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Bibliodiversity - what it is and why it is essential to creating situated knowledge

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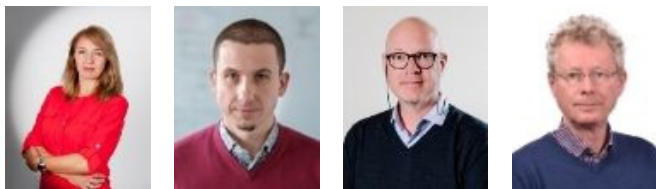
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Bibliodiversity – What it is and why it is essential to creating situated knowledge



*Vibrant scholarly communities are sustained by publishing outlets that allow researchers to address diverse audiences. Whereas, attention is often focused on international publication, much of this work is supported by publications that address national and regional audiences in their own languages. In this post, **Elea Giménez Toledo, Emanuel***

***Kulczycki, Janne Pölönen and Gunnar Sivertsen** explain the importance of bibliodiversity to sustaining knowledge ecosystems and argue that bibliodiversity is essential to ensuring that the transition to an open book future continues to support the creation of situated knowledge.*

Preserving multilingualism and research on local topics

[Big publishing companies](#) control most publishing at the international level. Their leading position in this market is reflected by the esteem they are held in academia. Many of their imprints are prestigious and highly rated in research evaluation processes. Nevertheless, they only represent a fraction of the publications needed for the production and use of new knowledge in research and education, as well as in cultural and societal life.

Bibliodiversity, the diversity of academic content, both at the national and international level is essential for preserving research in a wide range of global and local topics, studied from different epistemic and methodological approaches, inspired by various schools of thought and expressed in a variety of languages. These ideas are closely related to the principles of the [Helsinki Initiative on Multilingualism in Scholarly Communication](#): we need to support the dissemination of research results for the full benefit of society; protect national infrastructures for publishing locally relevant research; and promote language diversity in research assessment, evaluation, and funding systems.

Studying the national landscapes of academic publishing is a way of recognizing and protecting bibliodiversity. To do so, comprehensive data on publications and channels are required. Reports on publishing activity allow authors to know the richness of the publishing landscape of the different countries. They are also important for the development of library collections. Research organisations and funding agencies should take this diversity into consideration: as not only the largest international academic publishers publish specialized and high-quality books. In each country, there is an ecosystem of publishers working to publish the academic books necessary to guarantee the survival of plurality in research, the preservation of national languages in scholarly communication, and the societal usefulness and impact of new knowledge. These ecosystems also represent an important contribution to national economies.



The value of local publishers

When publishing activity at the national level is analyzed in depth, it is possible to see that each publisher creates an editorial project with a particular [editorial mark](#) developing different topics and approaches for readers. In Figure 1, representing Spanish academic publishing, one can distinguish large areas such as Law, Education, Economics or History, where all kinds of publishers operate: from commercial giants to university presses, as well as smaller publishing houses. In contrast, in smaller fields such as Archaeology, Philology or Anthropology, university presses play a central role in protecting diversity. They are publishers from regions with different languages (not just Spanish but Catalan, Basque, etc.), they publish necessary books for small communities and they spread content outside of the mainstream of Anglophone research. This is just one example of a pattern that is repeated from country to country. In other words, publishers at the national level – usually small and medium sized publishers, university presses, and learned societies – publish books and develop knowledge that would not exist if all publishing was to take place at the international level.

