

Towards a Sustainable Publishing Ecosystem: General Diagnosis and Management Proposal

Sebastián Endara Rosales^{ORCID}

Universidad Católica de Cuenca, Cuenca, Ecuador

ABSTRACT

This work reflects on the university publishing system within the framework of the transformations imposed by the so-called academic capitalism, characterized by the pressure to meet indicators, reputational competition, and the standardization of scientific production. From a critical perspective, it develops a conceptual framework that makes it possible to understand how these dynamics shape certain editorial practices and condition the capacity of universities to sustain socially meaningful publication projects. Based on this analytical foundation, the study proposes renewed criteria and functions for academic publishing, managed through an institutionally articulated model that embraces epistemic plurality and is committed to decolonizing perspectives. The research draws on the experience of reconstructing the publishing system at the Catholic University of Cuenca, which serves as a case study to demonstrate the applicability of the proposed guidelines. The result is an approach that offers tools for rethinking university editorial management from an integrative, ethical, and public-oriented perspective. The work contributes to broadening the discussion on the role of scientific publications in the contemporary landscape and to outlining pathways for their institutional transformation.

Keywords: academic publishing, editorial policy, social transformation, academic capitalism.

Hacia un ecosistema editorial sostenible: diagnóstico general y propuesta de gestión

RESUMEN

Este trabajo reflexiona sobre el sistema editorial universitario en el marco de las transformaciones impuestas por el denominado capitalismo académico, caracterizado por la presión por alcanzar indicadores, la competencia “reputacional” y la estandarización de la producción científica. A partir de un enfoque crítico se desarrolla un marco conceptual que permite comprender cómo estas dinámicas configuran ciertas prácticas editoriales y condicionan la capacidad de las universidades para sostener proyectos de publicación socialmente significativos. Sobre esta base analítica, el estudio propone criterios y funciones renovadas para la edición académica, gestionadas a través de un modelo institucionalmente articulado, con apertura a la pluralidad epistémica y comprometido con perspectivas descolonizadoras. La investigación se sustenta en la experiencia de reconstrucción del sistema editorial de la Universidad Católica de Cuenca, que sirve como caso de estudio para demostrar la aplicabilidad de las propuestas formuladas. El resultado es un planteamiento que ofrece herramientas para repensar la gestión editorial

Author for correspondence: jose.endara@ucacue.edu.ec, Endara Rosales S.

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universitaria desde una lógica integradora, ética y orientada al bien público. El trabajo contribuye para ampliar la discusión sobre el papel de las publicaciones científicas en el escenario contemporáneo y delinear rutas para su transformación institucional.

Palabras clave: edición académica, política editorial, transformación social, capitalismo académico.

INTRODUCTION

The aim of this paper is twofold: to offer a critical and conceptual framework that allows for an understanding of the university publishing system in a context marked by what has been termed academic capitalism¹, and, on that basis, to provide a foundation for new practices and functions in academic publishing, orienting them toward an articulated, decolonizing, and plural model, in connection with the needs of the territories in which academic institutions operate. This exercise is developed on the basis of a specific experience: the reconstruction of the publishing system at the Catholic University of Cuenca.

Thus, I begin by proposing an idea: our perspective on the cultural environment is marked by a kind of dyslexia. By this, I mean that there are difficulties in understanding the particularities of cultural contexts, linked to interruptions in the reading and interpretation of the environment and its needs. A fragmented understanding of the reality in which knowledge is produced includes, of course, academic publishing management as a form of scientific communication. Álvarez and Manzanet, drawing on the ideas of Fernández, characterize academic management –considering its content and objectives– as an activity that should be devoted to “explaining, with accuracy and depth, the facts of the objective reality that surrounds us, expressing the cause-and-effect relationships among phenomena, and clarifying the stages of historical development”².

However, in a context also marked by epistemic capitalism, the academic publishing system, far from fostering a critical circulation of knowledge, has become integrated into practices of simulation. To dissimulate is to feign not having what one has. To simulate is to feign having what one does not have³. Publishing no longer means communicating knowledge but rather appearing; its success is not necessarily its contribution to thought, but its visibility. In this scenario, publications driven by the fetish of indexation proliferate, where prestige is measured by metrics rather than by relevance, giving rise to innumerable distortions and editorial malpractices. Salatino and López Ruiz explain it as follows: “Indexation shifts from being an ‘index’, an ‘indicator’, and ultimately from providing a sign of the possible quality of scientific production, to becoming an icon, valued in itself, that ends up replacing the object it is meant to represent. In other words, it becomes a fetish, acquires a value of its own, and, instead of being a signal that a completed scientific work may be relevant and of quality, it becomes its primary and prior objective: to be published in a

well-indexed journal. This objective even displaces the intrinsic aims that motivate research”⁴.

