

Preface

by Menno Soentken



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PREFACE: AMSTERDAM SOCIAL SCIENCE IN REVOLUTIONARY TIMES

Menno Soentken

Following the Arab Spring and the Occupy movement, 'winds of change' are also blowing through academia. Neelie Kroes (European commissioner Digital Agenda) sets out to 'a crusade' in favour of open access publishing (NRC, 24-07-2012). More bottom-up, this crusade has already been started by the more than 12.000 academics that decided to boycott *Elsevier* on www.thecostofknowledge.com, an initiative spurred by the prominent mathematician Timothy Gowers. This first battalion in the 'academic spring' refuses to accept the high profit margins made by large publishing houses through exorbitant subscription rates for journals and imposing large costs on university libraries. In other places, such as www.doaj.org, open access initiatives are starting to accumulate. What position does *Amsterdam Social Science* take in this new academic movement?

Amsterdam Social Science (ASS) takes part in and wholeheartedly supports the emerging initiatives for accessible knowledge. However, being a journal with a critical stance towards social phenomena, neither does the process of open access escape our analytical vigilance. Open access publishing is part of a larger 'scientific field' that involves a constant struggle

for power and supremacy (Bourdieu, 2002, *Homo academicus*). Assessed from this perspective, existing practices are not easy to change because the winners of the system create and uphold the rules for acquiring 'scientific capital', something most researchers long to acquire. A key indicator of this scientific capital is one's publication record, the measure of distinction that grants scholars status and important positions in academia. The main sources of scientific capital are 'high impact journals', the very journals that belong to the stock of the large publishing houses. It therefore begs the question, should you, as a budding researcher, also join the ban on publishing houses and start disseminating in open access journals?

My short answer is probably not. 'Institutional entrepreneurs', the agents of change such as Timothy Gowers, are in a favorable position to challenge the existing practice of publishing. For emerging academics dependent on the beholders of power in academia, the situation is different. Circumventing regular journals would deprive emerging researchers from an important source of scientific capital to acquire a position in academia to begin with, let alone advancing an academic career. It would also generate a grave dilemma of collective action. There is a fair chance that when you decide not to publish in regular journals, others will, and can make a career in academia at your expense. Simply neglecting the existing institutional practices and boldly joining the front-lines of the 'academic spring' would involve the risk of 'perishing' from the academic scene overall. In short, when the existing practices have not yet fundamentally changed, the best thing one can do is tow the line and muddle through. ASS sees itself at the frontline of facilitating this broad transformation.

This is not to say that *Amsterdam Social Science* remains indifferent to academic change. ASS gives voice to the great ideas and innovative contributions of emerging scholars that are often marginalized in regular journals. To emphasize this commitment, as of the next issue ASS will start reflecting on the numerous reconfigurations happening in the academic world through an initiative tentatively entitled 'Rethinking the Academic

World'. Any reflections, essays or columns about initiatives of change in academia, existing or desired, are more than welcome. By collecting these different stories of change, we are able to proactively construct a new narrative of academic practice that might diffuse to those who are capable of changing the rules of the system.

As for this issue, the high quality of the articles continue to remind us about how much structural change remains, and that progress in the social sciences ultimately depends on the power of ideas. Get yourself prepared to get acquainted with the construction of sexual identity and behavior in the Israeli military, trophy hunting farms in South-Africa, how women experience bisexuality, the multiple meanings of home in soldiers' lives, the tension between ethics and the colonial past in anthropology, and the start of what promises to be a lively debate on interstate wars in Africa. Judged from what I've learned from these wonderful contributions, the remark of Neelie Kroes that scientific publishing will become Europe's "new oil" (*NRC*, 24-07-2012) cuts right to the quick.