

## Not Having a Publication Strategy is My Strategy


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### Abstract

This essay responds to an invitation by the editors of *Sociologica* to write about publication strategy.

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I've been asked to reflect on my publication strategy. But I don't have a publication strategy, other than: try to make sure you publish (otherwise you will lose your job!). If pushed I would say not having a publication strategy is my strategy. Having been pushed by the editors, I would also say that just as I don't find thinking of publishing — or more or less any activity in my life — as a strategy, I also don't find it helpful to think of publishing separately from a whole host of other academic activities. These activities include writing of course, but also giving papers (performing papers?) which may or may not involve powerpoint presentations, that may or may not combine text and image, arguing, disagreeing, agreeing, collaborating, editing, teaching and talking — with colleagues but also anyone outside the world of the university who is willing to talk with me about whatever it is that is the subject of the publication. My best advice is to make sure that doing and reflecting on all these activities feeds into your publications.

Why do I say this? For three reasons: process, form and audience, and authorship and collectivity.

**Process.** One of the reasons I am wary of focusing on publishing alone — as in having a publishing strategy — is that a publication is a stopping point. But, actively situated in a flow of other academic activities, it can be seen as a pause, and not a final stopping point. And this pause can be shorter or longer: I understand what I am trying to say differently when asked a question in a seminar than I do when I respond to reviewers of what I write. This variety of temporal stagings of ideas is important to me in that ideas, arguments, debates — the life of the mind, if we are being grand — don't have a natural stopping point. So, the stopping point of publication is, in my head, arbitrary, and not to be considered an end in itself.

**Form and Audience.** On the other hand, that arbitrary stopping is also a way of holding something, caring, through the fixing of a form. And form is also important to me: how something is said — and to whom — is constitutive of what is said. I could go on about form, in particular my frustration that it seems harder and harder to publish what I would call essays as articles in the highly-ranked sociology journals. This is a great loss; it contributes to blind empiricism, diminishes the sociological imagination, and obscures an understanding of sociology as a discipline in-between science and the humanities. But maybe this is the topic for a different discussion. One other point to make about form, is that it draws attention to the medium of publication. While I shudder at the use of the word 'output' to describe academic work in exercises such as the Research Excellence Framework (REF) at least it has the merit of reminding us that academic work — like art work — does not operate in one medium alone. There is more to academic work than print (although even print can be used as an expressive medium).

**Authorship, Citation and Collectivity.** No-one would deny that thought is collective, however that statement is understood, but the politics of authorship and citation indices have made some kinds of collectivity more visible than others. I have been told to include references to publications authored by the editor of the journal to which I submitted my article. I've been told to change titles of essays (articles); to think carefully about key words as these will increase the visibility of my work; and so on. Now all of these (except perhaps the first) can be understood as good advice — ensuring that my work is communicable. But I resist, in part because I believe that the communicability of an idea, a finding, an argument, should not out-weigh other principles of academic work. Sometimes it may be that making an idea communicable — at least in an academic world beset with ordinal technologies of communication — does not serve the idea well.