The “obligation” to publish is, in itself, an empty slogan. Imposed by academic regulatory mechanisms that privilege quantity, this logic reduces intellectual production to indicators of scientific output, and what should be a tool for public transformation becomes a functional means for advancing in the academic hierarchy or fulfilling institutional accreditation requirements.

Therefore, it is not possible to speak of critical editorial management without assigning it a radical turn. Based on the idea of the Publishing Ecosystem, CERALC-UNESCO⁵ proposed the need to conceive, at an institutional level, the development of a sustainable, critical, and open publishing ecosystem, capable of gradually overcoming an editorial model based on metrics and rankings, in order to restore to academic publishing its disruptive potential and its capacity to transform the world. From this perspective, the aim is not merely to fill repositories, but to generate meaningful intellectual action that critiques scientific publishing turned into a business and integrated into the “supermarket of science” as an intellectual commodity⁶.

METHOD

The collection of information for diagnosing the publishing system was carried out using a qualitative-descriptive design, based on the use of institutional and documentary sources. This procedure enabled the identification of the operational structure of the publishing system, the processes that comprise it, and the actions related to journal management. To this end, internal regulations, operational guidelines, available records, and documents associated with editorial production were analyzed.

Additionally, a review was conducted of the literature related to university publishing management, the training of editorial teams, scientific editing processes, and modes of organizing academic work in contexts marked by epistemic colonialism. This review made it possible to situate the diagnosis within a critical conceptual framework.

The integration of these sources allowed for the organization of the information, the identification of recurring patterns, the comparison of criteria, and the delineation of areas for intervention. On the basis of this analysis, a proposal was developed aimed at reorganizing the publishing management of the Catholic University of Cuenca, considering operational, academic, and administrative criteria that can be implemented in stages.

RESULTS

The publishing system of the Catholic University of Cuenca can be understood as comprising two distinct components. The first concerns the management and publication of books, a process that is largely overseen by the Office of Research in its academic dimension and by EDUNICA Press in its operational dimension (design, layout, printing, and dissemination). The second component involves academic periodicals, which operate in a largely autonomous manner. This disconnection does not appear to be an isolated phenomenon; rather, it is recurrent across various Ibero-American publishing experiences.

In July 2024, when the diagnosis of the state of UCACUE's periodical publications was conducted, the University officially recognized three journals under the *Killkana* series (*Salud y Bienestar*, *Ciencias Sociales*, and *Técnica*). However, in addition to these, other journals were also in operation, such as *Ciencia Estudiantil Unidad de Salud* (CEUS) and *Odontología Activa*, both managed within the Health and Well-being Unit. Likewise, *Decisión Gerencial*, managed within the Academic Unit of Economic and Business Sciences, and the recently launched law journal *Directum*, managed by the Academic Unit of Social Sciences at the Azogues campus. Finally, there was a *Multidisciplinary Graduate Journal*, as well as *Killkana Proceedings*, which compiled abstracts and conference proceedings from events held at the University.

The diagnosis showed that, despite being supported by the institution's overall capacity, these publications had not succeeded in consolidating an appropriate reputation, either within the institution or beyond it. This condition was not solely the result of their level of indexation or cataloging (with several of them having reached, at most, inclusion in the LatinIndex 2.0 catalog), but also of the absence of an institutionalized approach to publication management, grounded in a clear understanding of its purpose.

The journal is an academic and scientific tool that both sustains and contributes to the core functions of the University: research, outreach, and internationalization, culminating in teaching, which closes the cycle of the production, use, and transmission of knowledge. From our perspective, the editorial management of journals cannot be limited to merely fulfilling and maintaining the operational requirements of indexation, such as adherence to periodicity, which is certainly important for a journal's continuity. What is fundamental is that sound editorial management should contribute to scientific production, academic reflection, and the communication of results for the benefit of society. Editorial irrelevance, therefore, should be understood as the condition in which texts are published that are disconnected from the interests of a given social context.

A missing element in the editorial process under study was the absence of a comprehensive editorial policy that would not only ensure the proper functioning of periodical publications by standardizing minimum quality conditions, but also guarantee the necessary

autonomy for their management. In the absence of a normative institutional structure –and, consequently, an operational one–that recognizes the specificities of journal editorial management and its integration within an academic publishing ecosystem, editorial activity was relegated to an informal status. Considered as a contribution by faculty members to the institution and lacking formal recognition, editorial work was not evaluated, had no specifically allocated budget, lacked staff training in editorial management, and received no administrative support. In other words, editorial activity depended largely on the voluntarism of its editors. The absence of an institutional structure responsible for ensuring comprehensive editorial management clearly affected both its immediate and long-term functioning, rendering it structurally inefficient and undervalued.

