

The Increasing Hardness of the “Soft” Sciences: A Case Study of Referencing Patterns in German Language Core Journals in Sociology and Political Science

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Introduction

Publication practices in the social sciences are characterized by the use of heterogeneous publication channels and a stronger national focus (Nederhof, 2006). At the same time the use of bibliometric indicators in research evaluation promotes journal articles in international peer reviewed journals as the main style of publishing research results. The question emerges to which extent this changes publication practices in these disciplines. This study addresses this question and present results of a case study which investigates publication and referencing patterns of core German language journals in sociology and political science. Based on an explorative analysis of reference lists it describes patterns and changes of the parameters of the knowledge base of these journals.

Data and Methods

The analysis focuses on “core” German language journals which are nationally oriented, German language and predominantly citing non-source publications in sociology and political science, for expecting to differ significantly from the publication practices that serve as the theoretical boilerplate of bibliometric analyses. “Core” journals are defined by analysing the full outputs of two German political science departments (University of Mannheim and University of Münster) and publication lists collected for all German sociology departments in a research assessment exercise (*Forschungsrating Soziologie*, Neidhardt, 2006). We limited the list with core journals to journals that have continuously been indexed in the Web of Science since at least 1990. The core German language journals in sociology include *Berliner Journal für Soziologie*, *Kölner Zeitschrift für Soziologie und Sozialpsychologie*, *Soziale Welt- Zeitschrift für Sozialwissenschaftliche Forschung und Praxis*, and *Zeitschrift für Soziologie*. The core German language journals in political science include *Internationale Politik*, *Osteuropa*, and *Politische Vierteljahresschrift*. In total, the metadata of 8,433 publications from 2000 to 2009 were analyzed. All references to journals were classified based on a thesaurus containing spelling variations of journals indexed in Web of Science as well

as an extended set of German language Social and Political Science. Three categories were used: references to German language sociology/political science journals which are indexed in the Web of Science (“German source journals”), references to other source journals, references to German non-source Sociology/Political Science journals, and other references. The remaining references were coded as journal, monograph and non-source references based on the methodology described in Moed (2006: 121).

Preliminary Results

References to non-source items account for almost 84% of all references in the sociology dataset. Around two thirds of the references are to non-journal publications. The composition of reference lists in the political science dataset differs slightly: References to monographs and non-source publications account for almost 84% of all references—a high share of those being citations to articles in collected editions. While references to national journals do not play a very important role in sociology journals (at least with regard to their quantity), with only 5% of all references they are virtually absent in the political science journals. In terms of citations to source journals and non-source journals the two datasets show different patterns: Political science journals have a higher share of references to non-German source journals (12%) than sociology journals (7%). In contrast, sociology journals have a much higher share of references to non-source journals (17%) than political science journals (8%).

Table 1. The overall count and share of different categories of references in core German language sociology and political science journals (2000-2009).

References to-	Pol. Sci	Soc. Sci
monographs	38%	46%
non-source-publications	38%	21%
other non-source journals	8%	17%
other source journals	12%	7%
German source journals	3%	6%
German non-source journals	2%	3%
Total N	51222	57682

Figure 1 shows that the majority of references point at publications in the category “other source journals.” The number almost doubles in the 10 year time window. Non-source journals in both the German and non-German domain account for a smaller share of references than source journals. In the period from 2000-2002, the majority of journal references in core sociology journals points to non-source journal articles. After 2003 and in particular after 2007 the number of references to source journals starts to increase. The figure also reveals that the overall number of references to journal articles is increasing.

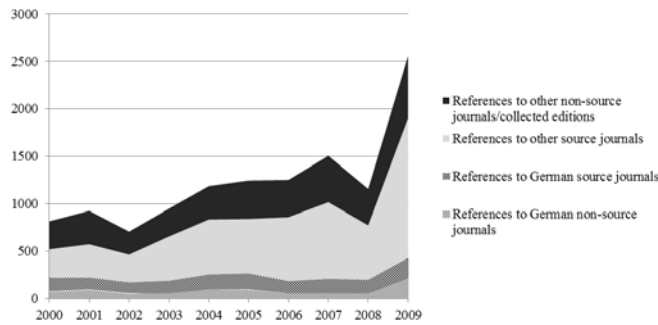


Figure 1. References to journal articles and collected editions in core German language sociology journals (cumulative).

Similar to the results in sociology Figure 2 shows a general growth in the overall number of references to journal articles. Other source journals have the highest number of the references of core German language political science journals and their amount increases continuously over the years. The number of references to non-German journals decreases in 2002 and then reaches a peak in 2007.

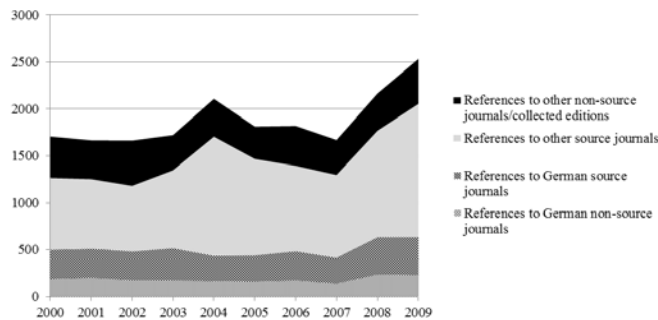


Figure 2. References to journal articles and collected editions in core German language political science journals (cumulative).

Discussion and Conclusion

Our analysis shows that with a total of 67% in the sociology and 76% in the political science dataset references predominantly refer to non-journal publications. These numbers are in line with the ones reported by Broadus (1971). He found that the shares of references to books and monographs vary between 31% (education) to 62% (sociology) in social sciences. The share of references to source journals is the same in both disciplines. However, there are differences of the scope of the referenced journals: While in the sociology journalset references to German source journals have the same share as references to other source journals, in the political science journalset the international domain seems to be more important. To sum up, this study shows that the share of non-source publications remains constant in the time period 2000-2009, and the number and share of references to source journals is increasing both absolutely and relatively. There is some evidence that source-items are becoming more important to German language sociologists and political scientists. At the same time, we can see that the use of other sources of scholarly knowledge does not decrease. An interesting and so far hardly investigated issue that has come up in this exploratory case study is the relevance of citations to newspaper and non-scholarly material in political science. We can see that at least one third of the top non-source references in the German language political science journals are newspapers in this study. Further research will show to which extent our observation is specific for the German language political science and to which extent the share of references to newspapers can be used as a comparative indicator for the specifics of the knowledge base of a discipline.

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