

Happy 40th Birthday, Organization Studies! Looking Back and Looking Ahead

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“I had never meant to be an editor” – this is how David Hickson (1980, p. 87) starts his recollection of how his engagement with *Organization Studies* began when he received the proposal to become the journal’s first editor at the third Colloquium of the European Group for Organizational Studies (EGOS) in Speyer in 1977. Hickson, a member of the first cohort of Super-EGOS (as the EGOS coordination committee jokingly called itself in the early years) and later EGOS’ first Honorary Member, also confesses in his *Inside Story* that “(w)hen talk of a new journal first began among the EGOS activists, I was distinctly cool”: Too much around to read already, no need to pour out any more. Neither was he particularly intrigued by the job of an editor: “Having to take responsibility for comments and criticisms that meddle with other people’s work” didn’t seem an overly appealing way to spend his non-existing spare time. Well, the journal was founded, David Hickson accepted the offer and acted as Editor-in-Chief of *Organization Studies* for more than the first decade of its existence. Richard Whitley, in his laudation for Hickson (Whitley, 1998, p. 905) especially stresses this role: “Very few of us”, he says, “have any idea of what it takes, as an Editor, to launch a journal and build it into a leading journal, and when one thinks of this being done in a multi-cultural environment, across nation states and languages, then the challenge is enormous”.

Now, more than four decades later, we are celebrating the 40th volume of our journal. Mostly thanks to the early editorials, several other *Inside Stories* in which the pioneers shared their memories, and the *News and Notes* that were also part of the spectrum of *Organization Studies* formats back then, the origins of both EGOS and *Organization Studies* have been preserved. We are reminded by Geert Hofstede (1993) of the part de Gruyter played not only

as the first publishing house of *Organization Studies* (until 2003, when *Organization Studies* was transferred to SAGE who have been a devoted and excellent partner since then) but especially in supporting the idea of a new journal in the field of organization theory by approaching Alfred Kieser, who shared the idea with Geert Hofstede, who then suggested this should become an EGOS initiative – both later became part of Hickson’s first editorial team together with Flemming Agersnap, Franco Ferraresi, Cornelis Lammers, and Jean-Claude Thoenig. From these sources we also know that the initiators played with several names for the new outlet. Finally, they settled for *Organization Studies*, not coincidentally mirroring the considerations that had also named its founding body EGOS: organization to embrace form *and* activity; studies in a deliberate plural.

The 1970s were, as we all know, a remarkably fertile time for organization theory with many innovative ideas and new approaches appearing, but, especially in Europe, with little cross-fertilization and exchange among them. European organization research at the time was fragmented. Cornelis Lammers later recollects that if European organization theory at the time was characterized by pluralism, it was mostly “pluralistic ignorance” (Lammers, 1998, p. 883). He remembers Mike Aiken, a US scholar and one of the founding figures of EGOS, noticing that European scholars in the early 1970s were very well informed about even second-rate research from North America, but were unaware of first-rate work of their European colleagues. The aspiration of the founders of *Organization Studies* was to amend this and to establish a high quality forum for conversation and debate in organization research that is “European, but not solely for Europe” (Hickson et al., 1980, p. 1): supranational, intellectually and paradigmatically plural, and open to all disciplines – qualities that, as John Child, *Organization Studies*’ third editor, noted (Child, 1992, p. 1) “reflect the best intentions of its founding ‘EGOS’”, and that, as Bob Hinings observed almost 20 years later, “constitute the core identity of Organization Studies and EGOS” (2010, p. 660).

There is a sense in which this initial approach for *Organization Studies* reflects both the strength and the weakness of Europe’s multicultural and multilingual reality. For many languages, historically extending beyond the present-day nation states, the distance to English was often less than to other languages. Publishing primarily in their first language until the late 1980s, many scholars’ international literature was thus English, and tended to be dominated by native English-speaking authors. North American authors were sometimes

closer at hand. However, it is this multi-cultural diverse history of Europe that has resulted in a multi-disciplinary constitution of most social science disciplines, including organization studies (and business school research generally). Relatively independent traditions have nurtured methodological practices and paradigmatic styles that still cause confusion and frustration, but are also the source for inspiration and innovation. As part of these initiatives, *Organization Studies* has always respected diversity and paradigmatic plurality, a heritage we bring with us into the next 40 years.

