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The Revolution Must Be Published: Toward a Radically Inclusive Publishing Ecology

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If public humanities is to realize its potential to benefit all in higher education and beyond, it must be published in some way – traditional or unconventional – and be discoverable.

During 2020, a working group of scholars, publishers, and librarians convened online under the auspices of Routledge, Taylor & Francis, and the National Humanities Alliance to explore some of the publishing challenges and opportunities for engaged scholars in the humanities. While public scholarship is deeply rooted in the humanities, it has spread dramatically across the disciplines during the last 25 years. When this work gets published, its fit and format create certain challenges in the existing publishing ecosystem due to the nature of public scholarship. The working group mapped these challenges, culminating in the publication of a set of model publishing practices in early 2021.¹ In the years since, members of the working group have gone on to convene multiple sessions, workshops, and conversations and publish several pieces, all of which explore the implications of a central thesis: building the field of publicly engaged humanities through publication, in partnership with communities within and beyond academia, can both do enormous good in the world *and* help build the field. However, publishing the public humanities requires rethinking scholarly communication with a wider range of producers and consumers in mind.

Academic research and publishing systems continue to favor conventional scholarly publishing models, while the diverse forms of knowledge emerging from publicly engaged projects derived from working directly with and for communities require novel and more dynamic (often digital) publishing solutions. Public humanities publishing must also develop organically out of the values that underpin this kind of work.

In the 2023 *Publishing Values-Based Scholarly Communication*² working group members teamed up with members of the HuMetricsHSS Initiative (<https://humetricshss.org/>) to craft an

¹ Burton et al. 2021a.

² Burton et al. 2021b.

intentionally values-based Open Educational Resource that situated values (openness, collaboration, collegiality, and shared authority) at the center of the process of creating the work, inspired by the HuMetricsHSS white paper *Walking the Talk*.³ If published in forms appropriate to their values and goals, publicly engaged projects have greater potential to generate the social results their participants seek (see the vast array of publicly engaged humanities projects cataloged in the Humanities for All database, <https://humanitiesforall.org/>). Therefore, borrowing from Raymond Williams – “To be truly radical is to make hope possible, rather than despair convincing”⁴ – we propose a *radically inclusive* category of publishing that prioritizes community voices and mutual benefit.

Radically inclusive publishing practices

Existing publishing models and accredited publications do not fully recognize all parts of the process and all modalities of presentation that engaged scholars are adopting in a values-based and engaged approach. The challenges presented to engaged scholars and the lack of appropriate publishing outlets hampers the development and the value of public scholarship in education, research, and wider society. Additionally, the work of publicly engaged scholars is not always recognized or rewarded by existing systems, structures, and hierarchies and can often be seen as a detriment to career progression. Scholarly communication, primarily publication in books and journals, plays an important role in an individual scholar’s career progression. It follows that publishing models that support career progression as well as an explicitly values-based approach to scholarly communication are therefore required for this kind of knowledge to flourish.

Developing a publishing system (or systems) that is rooted in the radically inclusive aim of doing enormous good in the world takes dedicated propagation and growth. There is a reason why we have chosen an ecological metaphor for this piece.

As more genres of work are recognized as “scholarly publications,” a set of classifications emerges that reflect the diversity of publicly engaged humanities publishing. This ecosystem consists of multiple *organisms* (exhibits, performances, community archives, and other participatory, visual, and collective activities) that foster a variety of communities and goals. Such events are often more appealing and effective ways of “making public” the work of a community-engaged project than a written text alone. However, it remains the case that books and articles are more likely to be cited in tenure and promotion conversations than any other output or data produced.⁵ Broadening what counts as “published” as well as what counts as “scholarship” is crucial for supporting both the scholarly and the public aims of the publicly engaged humanities.

