusively) young researchers who wanted to learn how to disseminate their research effectively and strategically. Initially these were for use within our own respective institutions or at wider postgraduate training weekends. However, this soon developed into a short Internet-based guide for students within our own discipline. The latter emanated from two 'meet the editors' sessions held at the 2002 Association of American Geographers' conference held in Los Angeles (co-organized by Lawrence Berg and Rob Kitchin). At those sessions we suggested the idea of a resource website for postgraduate and faculty designed to illustrate how

the publishing process works, answer basic questions about writing and publishing geographical work, and provide a number of links to useful websites, journals and publishers. It was also envisaged that, while being a useful resource for those contributing to journals, it might be a valuable site for editors – somewhere to refer an author whose paper needs significant attention, for example – while also drawing them into a critical discussion about the politics and ethics of dissemination practices. The idea was enthusiastically endorsed by the editors of twelve journals[1] (now more than thirty) and we began the process of piecing together the content of the site.[2]

The final stage in this journey has been the development of this book, which expands significantly on the website we created, and is designed to raise awareness of issues in publication and inform regardless of specialty and stage in one's career.

Our motivation in each of these related projects has been twofold. On the one hand it has been to provide advice about publishing and presenting, two pursuits that, at best, can be challenging and confusing for those unfamiliar with their workings, and at worst can lead to fruitless self-exploitation and (academic) misery. On the other it has been to generate discussion, debate and the exchange of ideas and experiences, while also exposing the ways in which research is embedded in a complex and transforming institutional landscape saturated with 'calculative practices' (that is, how concepts such as researcher 'productivity' are measured and issues such as 'worth' and 'value' are defined) that shape researchers' work routines and publication strategies.

These two motivations have shaped the book that follows. In the main, we have sought to produce a handbook that provides a comprehensive guide to all the different ways that research can be published, making transparent their structures and practices and presenting useful advice in a form that is succinct and easily digestible. There are of course other such guides or handbooks on the market (some of which are listed in Appendix 1). However, all of the ones we are familiar with focus on one or two particular aspects of publishing and presenting. For example, there is a number of books concerned with how to write in general and for different media (for example, books, journals, popular press) or how to self-publish or undertake public presentations. Few place publication in a wider context of career development and progression, or the organization and regulation of academic life.

In no way do we seek to be overly prescriptive in our discussion, trying to detail a set of cast-iron rules that, if followed, will deliver guaranteed

results. Indeed, we believe there are no sure-fire rules that will ensure successful publication. There are, however, strategies and tactics that, if adopted, will improve vastly your chances of sharing your ideas and findings with your intended audience(s). Our aim has been to set out such strategies and tactics and provide useful advice and observations. In doing so, we have attempted to tread a fine line between appearing to sanction and endorse existing neo-liberal projects such as the Research Assessment Exercise in the UK (or other research accountancy exercises elsewhere) by detailing 'successful' publication strategies, and a more pessimistic line of simply attempting to help researchers survive in such publication cultures. Rest assured, we are not attempting to transform legions of underperforming academics into an army of clones, drones and/or research accountancy fodder!

Our hope, instead, is that this guide is informative and useful, and that it helps you to publicise your research 'successfully', whatever stage in your career you are at, to a level and quality defined in large part by you (and not simply your academic paymasters). We hope it makes your academic life that little bit easier, and helps you to avoid unnecessary pitfalls in disseminating your research. We also hope it raises questions about the practices and process of publishing research and opens avenues to challenge exclusionary, exploitative and unjust tendencies wherever they are encountered.

Notes

1 *ACME*, *Annals of Association of American Geographers*, *Antipode*, *Area*, *Children's Geographies*, *Journal of Cultural Geographies*, *Ethics, Place and Environment*, *Gender, Place and Culture*, *Journal of Geography in Higher Education*, *Professional Geographer*, *Social and Cultural Geography*, *Society and Space*. These journals have been joined by eighteen others.

