

Editorial

# Planning for Academic Publishing After Retirement: Some Results and Observations

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**Abstract:** In 2018, before I retired, I speculated on how I might continue to publish as a former academic, identifying five key behaviours for me to pursue. Now, four years after I retired, I confirm that these activities have been successful. I have no affiliation with any institution, museum or university, and am thriving in my independence. My production is maintained, even flourishing. Some papers have been published under a new iteration of my name, S. Kenneth Donovan, which I trust confuses unwanted software. I publish more in the journals that I read and less in those that, formerly, were favoured by management. I am now a more efficient reviewer of research papers, identifying them as a priority rather than a nuisance.

**Keywords:** behaviour; affiliation; production; choice; reviewing

## 1. Introduction

On 18 October 2018, I published a speculative note, ‘*Planning for Academic Publishing after Retirement*’ [1]. At that time, I was expecting to retire on my 67th birthday, in June 2021, but a change in regulations in the Netherlands, where I worked, unexpectedly saw this event advanced by eight months. Having planned to publish a monograph and a semi-popular book in or around May/June 2021, this change resulted in neither appearing with any affiliation to my former home institution, now 500 km away and on the other side of the North Sea. But, as this satisfied one of my planned behaviours as a retiree, I nonetheless found it a satisfactory outcome.

I have now been a publishing retiree for about four years, and I could not be more contented. I have re-invented myself to a certain extent, but not in the direction that I originally anticipated. My research and writing remain satisfying, even fun, and these are ample outcomes for me to carry on as I am. I formulated my retirement publishing plan under five main headings [1]. Herein, I report developments, or otherwise, under each of these. Progress has been entirely satisfactory, if not quite what I predicted; my response is so what? I continue to make a contribution to my field and enjoy doing so. I expand on the sources of my enjoyment below and trust these will be enlightening, perhaps even inspiring, for other new retirees.

## 2. Place

In 2018, I was employed by the Naturalis Biodiversity Center in Leiden, the Netherlands, and had an honorary position as an associate professor at the University of New Brunswick in Fredericton, Canada. I have retired from both positions. When my paid employment ceased, I had lived in the Netherlands for 19+ years, but have returned to the land of my birth to live near my lady partner (now Mrs. Donovan). I retain no academic link with either institution; in retirement, I have not visited Leiden or Fredericton.

Has this been detrimental to my academic publishing? Not at all. For example, I maintain library support in my own way. Some research journals I still subscribe to, and I can keep an eye on others via the web. Friends and colleagues kindly send me pdfs of their papers if I ask for them, and even copies of old papers that I need. I have joined the



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libraries of the University of Manchester and University of Liverpool, institutions that I know well from my student days.

I also practise one of my great weaknesses, haunting second-hand bookshops, where I find occasional volumes of interest at knockdown prices. For example, I now have a (very) incomplete post-war run of *Transactions of the Sussex Archaeological Society*, which I read for insights into the nefarious activities of Charles Dawson, specifically his 'discovery' of Piltdown Man. More recently, I have bought an early run of *Transactions of the Manchester Geological Society*, which is informing me of, for example, the early history of our studies of borings and boring organisms.

### 3. Name

Job done—another tick. From my first research paper until my retirement, almost 38 years, I was the author S.K. Donovan, sometimes appearing as Stephen K. Donovan. In retirement I have expanded my options and have added a third iteration, S. Kenneth Donovan. They are all me, and if they give some bibliographic software electronic indigestion, then I am delighted. In retirement or otherwise, who needs their output for any year reduced to some integer? Not me. Such software will produce just a handle that is used by people who have no idea of what you are doing to gauge your contribution. In my retirement, who cares?

In truth, S. Kenneth Donovan tends to publish alone. Co-authored papers still use S.K. or Stephen K. because my co-authors know me as Steve, not Ken. I originally saw S. Kenneth [1] as a new incarnation, perhaps an industrial archaeologist rather than a geologist. This has not quite worked out. Although I read a lot of archaeology in retirement, I do not research or publish in the field except peripherally. My main interests are still geology and palaeontology—old habits die hard. S. Kenneth Donovan publishes mainly in *Geology Today* where, and contrarily, Stephen Donovan is on the editorial board.

Whatever! I retain 'ownership' of my research papers. S. Kenneth Donovan is as much my name as S.K. and Stephen K. I have never used a nom de plume, although this may be the next step.

