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Publishing and disseminating outdoor studies research

Linda Allin, Heather Prince & Barbara Humberstone

Introduction

The inclusion of a chapter on publishing in outdoor studies lays testament to the growth of outdoor studies as an academic discipline and its visibility over the past decade. There is now a wide range of publishing outlets for outdoor studies research and an increasing number of quality academic journals. Publishers are becoming more sophisticated and finding new ways to access a wide readership (see Prince, Christie, Humberstone & Gurholt, 2018; Taylor & Francis, 2018). These include having on-line and Open Access options as well as print presence (e.g. tandfonline.com) and use of social media such as twitter (e.g. @tandfsport). Alongside the increase in published material, outdoor research has also become more rigorous and ambitious, with the editorial board of outdoor journals such as the *Journal of Adventure Education and Outdoor Learning* encouraging “papers engaging with critical, theoretical and methodological perspectives” (Taylor & Francis, 2018). With current societal issues such as the decline in children’s outdoor play, a rise in mental health problems, concerns over risk, equity and social justice, sustainability and global environmental challenges, contemporary research in outdoor studies can have great benefit and influence. Publishing for research impact and the metrics used for judging outdoor research quality needs to be understood. It is also important to recognise that publishing is a vital feature of an increasingly competitive research culture in universities (Yokoyama, 2006), where evidence of high quality publications and the “effect on, change or benefit to the economy, society, culture, public policy or services, health, the environment or quality of life, beyond academia” are both markers of academic reputation, and inform funding decisions (Research

Excellence Framework, 2021). As such, the need to publish in outdoor studies and show its value has arguably become greater than ever.

Why publish outdoor research?

There are many reasons why people choose to publish research. At a fundamental level, one may ask why undertake research at all if the knowledge is not to be shared or disseminated? For those employed in a university, publishing is what is expected in the role of a lecturer or researcher and could be considered a defining characteristic of working in academia. Research publications also underpin research-rich teaching expectations in universities, which are increasing across academia in many western nations. Eley, Wellington, Pitts & Biggs (2012) highlight a number of additional extrinsic motivations for publishing associated with a university job role: improving one's CV, gaining promotion and/or gaining respect in the field. An external driver for many researchers in universities is typically to be able to contribute to an external assessment body such as the Research Excellence Framework (REF) in the UK, the results of which are the main criteria by which both they and their institution will be judged and funding allocated.

It is also likely that as an outdoor researcher there are other more internal motives. For example, sharing ideas among the widest possibly outdoor community, reaching other academic disciplines and influencing policy; the satisfaction of seeing outdoor ideas in print; hoping findings reach outdoor practitioners and lead to changes in the field or trying to form a bridge between academics and professional organisations. Is it most important to be making a difference or building networks or framing a sense of community with other outdoor researchers?

There may be different combinations of motivations for different pieces of writing or a single main driving force. The important aspect is to know the reasons for publishing and be able to balance internal motivations with any external drivers to help in targeting the right publication outlet for a particular piece of writing. This can also help with any longer term research strategy. In the next section we will identify some of the main publication outlets and discuss some of the implications for publishing in each type.

Outdoor publication outlets

Outdoor magazines

For the outdoor enthusiast or practitioner who wants to disseminate his or her thoughts or experiences to the wider outdoor community, then ‘non-academic’ magazines are a good starting point. These are usually published quarterly and may be related to a particular outdoor governing body - for example, *Climber* or *The Paddler* - or may be published independently. These typically include articles about trips, gear, expeditions, different disciplines within the outdoor activity, coaching or environmental issues, in an easy to read format, designed for a ‘lay’ audience.

Alongside the ‘non-academic’ magazine is the practitioner magazine, whose intended audience is those working in the outdoor profession. In the UK, the journal is *Horizons*, published by the professional body, the Institute for Outdoor Learning (IOL). IOL advertise for “contributors to share good practice, expertise or experience of their work in the outdoors” (Institute for Outdoor Learning, 2018) and the focus here is for publishing articles that emphasise vocational and peer relevance over theoretical underpinning (although they may have both). Writing for practitioner journals needs to be informative and in a style that can be understood by an audience of professionals.