2 Geo-publishing.org (http://www.nuim.ie/nirsa/geo-pub/geo-pub.html) was launched in January 2003.

References

Fuller, D. and Kitchin, R. (2004) 'Radical theory/critical praxis', in D. Fuller and R. Kitchin (eds), *Radical Theory, Critical Praxis: Making a Difference Beyond the Academy?* Praxis E-Press. http://www.praxis-epress.org/rtcp/contents.html, pp. 1–20.

Acknowledgements

In general we have written this book from drawing and reflecting on our own experiences and observations as researchers, authors and editors, only turning to other literatures after an initial draft was completed. We have, however, also benefited from the advice of colleagues and students and we are thankful for the contributions of Kajsa Andersson, Lawrence Berg, Mike Bradshaw, Kath Browne, Martin Dodge, Paddy Duffy, Denise Grassick, Kristal Hawkins, James Monagle, Graham Moon, Pamela Moss, Tristan Palmer, Robin Poulter, and Andrew Power. In addition, we would like to thank Robert Rojek at Sage for commissioning the book. We take full responsibility for the content.

1 *Publishing research*

Publication is a key aspect of research. It concerns letting other people know about your research endeavours, findings and ideas. This is its prime importance – why go through all the effort of research if nobody else can learn from it? Research, after all, is about collectively exploring, examining, challenging and advancing knowledge and understanding, building on the work of previous studies and treatises. As a consequence, those who support and fund research expect researchers to engage in such collective practice. In addition, there are obvious secondary benefits to publication that relate to strategic issues such as securing a job or promotion, gaining more research funding, building a research profile, and so on.

Successfully publishing research is, unfortunately, not an inevitable outcome of academic endeavour. Just because a project produces exciting results, or a new, groundbreaking theory, does not mean that it will automatically be communicated to the wider world, with recognition and plaudits following. Completing a project or developing an idea or theory simply represents the first phase of research. Publication is the second phase and it requires many specific skills and knowledges. Without successful dissemination no one, with the exception of close colleagues, will know about your work. It is vital then that you, as a researcher, know how different forms of publication work and possess the skills to work with and exploit these media. This book provides practical and strategic advice and information on the various means by which researchers publicise their work, and how to effectively and successfully package and present research for those media.

In today's multimedia culture, methods of publicising academic endeavours are diverse, ranging from traditional outlets such as an article in a learned journal or a research monograph, to popular media such as newspapers, radio and television, to more recent inventions such as the Internet. It can also take visual or oral means, such as a poster or presentation. As the

chapters in this book detail, each form of publishing has its strengths and weaknesses and reaches different audiences. For example, the strengths of academic journals relate to their high quality, assured by peer review, the fact that institutions recognize them as the most valuable or worthy form of dissemination, and that they are read by a peer audience. The weaknesses of academic journals are their formal style, their restrictions on length and content, and that a peer audience is usually very small in number (generally fellow academics who access the journals through a university library). Books provide a broader canvas to present a theory or study, often receiving some degree of marketing, and are more likely to be seen by a wider audience. Their weaknesses relate to the time and effort taken to write them, the reliance on publishers for marketing and distribution, and their cost. Conference talks allow a work in progress to be presented to, and discussed by, peers, but time constraints often limit the content to one or two specific points and the audience is usually quite small and select. Newspapers and other forms of popular press such as magazines provide access to a very large potential audience and usually universities and colleges will welcome any coverage, but they are very restrictive in terms of content, and controlling the message presented can be difficult. And so on.

For the uninitiated, the workings of these various media can be fairly opaque. Indeed, if your experiences are the same as ours, most researchers seemingly learn how each form of publication operates through trial and error, slowly gaining an understanding of their practices. That said, individual experiences alone provide only a partial picture because they are limited to just a few aspects of the production process. For example, sending articles to journals and interacting with editors, responding to referees and correcting proofs, provide glimpses inside the 'black box' of journal publishing. However, without someone actually revealing how things work (for example, in a book like this), one only gets a real sense of how a medium truly operates when involved in other facets of production; for example, the full mechanics of journal production only become clear through working as an editor.