The ‘supranational’ character of the journal played an important role especially in earlier editorials. Supranational (not international) meant being placed beyond nations. “Widening horizons beyond national boundaries” (Hickson et al., 1980, p. 1) was the mission. This implied that editors had an eye on how many different nationalities were represented in the issues. The *News and Notes* sections included so-called *Country Tales* in which scholars reported on what was going on in organization research in their home countries. Being located beyond national boundaries also meant overcoming language barriers and bringing together different linguistic communities. Back then, the language of the newly founded journal was still a topic of discussion. Hickson (1980, p. 89) notes that “after examining many alternatives the decision was to begin with English, though this still remains open to experience”, and for some time *Organization Studies* accepted initial submissions in multiple European languages – the editorial team, itself covering many European languages, would recommend translation when they saw potential.

Much has changed in this respect. Although we are still aware that most of our authors do not publish in their mother tongue and that relevant work is published in many languages, English has become the uncontested *lingua franca* in academia, and today, it is the careers of organization scholars that are ‘beyond nations’ to an extent that would make it a rather difficult task to count nationalities – what should be considered: passports, affiliations, academic training? While geography, nation states, and language barriers have more or less lost their significance in our scholarly field, in spirit, the responsibility remains to bring together different (intellectual rather than geographic) communities and to warrant that quieter voices and silenced themes are heard. In this respect, there is a difference between *lingua franca* and a dominant language. Attention to quieter voices and silenced themes means that the requirement to be reflexive about language, translation, and the visibility of multiple linguistic communities of practice in academia is even more pressing today (Meyer

& Boxenbaum, 2010). No one speaks only one language, since all languages are influenced and intersected by other languages. In addition, understanding the other-self relationship (with all the ethical implications thereof) is a challenge that goes beyond language but will always include language and the inherent tasks of translation that come with it (Piekkari, Tietze, & Koskinen, forthcoming). Fragmentation is still a challenge – not of the national sort, but between the sub-domains of our field, the many somewhat self-contained conversations and literatures, and the predominance of a manuscript style that discourages looking over the fence and ‘widening horizons’. Overcoming ‘pluralistic ignorance’ remains a continuous task. Reflexivity about such ‘disciplinary’ fragmentation can help us all to learn from the challenges related to translation in the more general sense. Generosity is as important as curiosity for intellectual progress. We strongly believe in keeping *Organization Studies* curious and generous enough to have a ‘de-fragmenting’ impact on academic-intellectual communities in our field.

Widening horizons across boundaries implied disciplinary boundaries and “reduc[ing] academic ethnocentrism” (Hickson et al., 1980, p. 1): “[F]lexible in content and style, open to a diversity of paradigms, and to any and all of the disciplines which contribute to organization theory” (Hickson et al., 1980, p. 2). The first editorial team of *Organization Studies* was well aware that such programmatic and paradigmatic openness make it difficult to define a clear editorial line since, as they continue, “[t]o define which ideas are ‘in’ is also to define which are ‘out’”. We like to think that a certain productive vagueness or generative ambiguity is thus required, and we have related this to the journal’s capacity to move entrepreneurially ahead (Hjorth & Reay, 2018). Openness is a way to invite new movements, entrants of the perhaps unexpected, and to encourage learning from ‘all of the disciplines which contribute to organization theory.’ Hence, the mantra of *Organization Studies* that all subsequent editorials have reiterated in one version or another, was and has remained until today: *to understand organizations, organizing, and the organized, in and between societies.*