Outdoor studies books or book chapters

There are an increasing number of academic textbooks, handbooks and other books related to outdoor studies that have been published in recent years. This reflects the growing demand for such texts with the number of university courses offering outdoor degree programmes. Examples of recent handbooks include Humberstone, Prince & Henderson (2016) and Gray & Mitten (2018). Book chapters may be invited or authors may work alone or together with academic colleagues in order to present an idea for an entire book to a well-known publishing house, such as Routledge, SAGE or Elsevier. These publishing houses will have guidelines for authors or editors in relation to book proposals on their websites. Indeed, Routledge has recently added a book series *Advances in outdoor studies* to encourage such proposals. The first step in a book proposal is to put forward an idea or respond to a publisher's request, usually providing a proposed title, synopsis, contents list and proposed abstracts or example chapters. The book proposer will also have to identify the intended audience and market competitors, and suggest reviewers. The publisher will then distribute the book proposal through its internal approvals' processes and networks to establish whether there is a demand for the publication topic, and will seek reviews of the proposal. If the feedback and reviews are favourable it may result in a contract and being asked to develop the idea into full book form, with a proposed timetable towards estimated publication. It can sometimes take two years to go from book proposal to published book, and the process can go back and forth between editors and the authors of the different book chapters, so it is a considerable undertaking and there will be a time lag in the resultant published material. However, books and book chapters can be rewarding writing. Often the main academic publishers can distribute work to libraries and on line in order to maximise sales. They are also able to reach audiences and libraries, which may not be able to access or subscribe to particular academic journals, and/or promote it as a core text book for students on outdoor studies courses. While

books and book chapters are not always valued in the same way as journal articles in universities, due to their relatively low status in terms of research rankings, if popular they can be effective in helping to gain visibility, wider impact and recognition as an author in the field.

Outdoor conference proceedings

Conference proceedings are typically a book of summaries (abstracts), extended abstracts or full texts of articles presented at an academic conference. They can be published at the time and/or afterwards. For example, the International Outdoor Research Conference (2018) website (<https://www.usc.edu.au>) publishes both a list of accepted abstracts for the specific conference and links to the proceedings for some of the previous conferences and the European Institute of Outdoor Adventure Education and Experiential Learning (<http://www.eoe-network.eu/home/>) publishes conference abstracts and proceedings. Conference proceedings are a good starting point for early career researchers to get work in progress published and an initial publication record as well as reaching a conference audience. Some conference proceedings are advertised as ‘peer reviewed’, with some form of review process prior to acceptance, whilst other conference proceedings may simply publish the abstract (or article) submitted for the conference itself or may have a less stringent single peer review process post-conference (see Brown & Boyes, 2013). There is usually a short time frame after the end of the conference to submit the final article for publication, often a matter of weeks rather than months. As such, conference proceedings can be a relatively quick way of getting research ideas out in print.

Outdoor peer reviewed academic journals

For academic researchers in outdoor studies, the apex of publication is usually in peer reviewed academic journals. These journals have a rigorous editorial and review process

whereby any submitted article is usually scrutinised by at least two experts in the field, with feedback on the quality of the paper and a recommendation in relation to publication provided to the author(s). As such, some perceive that gaining publication in an academic journal means that it has greater 'quality'. Authors may have to respond to reviewer feedback comments on one or more occasions before eventual acceptance and at any stage, acceptance for publication is not guaranteed. Thus there is usually a relatively lengthy period of time between submission of your journal article and possible publication, which you would need to factor in to a publication strategy, although online publication usually precedes incorporation into a volume.