This book bypasses the need to learn about publication through personal experience, and attempts to lift the lid on the black boxes of dissemination to reveal how they operate. Drawing on our own experience and that of others, we discuss a range of forms of publication available to amateur and academic researchers, detailing their strengths and weaknesses, and outlining how to use them to let others know about your work. In addition, practical advice is supplied for those who want to take control

of their own means of production (for example, self-publishing a report or book or newsletter) or who would like to take a more active role in the production process (such as starting a new journal). In doing so, the book provides a head start, detailing advice and knowledge that we would have valued when we started our careers as researchers.

2 A STRATEGIC APPROACH TO PUBLICATION

Given that there is a range of media through which research can potentially be published, and it is unlikely that you will have either the time or the inclination to explore all of them, there is a number of decisions that need to be made about the best outlets through which to showcase your work. These decisions, such as which journals to submit work to, or which conference to attend, will be shaped by two prime considerations. First, how and to whom do *you* want to communicate your work? Second (and increasingly, just as important), how and to whom do your *employers* or *funders* want the work disseminated? While there is often overlap, in that both you and those that sponsor your work will often want to target the same journals or conferences, it is often the case that there is some disagreement. For example, you might want to target a journal with a particular audience while your university administrators want you to submit to a journal with a high impact factor (as denoted by its citation index – see Chapter 6).

In the latter case, pressure arises from administrators because there continues to be perceived differences in the worth or value of academic work dependent on how it is disseminated. So the same work could, theoretically, be disseminated via a website, through a leading paper-based academic journal, or through the pages of an edited book, and be reviewed, consumed and valued in very different ways as a result. As noted in the Preface, this situation is exacerbated by the unrelenting neo-liberal restructuring of the education sector as certain modes of publication form the basis of calculative practices aimed at monitoring and regulating the endeavours of researchers.

Balancing individual preferences with institutional pressures requires a *strategic* approach to publication that utilizes particular tactics. A strategic approach means to have a consistent and planned method of dissemination

that aims to fulfil defined goals. These goals might be to build a successful research career, to obtain employment, to gain tenure or pass probation, to achieve rapid promotion, to survive the academic system with as little effort as possible, to try to become famous, and so on. Tactics are the means for achieving these goals. These tactics might include submitting papers to the journals with the highest impact factor, attending the most prestigious conferences, organizing events, editing a newsletter, presenting at specialist conferences, sending press releases to the media, working with established researchers, and so on.

In our opinion, the key to achieving any lasting sense of personal academic satisfaction and freedom is to adopt a strategic approach to publication that works in *your* interests – in short, you need to develop your own strategy, a strategy that satisfies the 'rules of the game' but which maximizes *your* control over that game, and the time/resources available beyond it.

Of course, it is possible to be relatively successful employing a haphazard approach to publication, and there is no doubt that many researchers are quite haphazard in how they make their decisions on publication. For example, it can be quite easy to agree to submit an article to a particular journal or write a chapter for an edited book or attend a particular conference. But these choices might not be the best tactically in order to achieve one's goals. If these decisions involve taking on additional work then the time element in one's strategy will be altered radically. This approach, then, is far less likely to achieve one's goals than a strategic approach – it simply leaves too many things to chance and serendipity.