DISCUSSION

The production of knowledge subordinated to a logic of symbolic profitability leads to a form of academic capitalism⁸, in which what matters are indices and citations. Without intending to generalize –since there are always honorable exceptions– it may be said that, in this context, publishing has ceased to be an exercise of thought and has become a unit of value within a market of visibility governed by rankings and corporate interests. Within this regime, indexation functions as an ideological filter that excludes and expels everything that does not align with the formats, languages, and approaches legitimized by hegemonic centers of epistemic power. In this way, a form of colonialism of knowledge is reproduced, relegating what is not standardized. Publications that do not conform to these criteria are marginalized and rendered invisible, regardless of their relevance.

To this scenario must be added an even more troubling shift, driven by communication technologies. From the cultural dyslexia noted at the outset –where the text exists but is disconnected from its meaning– society moves toward alexia, in which the text as a form of thought begins to disappear. In this drift, the emergence of technologies such as Alexa is not incidental, but rather reveals a turning point: the shift from writing as a mode of thought to command-based interactions as devices of efficiency. Without texts, we move toward a post-alphabetic context, as Berardi highlights in his readings of McLuhan⁹. Post-alphabetism can be understood as an anthropological mutation produced by a very particular mode of access to knowledge. It is not only that less reading takes place, but that thinking itself is increasingly detached from the acts of writing and reading texts. However, it is texts that enable critical imagination, and this kind of abandonment of the text reflects a broader crisis. Without texts, it becomes difficult to construct the narrative, logical, and reflective bridges that make dialogue with others possible.

In light of the above, thinking about a different publishing ecosystem involves much more than redesigning technical processes and articulating

regulatory frameworks. Publishing must be conceived as a space for pluralizing ways of knowing and for restoring the importance of collective reflection on the world, prompting us once again to ask why we publish. Clearly, the answer cannot be confined exclusively to the institutional benefits that editorial work may generate. Publishing is a decisive act within the mediating function that the university exercises in relation to society.

It is necessary to speak of a sustainable publishing ecosystem while recognizing that there is no single valid way of producing and validating knowledge. The alternative is to embrace epistemic and methodological pluralism that promotes a decolonization of publishing criteria, opening space for interdisciplinary and alternative approaches –whether aesthetic or experimental– so that form does not outweigh content. Decolonizing publishing criteria is therefore a fundamental process for questioning and rethinking the epistemological, cultural, and political frameworks that have historically shaped the global academic system. This concept entails transforming the ways in which we understand and validate knowledge, particularly in contexts where community-based forms of knowledge have been suppressed and historically marginalized. Decolonizing publishing criteria should not mean merely accommodating “other” forms of knowledge, but also transforming the very criteria of quality themselves. The perspective of epistemological decolonization complements debates developed within critical theory, adding a viewpoint from the Global South and from positions of subalternity¹⁰.

It is also necessary to critically address the commodification of knowledge –Díez Gutiérrez even refers to the “McDonaldization” of higher education¹¹– where scientific publishing becomes a means for the accumulation of symbolic capital (through impact factors), rather than a process of generating transformative knowledge. Predatory journals, pay-to-publish practices, and academic competition are merely symptoms of this phenomenon, which distorts the quality and impact of publications. One possible alternative is to replace competitive logics with collaborative dynamics. The work of editors, reviewers, and academics should be understood as a collective process of knowledge construction, of constructive exchange and mutual formation, rather than a punitive process. At this point, one might speak of an ethics of editorial hospitality, in which the processes of review and guidance are formative and contribute to the maturation of ideas. Hospitality is not only about receiving the other, but about embracing difference and providing a space for its expression. In the editorial context, hospitality implies creating an environment in which all voices are welcome. Such hospitality would, above all, constitute a principle for organizing forms of interaction, grounded in an active approach of accompaniment, support, and training, so that publishing houses and their outputs are conceived as platforms for encounter, dialogue, and co-creation. Indeed, the production of a text involves the participation of a network, both in its production

and in its reception, and attention to audiences as recipients constitutes another challenge that a sustainable publishing management must address.

Another important aspect is the reconsideration of editors as content curators, understood as information professionals¹². Too often, editors and researchers overlook the political dimension of publication management, and editorial decisions are made from a primarily administrative perspective. Academic curation calls for editorial sovereignty, one that regains control over what is published, how it is published, and for whom it is published. It implies a commitment to developing in-house, open publications, managed with ethical rigor, but also with autonomy from the extractive logics of academic capitalism. In this sense, sustainability is also a strategy of resistance: it involves building a publishing system that measures its success according to alternative indicators. It is therefore worth noting that, at the international level, there are already declarations, manifestos, and coalitions that challenge hegemonic indexation systems, such as the Declaration on Research Assessment (DORA), the Leiden Manifesto for Research Metrics, and the Agreement on Reforming Research Assessment (CoARA).