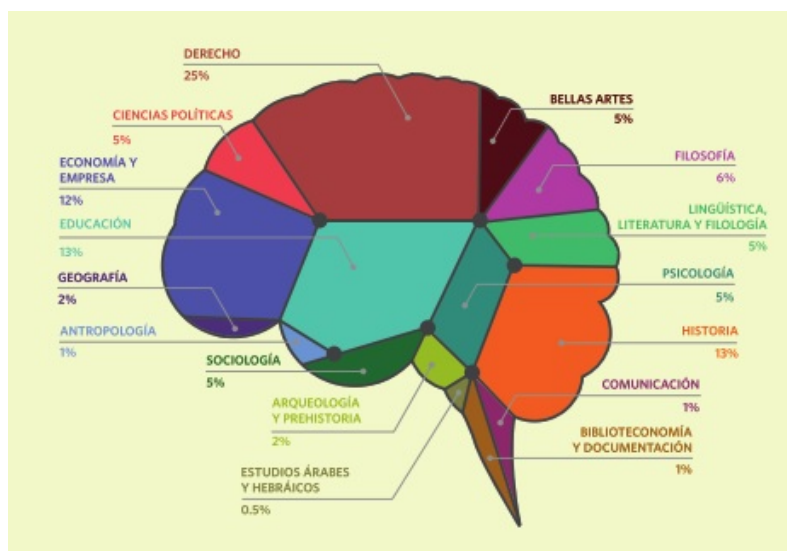


Figure 1. [Spanish academic publishing. Infographic](#) showing the percentage of book titles published in different SSH fields

Further, the publication of research results through monographs and book chapters is an important and distinctive [communication pattern](#) in the Humanities and Social Sciences. Research in these disciplines has four characteristics that require bibliodiversity for effective communication:

- **It is often multi-paradigmatic**, meaning that the same research topic can be studied from different perspectives and with different methodologies. It can be analyzed from the principles of a particular school of thought and, of course, it can be influenced by contextual and cultural issues. To give just one example, consider the different visions and interpretations that historians have offered about the discovery of America.
- On many occasions, it is **locally relevant**, because it deals with research issues that concern the nearest geographical, social or cultural context. In this sense, the research carried out has a clear mission to contribute to solving problems, thus producing societal impact.
- It must be communicated in **regional or national languages** to reach its [natural readers](#) and contribute to the expected impact of the research.
- It often addresses various audiences, as even peer-reviewed publications – especially monographs and edited volumes – may target **professional and general audiences** in addition to experts in the field.

A global and multilingual register of Academic Book Publisher

Understanding this landscape and recording the diversity of academic publishers is one of the aims of [Academic Book Publishers \(ABP\): a global and multilingual register](#), an initiative of the [ENRESSH COST Action](#). More than 6,000 publishers are already part of the register. However, there is much work to be done in developing the register, as well [technical work](#) on improving the quality standards of scholarly book publishing. It is important to embed these standards in proper research evaluation procedures. Moreover, having a complete picture of academic publishers at the national level and identifying those that already have OA publishing programs can help to analyze to what extent an open transition is taking place and the impact that this transition is having on bibliodiversity. This knowledge is essential to developing national and local policies that assist publishers and academics to sustain local research and publishing traditions.

More diversity needed in OA book publishing

At a first glance, (Figure 2), showing the publication languages for books covered by the Directory of Open Access Books, [DOAB](#), leads to two preliminary observations: 1. Only a few languages, especially English, are dominant in OA content, and 2. Countries developing specific strategies for OA monographs (such as Brazil with the development of [Scielo Books](#)) are not only increasing the visibility of their languages but also contributing to diversity in OA space. Furthermore, the number of publishers and different countries covered in the ABP, as opposed to the Scopus and Book Citation Index (Figure 3), highlights a critical volume of high quality book publishing that is not recognized by traditional indexes.