Historically, journals specifically in the outdoor field have been few, but the reputation of these has grown in the last decade, as the outdoor field has become more established. Perhaps the most well-known international outdoor journals are the *Journal of Adventure Education and Outdoor Learning* published in the UK, the *Journal of Outdoor and Environmental Education* (previously the *Australian Journal of Outdoor Education*) published in Australia and the *Journal of Experiential Education* in the US. A good start is to offer to review books for a journal or submit to a special issue on a specific theme. The latter is often published quickly and can attract more readers than general submissions. Further details of the purpose, history and content of each of these journals can be found in Thomas, Potter & Allison (2009). In addition to outdoor specific journals, outdoor studies research can also be published in journals focusing on the broader disciplines on which they are based; for example, education, sociology or psychology. This is useful as it gets outdoor studies recognised by a wider audience. The English Outdoor Council (www.englishoutdoorcouncil.org) also lists a number of refereed journals that publish outdoor learning based research.

Publishing, access and research metrics

Which journals or outputs to target will depend again on the motivations to publish, the intended readership and consideration of the quality or status of the journal. This means paying attention to what measures are used to indicate research impact, productivity or status in the field. Some of these are identified and discussed below:

Open Access options

The concept of Open Access is based on the principle that “A commitment to the value and quality of research carries with it a responsibility to extend the circulation of such work as far as possible and ideally to all who are interested in it and all who might profit by it” (Willinsky, 2006, p. xii). Making publications Open Access has gained momentum in recent years, due to what Harnard et al. (2008) called the ‘journal affordability’ and ‘access/impact’ problems (p.36). That is, whilst the number of publications may be around two and a half million per year (Harnard et al, 2008), university libraries cannot afford the costs of journal access to them all, hence the potential readership and impact of the research in such journals is often lost. At the same time, there is a demand by funders for knowledge gained through publically funded research to be freely accessible as soon as possible (Terry & Kiley, 2006; UK Research and Innovation, 2018).

Some publication outlets publicise themselves as being fully Open Access, meaning there are no restrictions on being able to read or download the material they publish, which is usually published on-line relatively quickly after acceptance. Other journals advertise different levels of access known as ‘Green’ or ‘Gold’ access; the former allowing self-archiving on a personal or university repository and the latter usually asking a fee to enable the text to be made fully available. Costs, therefore, might influence a decision about where to publish. It

may be useful to note that the REF (2021) has as a condition of entry that authors must have their final refereed articles deposited in an institutional or subject repository.

The impact factor

Another key consideration in publishing choices, particularly for those in higher education institutions, is the ‘impact factor’ of a particular journal. This is the most commonly used metric for research impact and historically has been based on citations – the number of times an article, or articles in a particular journal, are cited by others. The ‘impact factor’ (Thomson, 2018), is applied typically to journals as a way of measuring its ranking or status, based on the average number of times articles from it are cited. It is one of the key metrics used in judging the quality of articles included in such journals and hence important for researchers involved in such assessments as the REF. Unfortunately, due to outdoor studies being a relatively young and small area of research and the comparatively recent development of its academic journals (Prince et al., 2018), the ‘impact factor’ of publishing in any of the main international outdoor journals has tended to be considerably less than others with a broader discipline base. Brookes & Stewart (2016) also reviewed the citation patterns of outdoor education journals 2000-2013 to suggest “with the exception of a few articles, any impact of Outdoor Education (OE) research and scholarship outside of the OE journals, theses, or OE conferences, is highly diffuse” (p. 12). It is also the case that some of the psychological or physical science discipline based journals publishing perceived greater ‘scientific’ research using a quantitative approach tend to have a greater ‘impact factor’ than those in education or sociology due to a historical bias towards this approach. A similar problem for publishing in a relatively small, young and applied field is identified in relation to publishing sports coaching research (Trudel, Culver & Gilbert, 2014). As such, in the competitive academic environment, university researchers will often be encouraged to place

outdoor articles with a strong theoretical base in a more highly rated psychology, sociology, science or education based journal.