### 4. Institutional Links

I have none and I like it this way, perhaps even more than I anticipated. I suspect that Donovan [1] was read by more than one person in my former institution. When I retired, nobody invited me to enrol as a guest researcher (rare evidence, perhaps, that anyone noticed one of my publications!). Or perhaps it was my responsibility to request some such continuation. My e-mail address was closed after about a month and that was that.

But, as I expected, I enjoy being on my own academically. My output of published papers has been maintained, and my latest book has been revised and resubmitted. Colleagues get in touch when they want me to be involved in a project and, now based in north-west England, I have many possible avenues for field-based research. I find myself giving a quicker response to offers of collaboration, whether yes or no.

I enjoy publishing where I want, rather than where I should, to satisfy some institutional target. I would say that there has been no deterioration in the standard of my research nor of my writing. What has disappeared is the management-down requirement to aim for the 'best' journal that will accept a paper. My contributions should be judged on their own merits, not by where they were published. In my present situation, I aim to publish in journals to which I subscribe. Elsevier, Wiley, and their rivals receive ample submissions without me. It is the smaller journals, published by local and minor specialist societies, that I endeavour to support.

### 5. Where to Publish?

I have already made ample reference to where I publish, but to reiterate, I send my research papers to journals that I actually read and appreciate. This is in contrast to the attitude of many, probably most, research institutions whose researchers are expected to

aim for the most high-profile outlet available. These are journals with a high score on the Science Citation Index (SCI). These I did publish in, wanting my papers to appear in the most high-profile journals possible, but not all of them. I have been a prolific author for many years; a certain number of my papers were always submitted to local, low-profile journals not listed by the SCI. For example, a paper on the palaeontology of the Isle of Wight might go to a journal on the SCI [2], but it might equally appear in *Wight Studies: Proceedings of the Isle of Wight Natural History & Archaeological Society* [3]. The latter were more commonly single-author papers; I wanted my co-authors to receive the credit of publication in a top journal.

My strategy for publication is driven by my determination to support low-profile journals that I actually read. These are mainly those journals published by local scientific societies [3]. These commonly publish in both hard copy and online for free. This is a valued contrast to the major publishing houses who charge thousands of pounds, euros, or dollars for the same. I have never paid a penny to publish a book or a paper. I have no grant support, and my pension is not there to line the purses of major publishers.

Local journals may or may not use external reviewers for research papers. Publishing locally is a positive pursuit, but it is warped by some academics. In an earlier incarnation, when I was on the teaching staff of the University of the West Indies, Mona, I was conscious that some fellow scientists were at pains to publish in outlets—newsletters, regional conference volumes, and the like—which were not reviewed. This was their choice; they wanted to publish, but perhaps were loath to risk the gauntlet of external criticism. This could lead to some strange anomalies due to the poor standards of some of these publications, such as a paper that appeared in a conference volume without a reference list. My position is different; after over 40 years of peer-reviewed publication in my field, I am a leading expert and doubt if an external reviewer will make any worthwhile changes to my latest paper. When my papers are sent to peer reviewers, comments are mainly worthwhile, but suggested changes are primarily cosmetic.

## 6. Reviewing

This is proving to be an unexpected treat in part because my approach has changed for the better. I review papers, but not grant proposals. I am not in the business of applying for research grants any more. I have not been asked to review a proposal since I retired, but I would decline the offer. Let those who apply for research grants be the reviewers, hardly an unreasonable attitude.

But I am delighted to be asked to review papers submitted to a select group of journals, mainly, but not solely, those in which I have hitherto and currently do publish. My research direction and that of a journal in which I no longer publish may have diverged. If so, my attitude is that there must be those experts who are closer in their interests to those of such a publication. Let them support their own journal.

I prefer to support my 'own' journals. Now I am no longer affiliated to a museum or university, editors may have to hunt for my e-mail address, but they do find it and offer papers for me to review. At this point, I make a rapid decision to review or not; no point in keeping the editor waiting. If I agree to provide a review, then I have a new approach. Formerly, like a book reviewer envisioned by Orwell [4], I could contemplate a paper for days without actually starting to read it. Today, the retired Donovan receives a paper for review, prints a hard copy and starts to review straight away, dropping whatever else he is doing. I have a preference for reviewing short papers and I aim to get my review to the editor within 24 h. That is good for everyone involved with the process, including me, as I get to read the latest research in an area of my own interest.

The obvious question is does the Donovan [1] system work? Yes, it does, but, remember, I crafted it to fit my own needs and preferences. It may not suit a new retiree in its entirety, but I commend to you to adopt what fits, discard what does not, and make your own adjustments. I am having fun with publishing in my retirement; I hope you do too.

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**Conflicts of Interest:** The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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