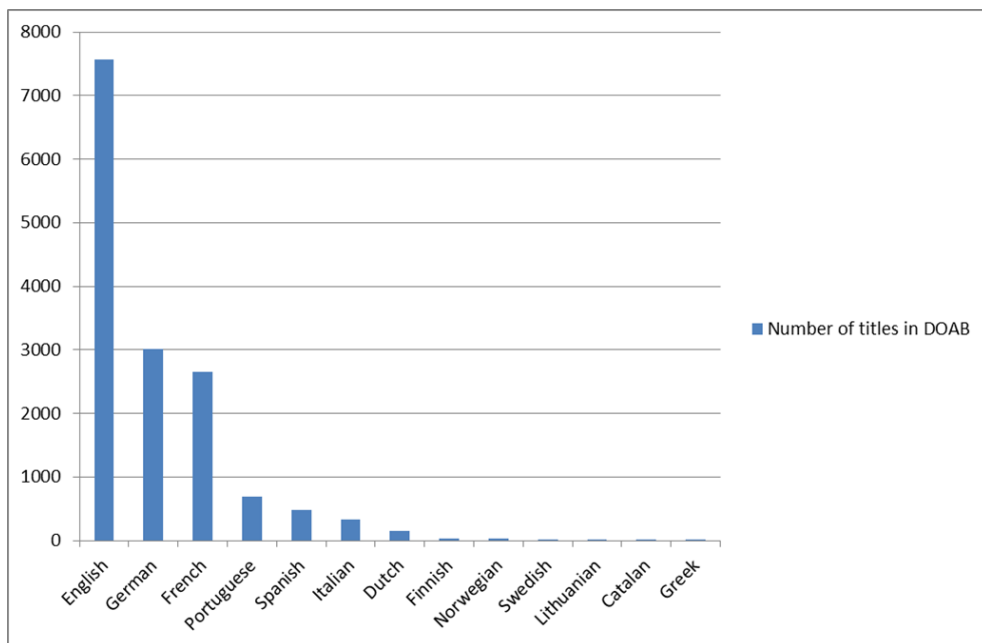


Figure 2. Publication languages in DOAB. Source: DOAB. Own elaboration. 2019

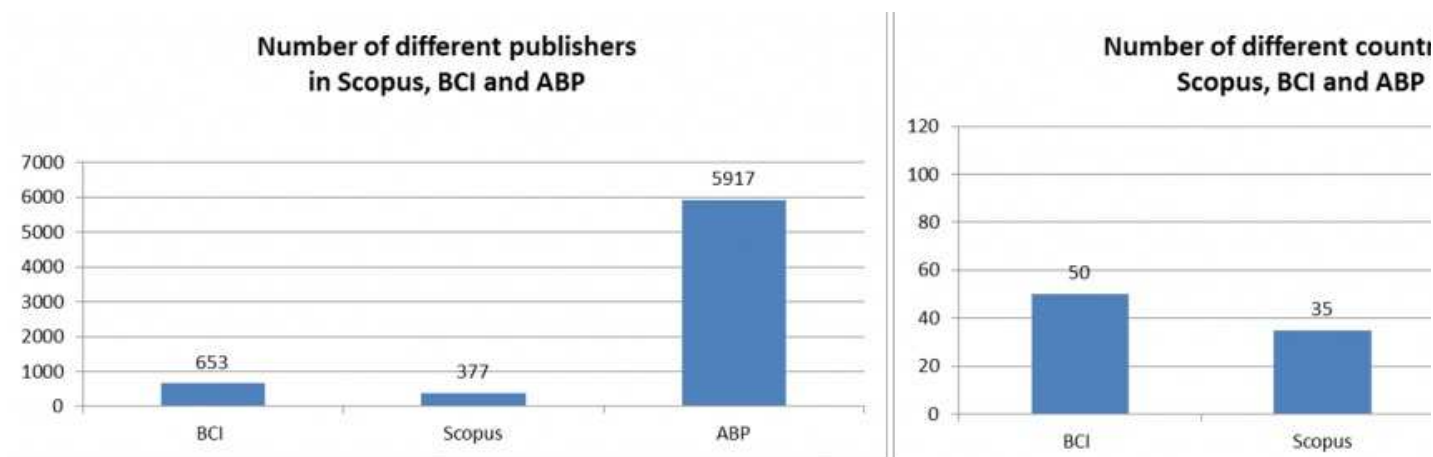


Figure 3. Coverage of publishers and countries in Scopus, Book Citation Index and ABP. 2019

The diversity of academic content in the OA environment is crucial to guaranteeing a plural, rich and unbiased scientific communication. The OA space needs to be as diverse as the traditional publishing space. We are not yet there.

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