The focus on ‘understanding’ (*verstehen*, and its concern for the speaking, writing, and expressing human) deliberately draws on *Organization Studies*’ “deep intellectual roots in the social sciences” (Wilson, 2003, p. 5). The call to see organizations as “both the implements of societies and the institutions which shape the societies that use them” (Hickson et al., 1980, p. 2), as social, cultural, historical and political phenomena in societies (Hjorth & Reay, 2018, p. 7) urges work published in *Organization Studies* to emphasize “organizations

as part of societies rather than an exclusively ‘organization-centric’ view” (Hickson, 1990, p. 1). It also prompts engagement with ‘big’ societal questions (Courpasson et al., 2008) that “bring society back to center stage” (Courpasson et al., 2008, p. 1386; emphasis in original). *Organization Studies* is the journal for research into problems of organized humans, the processes that organize them, and the organizations (in the broadest sense) that organize those processes, in and between societies.

Organization research of today, not only the work we publish in *Organization Studies*, but more generally, is more and more coming from the business faculties of universities or from business schools. Although the scholars who assemble at business faculties or business schools to study organizations, organizing and the organized still have multiple disciplinary backgrounds, this academic locale, as Jim March, EGOS’ second Honorary Member, stressed, is not a neutral one: It encourages contacts to economics rather than the social sciences, and favours a focus on organizational strategies over societal strategies (March, 2007). Understanding organizations in and between societies thus also urges us to reflect upon the business schools’ more dominant position in the higher educational system and the impact on societies of placing more and more business school graduates into more and more organizations.

Despite this trend, or perhaps rather because of it, the paradigmatic and disciplinary openness as well as the interest in broader societal questions that were imprinted into *Organization Studies* upon inception are incanted ever since by incoming editors, like a Fugue in music, a principal theme with several variations, ever revolving between mono-, poly-, and cacophony, the perpetual challenge being to find a good balance between intellectual hegemony and fragmentation into knowledge silos. Hari Tsoukas and his editorial team, for example, saw danger in fragmentation.

They warned that “pluralism may descend into a series of inward-looking, even self-obsessed, colonies” and sought “to avoid both the Scylla of a monoparadigmatic journal and the Charybdis of a pluralistically cacophonous journal” (Tsoukas et al., 2003, p. 1006). David Courpasson and co-editors, in turn, stressed their ambition to reinforce “the *diverse diversities*” (Courpasson et al., 2008, p. 1383; emphasis in original), and Robin Holt and Frank den Hond a few years later diagnosed that “the ‘flexibility’ and ‘diversity’ that Hickson et al. sought to promote have ever since been in need of encouragement” (Holt & den Hond, 2013, p. 1589). The most recent editorial voices a “deep suspicion of calls for a

unifying paradigm or establishing a ‘proper’ discipline (of organization studies)” and insists “that OS must continue to take inspiration from its multidisciplinary ‘foundation’” in order to retain organization studies as a “polyphony [. . .] that allows for surprise and change” (Hjorth & Reay, 2018, p. 10).

Forty years have passed since the first volume of *Organization Studies* was published. As the new editorial team of Daniel Hjorth and Renate Meyer move forward, it is with full consideration of the many devoted editorial teams that have set demanding examples to follow. With the help of our Senior Editors, Book Review Editors, authors, reviewers, and the wonderful Sophia Tzagaraki (a big *Thank you!* to all of them), *Organization Studies* will continue to deliver first rate research in multiple formats, cross boundaries of all kinds, embrace intellectual novelty (Tsoukas et al., 2003), “facilitate the airing of new perspectives, issues and data” (Clegg, 1991, p. i), explore the roads less travelled, and the roads that have yet to be built (Hjorth & Reay, 2018), be bold in exploring novel frontiers, daring to know and “to push at the edges of convention” (Holt & den Hond, 2013, p. 1587). It will continue to stand on the shoulders of giants (Courpasson et al., 2008) (and occasionally on their toes), and contribute to organization studies being an “‘undisciplined’ discipline” (Hjorth & Reay, 2018, p. 11). And, most importantly, we agree with Arndt Sorge (Sorge, 2000, p. vi): “you meet the nicest people in OS and EGOS”. Happy Birthday, *Organization Studies!*

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