The aim is to move beyond a conformist model of editorial production that reproduces existing structures and hierarchies while sidelining critical thought. Academic editorial management must recover its disruptive and transformative vocation and once again place the freedom to think at its core. In this sense, a sustainable publishing ecosystem may be understood as one that protects and promotes critical, empathetic, and democratic thinking –and that publishes what truly matters.

MANAGEMENT PROPOSAL

A proposal for the configuration of a Sustainable Publishing Ecosystem¹³ at the Catholic University of Cuenca was presented as a fundamental step toward transforming editorial management from both an academic and a political perspective, and as an essential component of the research function, “which is realized through the transmission of science, technology, and culture, by socializing knowledge and extending its products beyond the university setting”¹⁴.

This approach sought to provide a set of concrete measures aimed at contributing to meaningful scientific production, aligned with local needs and supported by high-quality academic management. To this end, it was important to establish that several of the most concerning aspects identified in the diagnosis –such as the lack of a comprehensive editorial policy, the absence of an administrative structure that integrates editorial management into the institution’s functional organization, and the lack of professional training processes for editors–gave rise to a number of challenges:

1. Disconnection between publications and research lines: scientific journals are not always aligned

with the university's research projects, nor with the interests and social needs of the community.

2. Lack of capacity in key aspects of scientific publishing, with a direct impact on the quality of publications. This point is particularly relevant insofar as "editorial management increasingly requires professional teams dedicated to this work, as well as personnel from different academic areas capable of enriching these processes"¹⁵.

3. Dependence on personal relationships: unstructured editorial work relies heavily on individual goodwill, which limits both long-term sustainability and process quality.

4. Insufficient financial resources to ensure that publications are properly managed at all stages.

Consequently, a series of recommendations was developed in order to build the sustainable publishing ecosystem:

1. To create an academic and administrative structure tasked with providing support to each journal. This would serve as a space for advising on the design of editorial policies and regulations for all periodical publications, and for clarifying –through formal guidelines– the conditions for the creation and inclusion of new or future journals. It would also function as a forum for discussing strategies to enhance not only the academic impact of journals, but also their contribution to the consolidation of research processes and, most importantly, to the development of a research culture within the institution. Such a structure would promote editorial linkages with other institutions, support processes of academic and editorial communication, foster continuous improvement in editorial management, encourage access to writing and publishing training spaces, and even stimulate the emergence of new readerships.

2. To provide technical and operational support for the optimal functioning of journals. As an initial measure, this could involve the incorporation of editorial managers, thereby relieving faculty members of operational tasks and allowing them to focus on the academic management of the journal.

3. To harmonize the participation of other institutional units in the editorial process. This entails the development of a coherent institutional structure capable of supporting editorial work at academic, operational, and budgetary levels.

4. To establish appropriate transition processes toward the new management model.

5. To promote the use of texts published in the University's journals as part of the bibliographic sources included in academic syllabi.

6. To strengthen editorial training processes from a critical perspective.

7. To incorporate elements of communication and cultural and academic engagement around publications.

8. To foster new reading audiences and contribute to the strengthening of a research culture.

CONCLUSIONS

First, a critical and conceptual framework has been developed that makes it possible to situate the university publishing system within the dynamics of so-called academic capitalism, highlighting its tensions, institutional constraints, and structural challenges. This framework made it possible to recognize how editorial processes are shaped by logics of productivity, standardization, and global competition, and why it is necessary to reconfigure them from perspectives that integrate reflexivity, institutional responsibility, and a public-oriented horizon.

Second, on the basis of this conceptual diagnosis, the study substantiated a set of renewed practices and functions for academic publishing, oriented toward institutional articulation, sustainable professionalization, epistemic openness, and the adoption of decolonizing and pluralistic criteria. This objective was materialized through the concrete experience of reconstructing the publishing system at the Catholic University of Cuenca, which served as an institutional laboratory to demonstrate the feasibility, relevance, and scope of the proposals developed here.

In this way, the paper not only provides a critical reading of the place occupied by university publications in the contemporary landscape, but also offers lines of action and operational criteria to move toward a coherent, situated publishing model capable of responding to the ethical, political, and academic challenges of our time, as well as to the needs of our populations and territories. In doing so, the study successfully articulates theoretical reflection and institutional transformation, fully achieving its dual objective of understanding and reorienting academic publishing.

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