

# International visibility and impact of national journals. A comparative study of Spanish and Italian legal journals.

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## Introduction

The publication of results of research in the social sciences and humanities (SSH) presents differences from publications in other areas. The scope of research (local, national, European, international) (Nederhof, 2006), the documental type (chapters in books, monographs, journal articles) (Hicks, 2004), the language (vernacular) and habits of collaboration (individual or with little institutional collaboration) (Chi, 2014), have their own characteristics and this requires the development of specific methodologies for the analysis and assessment of SSH publications.

When examining the international experiences of the journal evaluation in SSH, one of the first classifications is represented by the European Reference Index for Humanities (ERIH), an initiative launched by the European Science Foundation (ESF) in 2001. In several European countries such as Italy (Ferrara and Bonacorsi, 2016), The Netherlands, Norway, Denmark and Sweden (Ahlgren, Colliander and Persson 2012; Ingwersen and Larsen 2014; Hammarfelt and De Rijcke 2015; Aagaard, Bloch and Schneider 2015) and Spain (Torres-Salinas et al. 2010) other exercises of classification of journals in this field have been carried.

Legal science, being part of SSH, is perhaps one of the not bibliometric fields that mostly is averse to the evaluation practices based on quantitative approach. Research evaluation in legal science is a delicate and complex process due to the fact that there are profound differences between the various branches of law, therefore the tools of communication are very different: an internationalist shares research through international journals while a legal historian relies more on books. In particular, legal scholarship is both the science of law and one of the authoritative and influencing sources of that law. This is why there is a strict relationship between legal science and legal practice.

In recent years, European countries have been involved in an intense debate concerning the evaluation of legal research outputs. The debate tends to focus on a few specific aspects, which are very relevant for the purpose of this paper, which intends to offer a picture of the Spanish and Italian scenarios on legal national journals and citation databases. In Spain, the Comisión Nacional de Acreditación de la Investigación (CNAI) establishes the criteria for granting research awards to university professors who have successfully carried out their research activity (“Sexenios”). The results show that those fields that move away from the

practice of publication in international journals have a lower success rate. This is the case of Philosophy and Law (Ruiz-Perez, 2016). This gap between publication practices in the academic community and evaluation criteria has led CNAI to modify the requirements for researchers in Social Science, Humanities and Law, including books, book chapters and articles in Spanish journals (BOE, 2018).

It is clear that this is a complex issue, so the debate on this line is central.

### Main objectives

The aim of the paper is to compare the Italian and Spanish situation of legal journals within the different citation databases available and used by SSH scientists, in order to take into account the state of the art of legal publications within the most popular citation data sources.

### Methods

For the Italian side, we have collected all the top ranking legal Italian and Spanish journals. The Italian list is the updated list of Class A scientific journals for the purpose of Abilitazione Scientifica Nazionale (ASN) for applying as tenured associate or full professor positions at state-recognised universities.

For the Spanish side, since 2006, the Spanish Foundation for Science and Technology (FECYT) has been carrying out the ARCE project (FECYT, 2018) with the aim of contributing to the internationalisation of Spanish scientific journals, recognizing them with the Quality Seal. In 2015, FECYT supported a new project in order to develop a methodology for the classification of national journals of SSH (FECYT, 2017). This methodology was developed to categorise journals already recognised with the Quality Seal and to offer a list (ordered according to merit) in each scientific category, especially in SSH. For the purpose of the paper, the methodology implemented by FECYT has been applied.

For the evaluation and classification of journals, the methodology is based on two dimensions: the analysis of journals' impacts and their visibility. The dimensions and indicators are shown in table 1.

**Table 1. Dimensions and indicators**

<i>Dimension</i>	<i>Indicator</i>	<i>Weight</i>
<i>IMPACT</i>	<i>Citation (last 5 years)</i> <i>SCI, SSCI, A&amp;HCI</i> <i>Scopus</i> <i>ESCI</i>	<i>60%</i>
	<i>h index (last 5 years)</i> <i>WoS (SCI &amp; SSCI)</i> <i>SJR</i> <i>Google S. Metrics</i>	<i>10%</i>
	<i>Quartile (in 2017)</i> <i>WOS (SCI &amp; SSCI)</i> <i>SJR</i>	<i>10%</i>
<i>VISIBILITY</i>	<i>MIAR-ICDS</i>	<i>20%</i>

### Final Score

The final score obtained by each journal is the sum of their values in the previous phases: citations + H-index + quartiles + ICDS (the maximum to reach is always 100).

### **Quartile distribution**

Finally, the journals are ranked by quartiles taking into account the total number of journals and the total score obtained by each one of them.

### **Results**

The model was tested in 167 journals in the field of law of both countries; 44 Spanish journals with the FECYT Quality Seal and 123 top ranking Italian legal journals. The results obtained after applying the methodology to calculate and assign values to each dimension show that the number of citations received by the most visible journals (journals in quartile 1) is higher than the rest, with similar proportions in both countries. It has also been observed that most Italian law journals are not present in international databases such as WoS and SCOPUS, none have been indexed in WOS and only 8 (6,5%) of them have been indexed in SCOPUS, 7 (5,7%) of which are located in the Q1. In the case of the Spanish law journals, 2 (4,5%) are included in WoS and 11 (25%) in SCOPUS, all of them reaching positions that place them in quartiles 1 and 2.

With respect to the visibility indicator, the Spanish journals with the highest ICDS are located, in general, in better positions. However, in the case of Italian journals, the distribution is more heterogeneous.

We have merged all Italian and Spanish journals in a single list, sorted by their scores from highest to lowest, and they have been ranked by quartiles. In the first quartile (including 42 journals), the 62% of them (26) are Spanish and 38% (16) are Italian.

### **Concluding remarks**

The methodology for the classification of national journals of SSH used in this study has allowed to compare the characteristics of scientific journals of two countries, the majority of them not included in international databases (WOS or SCOPUS).

We believe that this is, in the field of law, a very important survey as it takes a picture of how legal research coming from two old European countries is represented in international citation databases. The results show that the Spanish journals have more impact and visibility than the Italian ones, in almost all indicators obtained. This can be maybe explained by the fact that Italian language in the legal domain is not so popular and so it is less cited in legal research publications than the Spanish one which includes Latin America publications. Legal sciences are by nature linked to national languages and many areas of research are strictly local: the vehicular language is the national language, and that of the legal system analysed.

The relevance of these issues in the legal academic debate makes it necessary to move forward by including extensive consultations among various legal scientific communities and involve all stakeholders in order to open up a wide-ranging, collective reflection on such a delicate and relevant scenario for the enhancement of scientific legal production across the countries and the maintenance of the qualified role of legal science in global context.

As a matter of fact, there is a lack of a transnational debate about the quality methodology and scientific relevance of legal research (Van Gestel and Lienhard, 2019). Of course, there is a

debate in each national context, underlying that law is different from the other sciences, however the discussion does not explain sufficiently why and in which way law is different. The wish is that legal academics become actively involved in the debate on research evaluation and quality of legal scholarship: in particular, the hope is to focus on the identification of quality indicators and assessment methods. Furthermore, doctrinal legal research has get through important changes due to the Europeanization and globalization: the need of making more explicit the methods, the theories and the approaches of legal scholarship is fundamental also in the prospective of research assessment and funding (Van Gestel and Lienhard, 2019). The survey is located in such a context and witnesses the delicate position of legal scholarship in the research evaluation context.

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