However, as outdoor journals and the quality of the articles within them have increased over time, their impact factors and citation figures have begun to show progress. For example, the *Journal of Adventure Education and Outdoor Learning (JAEOL)* had an impact factor of just 0.29 in 2003 but showed a linear increase to 0.98 in 2014 based on ResearchGate citations (see paragraph below on broader impact measures). However, whilst ‘impact factors’ in terms of journal ratings are typically important for academic institutions, they are not the only criterion or metric to consider. It is worth also considering who you want your work to be read by and the likelihood of readers citing or using the research findings you present. The notion of the ‘impact factor’ has also been criticised recently as a greater number of potential other metrics become available. There is some debate as to whether Open Access leads to greater citations of the article, with some authors suggesting that it does and others highlighting weaknesses in the methodologies used to make these claims (Craig, Plume, McVeigh, Pringle & Amin, 2007). Vanclay (2013) indicates that whilst strategically considering where to publish in environmental science, the evidence for Open Access remains inconclusive.

Citation databases and journal rankings

When choosing a journal it may also be important to know whether it subscribes to a citation database such as *Scopus* or *Web of Science*. These are abstract and citation databases of peer-reviewed literature which serve as a basis for journal rankings. For example ranking based on *Scopus* is available through the *SCImago* Journal and Country rank web portal. *Scopus* covers scientific journals, books and conference proceedings, and calculates its score based on average citations known as the Source-Normalised Impact per Paper (SNIP). The advantage

of this score is that it considers discipline differences in its calculations. For example, *JAEOl* is ranked both in Education and also in the health professions under Physical Therapy, Sports Therapy and Rehabilitation. In such journal citation rankings, the top 25% of journals are placed in the uppermost quartile (Q1), with the next 25% as Q2, the next 25% as Q3 and the lowest 25% of journals in the bottom quartile (Q4). *JAEOl* currently scores in the second quartile (Q2) of each area. The Citescore is also relevant – the number of citations received by a journal in one year to documents published in the three previous years, divided by the number of documents indexed in Scopus published in those same years. *JAEOl* has risen from 0.48 (2014) to 1.51 (2017).

H-index

The H-index is calculated by considering the number of articles an author has, and how many of them have been cited the same number of times: for example, an author with an H-index of five, will have at least five articles that have been cited at least five times each. An author with ten publications each cited at least ten times will have an H-index of ten, and so on. The H-index only increases when the next milestone is reached. That is, an author who has ten publications, but only five are cited at least five times, will remain with an H-index of five until the sixth publication reaches six citations. H-indices can also be calculated for journals in the same way and can contribute to an overall assessment of the journal impact.

Broader measures of impact

There are a number of other data points that can give some indication of reach, impact or influence beyond journal citations. These include the amount of media or social media coverage a publication or piece of work may attract, the number of reads or downloads from publication websites, blogs or personal research sites such as ResearchGate or Academia. These ‘altmetrics’ although becoming more recognised and enable a broader range of

publication outlets to be considered, have yet to take over from the more traditional forms of research impact. This may change as the ways in which people access research findings continues to diversify.

Considerations in research design

A final point is associated with the concept of ‘engagement,’ which has particular relevance to research in outdoor studies, particularly in those areas examining the impact of outdoor environments or outdoor programmes on learning. ‘Engagement’ refers to the involvement of stakeholders, usually the end users, in the research being published. Research councils and REF particularly value research that includes, or works in partnership with, stakeholders or beneficiaries. For outdoor studies research this may include, for example, children and young people, environmental bodies, outdoor organisations, teachers or members of communities. Involving the potential research users in different ways in your research can also extend its reach and increase its possible impact. It is also useful to remember that whilst journal rankings, impact factors and citations are all important when considering which journal to place your completed research, some deep thought around the potential ‘significance, originality and rigour’ of your work in the design stage can pay dividends later.

