

EDITORIAL: IS A JOURNAL LIKE SVMMA NECESSARY?*

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Creating a scientific journal is a major challenge that we took on three years ago. Although it is still early to make an assessment—after all, we have only published five issues so far—I think it is important to share a reflection on the meaning of all this.

First, I would like to point out the human resources that make SVMMA possible: a coordination running like clockwork at all times, for which we must thank the editor; an attentive Managing Committee; an Advisory Board to help us sing the praises of our journal while keeping to our initial objectives; a large Editorial Board to ensure quality; and a countless number of reviewers who certify the quality of the publication—if you do not know them, their names can be found at <http://revistes.ub.edu/index.php/SVMMA/about/editorialTeam>. This is not a business-minded professional organization, but an efficient structure based on the collaboration, dedication, and generosity of a lot of colleagues who, rather than solely focusing on their CVs, devote many hours to this task without any other remuneration than the quality of the journal. In view of the growing bubble of scientific publications, it is necessary to bring attention to this human, fundamental factor, which is not only crucial to SVMMA but also, probably, to most scientific publications in the field of human sciences.

Second comes the economic question. Each issue of our journal has a rather moderate cost. It is what the IRCVM can afford, and it is the price we pay both to shape the contents we receive into a journal, and to translate them into one language, English, which, despite not being by far the *lingua franca* in our reserach areas, guarantees that a world that ignores everything that is not written in English has access to the excellent work of our authors. We have often seen this as a strategic option; in truth, it is a matter of consistency, because it is the subtlety of our words which enriches our disciplines. In the beginning there is **always** the verb as the first viable extension of what our brains produce, and our brains can only display a wealth of nuances in the languages in which we think. Therefore it is important to produce quality translations, but also to make the original version available. The price we pay is minimal, we are convinced of that, if we compare it with the full accessibility to contents and knowledge we offer.

Third, again, comes the economic question. SVMMA is an open access journal, and authors do not pay to get published. The only requirement is the quality of the work they submit. From a business point of view we are striking a poor deal (I want to see our translators manage this one!

Google Translate offers: “Robert business with goats”),¹ but what does that mean? It means that we have no economic or business interest whatsoever in what is published, the authors, or their motivations. We merely convey it and ensure its quality in the only possible way: understanding the subjects, reading the texts as many times as necessary, and monitoring the methodological rigour and value of the contributions. Any other procedure would only concern the form and not the content, which, in the case of scientific publications, would be rather absurd.

Sadly enough, that is sometimes the case. Some journals have an only–members publishing policy, or ask for a fee of thousands of euros that varies depending on the pages and the number of references; moreover, most ratings and indexes trust everything to formal aspects ... and all of that in the name of guaranteeing quality. Unfortunately, universities, and many research areas have fallen down the slope of this “editorial con-democracy” supported by rankings, which, according to our experience, is absolutely unjustified and contrary to the public mission of the University. Maybe we are being too naïve, perhaps we are wrong, but for some areas where conducting research and publishing or disseminating it has often been closer to volunteering than to business, paying fees in order to publish in journals reminds us more of economic speculation, bribed commissions, committees, lobbyists, and corporate control of scientific reflection than of the transfer of knowledge to a society that has already paid for its generation. Some other day we can discuss the salaries of professors and university researchers.

Finally, this reflection is prompted by the university model we are gradually building. The indiscriminate and uncritical access to information our society enjoys has slowly brought about a process of substitution of authority that is becoming dramatic in universities. In the same manner as the habit of self–diagnosis questions the decisions and suggestions of the family doctor and even the surgeon, as the recent outbreak of diphtheria has sadly shown, students question the worth of their professors for the simple reason that they are the only visible authority before them. The value of the learning process is constantly short-circuited by affirmations such as “I read on the internet”, which, in many cases, only voice glorified anonymous opinions turned into oracular truths. Thus, the medium becomes the message, because having access to **all** the available information **without critical** training equals **zero** knowledge. That said, I do not intend to start here a corporate defence of professors. I have always tried to be critical of what we do and how we do it and, moreover, as in any group, there are knowledgeable and ignorant, good and bad, capable and incapable professors. It is evident that if we do not change many things we will have to close shop, and it seems clear that the model of the scientific-technical areas, which is currently defining the common framework, does not work for the humanities, because human sciences do

¹ Translator’s Note: Here, the author uses the Catalan idiom *fer el negoci de Robert amb les cabres*, which can be roughly translated as “striking a poor deal”. As Dr Mancho jokingly points out, Google Translate offers the literal meaning, something in the line of “the business a certain Robert closed with his goats”. The idiom refers to the popular story in which said Robert exchanged two black goats for each white goat he received, thus striking himself a fairly poor deal.

not belong anywhere and belong everywhere at the same time and they cannot be studied as if our raw materials and our society were not what they are. The absence of a *lingua franca* is the clearest indicator of such situation. The relationship between professors and students is increasingly defined in contractual terms: the university offers its services through professors and the students are the users of such services, that is, the customers. In this relationship, learning is no longer discussed, only regulations. It is no coincidence that many of the problems of scientific publications derive from this same relationship model.

Confining the knowledge generated by the University further does not make any sense. Knowledge must be open, accessible and multilingual; otherwise it won't be anything. That is our duty towards the citizenry and our contribution to the critical training of our students, and, as we have shown in each issue of SVMMA, it is possible to carry it out with rigour and professionalism. This calls for the generosity and work of many people, but it guarantees absolute independence and no toll whatsoever.

In sum, I would say that the answer to the question that we formulated in the title of this editorial is a resounding 'yes'.

*This editorial is exceptionally signed by the director of the journal and the IRCVM, Dr. Carles Mancho. It is our way to allow him to say goodbye to those who entrusted him with the launch of this project and to those who have started following our journal. From October onwards and for a year, he will lead a better life, exclusively devoted to research.