As suggested above, this is not to say that a strategic approach should be followed rigidly and in a heartless, calculated manner (there is little worse than joyless work). Rather, it is perhaps more sensible to employ a strategy that is flexible and which can react to situations as they arise. In other words, a productive strategy might be one that utilizes a minimum or adequate set of tactics to achieve a goal, but which leaves space and time to take on other interesting and rewarding commitments that also contribute towards this goal. This strategy ensures that defined targets are met, while not closing off new opportunities. An important tactic to keep such opportunities open, in an age when many institutions ask staff to set yearly work targets and then assess these targets at the end of the year, is not to overestimate outputs. Over-estimating targets closes off new opportunities and places a researcher under pressure to deliver. In such a situation, a researcher either fails to deliver everything promised or reduces the

standard of that delivered. It is much more sensible (and flattering) to be conservative or realistic and then to deliver or over-produce.

The strategy adopted and the tactics employed will often depend on what stage of your career you are at. As we explain below, if you are still a postgraduate and your goal is to gain a postdoctoral or teaching position then your strategy and associated tactics will almost certainly be very different from those if you are an already-established academic whose goal is to broaden your profile or rest on your laurels.

A postgraduate strategy

In today's competitive academic environment postgraduate students who want to continue their research career often need to adopt a strategy that separates them from the rest of their peers, and demonstrates that they can do more than merely survive the rigours of academic life (such as tenure-track and RAE – Research Assessment Exercise as operated in the UK – demands). While for many this is an unfortunate side effect of neo-liberal reforms to the higher education system, and the introduction of pernicious forms of academic capitalism, for the time being at least it remains a simple fact of life for would-be researchers. Gaining access to this environment necessitates employing tactics that stretch well beyond simply completing a competent PhD. Suitable tactics include: attending and presenting papers at regional, national and international conferences; getting involved in societies and organizations (for example, sitting on study group committees); helping to organize meetings and conferences; editing newsletters or postgraduate/departmental journals; submitting papers to journals; and while not (directly) related to disseminating research, getting involved in teaching.

For postgraduates, the journals chosen for submissions do not necessarily need to be the ones considered the most important in a field. They might instead be departmental or society journals or 'lower ranking' journals. The aim is to demonstrate potential and to build confidence. As we note below, the review process for many journals can be an unpleasant and upsetting experience. There is nothing worse than starting one's career with a series of rejection letters for articles that, while not quite good enough for the top journals, display scholarship that is worthy of publication. Similarly, when choosing conferences it is perhaps best to start with those that are more likely to provide a supportive environment for postgraduate students,

such as postgraduate-only conferences, smaller regional and specialist conferences, and postgraduate sessions at major conferences.

Getting beyond contract research and teaching posts

For many researchers their route into a professional, tenured research career starts with a period of short-term research or teaching contracts. They have shown enough potential as a postgraduate to secure an initial step on the ladder. The next step is to secure a permanent position. This step is just as competitive as moving from postgraduate to postdoctoral level and again requires the adoption of tactics that distinguishes you from the rest of the crowd. Tactics that might be of benefit include publishing articles in specialist journals and in more generic, national and international journals (these do not necessarily have to be the top-rated journals, although a couple of articles in these would obviously do no harm!); attending and presenting at national and international conferences; being the main organizer of meetings and conferences; and taking an active role in disciplinary organizations. The aim is to demonstrate that you can achieve what is expected of a permanent member of staff: that you can publish in a variety of quality outlets, you are prepared to share your ideas at conferences and meetings, and that you care about and are prepared to be a steward for your discipline.

A tenure-track or probationary strategy

Tenure-track or probationary posts are those that lead to the relative job security of a tenured position. Tenure does not mean a permanent post that lasts until retirement; rather, tenure provides a right to a due process of evaluation prior to being fired. In other words, a college or university cannot terminate a post without presenting evidence that the professor is incompetent or unprofessional or that the finances that support a job are no longer sufficient (NEA, 2004). Until tenure is obtained, job security is very weak, with colleges and universities able to terminate a contract without reason or cause. A panel of senior professors and administrators, who evaluate the candidate's teaching, research and service, assesses tenure. The weight attached to these various assessment criteria varies depending on the institution, with research output and profile gaining more influence in