How to be a successful in getting outdoor studies research published

In this final section, we explain in more detail the process of publication in peer reviewed journal articles and provide some suggestions on how outdoor researchers can enhance their chances of success. The suggestions here are based on the authors’ personal experiences of co-editorship of the *Journal of Adventure Education and Outdoor Learning* for a number of years and of publishing outdoor related research.

Most academic journals will have guidelines for authors on their web pages. The first step is to understand the aims and scope of the journal itself. It may sound surprising, but many articles submitted to journals are rejected at the first step simply because they are not aligned with the aims of the journal or the type of article the journal publishes. Hence reading the journal aims and having a scan through the types of articles already published in the journal to see how yours would fit are useful reconnaissance activities which can save much time later. It can also be worth noting the editorial board members and reviewers to get an idea of the types of areas and approaches (qualitative or quantitative) in that journal. You can also look through past issues for the kinds of themes or topics that seem to recur.

Additional guidelines for authors usually include such aspects as expected font, referencing format and word length. Although these might seem like minor points, from an editor's point of view, having a paper that is considerably over-length raises questions as to whether the author has properly considered the journal. Receiving an article with many incorrectly formatted or missing references provides much additional work and is unlikely to set a good first impression.

Once you have identified your target journal, there are a few other key areas that reviewers will consider when deciding whether to accept your article. These include ensuring your paper is well written, has a clear focus, theory and argument, and provides a contribution to literature and knowledge or practice. Make the contribution clear in your conclusion, but ensure not to overstate the claims of findings - no research is perfect! Finally, if possible get someone to read through the article before submission; it is easy to miss minor proofreading or issues.

Handling the review process

It is important to take any comments from reviewers as a learning experience. Rejection from anything can be a disheartening experience. However, rarely do articles pass through the reviewer process without any changes at all, and reviewer comments are there to help you improve your paper and ultimately the quality of your work and the published article. Unless an outright 'reject' (which can happen for a number of reasons, including the article not being an appropriate 'fit' for the journal), there remains the potential for work to be published if authors carefully consider and respond to reviewer comments. The best approach is typically to make a written response against each comment in turn from each reviewer, explaining clearly what changes have been made to the text or to rebuff the comment and provide justification. Where both reviewers' comments are in agreement, this is straightforward. In cases where reviewers differ, a judgement may be needed as to which reviewer comments take precedence and how to make changes that will be acceptable to both. You may receive guidance from the editor on this point. Ideally, both reviewers will have identified similar points, giving you a clear steer on the kind of improvements you need to make to get your work accepted. Reviewers give their time freely and reviewing can be an edifying process.

Conclusion

This chapter has provided a brief overview of the different publication outlets and considerations when making choices about where to publish outdoor studies research. It also describes what is meant by research 'impact' and some of the common ways in which it is calculated. The need for some outdoor researchers to be able to demonstrate research impact means that having a publication strategy that includes considerations of some of these metrics is now vital in a competitive research environment. However, whilst broader discipline based journals may have a greater 'impact factor' it is also important to consider the standing of

journals in the outdoor field and the kind of audience the work is intended for. More recent broader ways of reaching audiences include the use of blogs, social media and/or online profiles where ideas and articles can be read, downloaded and used by readers. The chapter concluded with a reminder about the value of ‘engagement’ when designing outdoor research and some hints and thoughts about how to be successful in getting your ideas and findings published in a peer reviewed journal.

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Abstract

This chapter is concerned with the publishing of outdoor research. A consideration of reasons for publishing and a review of different types of publishing outlets for outdoor studies research are presented including outdoor magazines, outdoor conference proceedings, outdoor studies books and outdoor peer-reviewed journals. The chapter then provides a more detailed look at some of the issues around research access, impact and metrics, which can also influence publication decisions for researchers in outdoor studies. The chapter concludes with an explanation of the process of publication in peer-reviewed journals with guidance for potential authors of outdoor studies research.