Genre classification is not the only difficulty. There also exist challenges particular to the conditions of producing publicly engaged scholarship that make publication more complex and indeed more important. For example, publicly engaged work is about *relationships*, process, and methodology – how and why the project partners chose to do this work together – as much as it is about outcomes. The publicly engaged humanities need publishing options that include all aspects of a project’s processes and methodologies, including failures and adjustments arising from the messy – and often time-consuming –

³ HuMetrics HSS Initiative 2022.

⁴ Williams 1989.

⁵ Ruediger and MacDougall 2023 and Rosenblum et al. 2024.

process of working across diverse public or community groups (cf. Goldenberg and Tell⁶). Alternative formats, timelines, and criteria for marking progress need to go hand-in-hand with sustainable, flexible publishing forums that share the values of publicly engaged humanities scholars.

Further, scholarly and public partners are collectively engaged in building the publicly engaged humanities as a field of research and practice; every publication must ask how *all* the voices involved in a project's life cycle can be included in a project's publication. And if that is not enough, publicly engaged scholars also need to effectively communicate these complex projects to their scholarly peers and beyond to a larger public. Works that incorporate multiple voices, are broadly accessible, and are designed to intervene in public issues, may not fit easily into the highly conventional design of scholarly products. The multivocal, collaborative nature of publicly engaged work poses challenges for linear, author-driven, print-based publications and is essential for maintaining a *rootedness* in public-good goals. That is why digital, open, and *publicly engaged* humanities are symbiotes.⁷ They are built on shared values and require innovation in the forms and aims of publication.

Richly depicting and re-centering an examination of engaged scholars' radically inclusive efforts – for instance, in ways that resemble the call for more inclusive practices in the Digital Humanities⁸ – is situated at the heart of our approach to building the field through publication. We believe that collectively we can create the radically inclusive publishing systems we want to see. Systems that value the rich array of inputs, processes, forms, formats, and academic, alongside community voices, just as much as the outputs.

Toward a radically inclusive publishing ecology

Against the backdrop of an evolving research system that is moving toward a more open, digital, societally responsive, flexible, and networked model, the time is right to explore how we might create paradigm-busting publication pathways for public scholars and their partners that make visible, accessible, discoverable, and preservable all parts of the work being produced. We need to find ways to fill the gaps (and address the inequities for public scholars) in the publication pathways that have been created and sustained by the dominant publishing paradigm. Both how engaged scholars publish and what they publish are changing to serve broader purposes and audiences. For the publishing ecology to continue to thrive and grow, these new modes and outputs must be given just as much status in evaluations as more standard forms of scholarly outputs.⁹

In this moment of celebration that is the manifesto issue of *Public Humanities*, we are calling for greater collaboration with and cooperation across a wider range of information professionals – publishers, authors, public partners, technicians, librarians, and more! – to think through what it means to produce knowledge in service to public, rather than solely disciplinary, aims.

Drawing on the principles growing out of our working group's activities, we propose the following seven-step call to creating a radically inclusive publishing model for the publicly engaged humanities:

⁶ Burton et al. 2021a.

⁷ Sundaram 2021.

⁸ Nieves 2022.

⁹ HuMetrics HSS Initiative 2022 and MLA 2022.

1. Sow research methods that involve community members in the design of community impact – create successful processes and methods from the ground up! Publicly engaged humanities scholars and their public partners, this journal, and the National Humanities Alliance’s *Humanities for All* database are good examples.
2. *Nurture* online platforms for the co-publication of community/public engaged projects with, in, and among the existing fertile fields – use Knowledge Commons (formerly Humanities Commons) and HASTAC Commons and all the commonses!
3. *Fertilize* cross-cutting conversations – embrace contributions from multiple academic and public partners and adapt (and adopt) the CRediT (www.creditor.niso.org) taxonomy specifically for the public humanities! Community groups, scholars, and institutions like libraries, cultural centers, museums, and humanities councils (in the United States) are at the forefront of this work.
4. *Weed* out the noise – connect publicly engaged scholars with publishing professionals to work out if this *really* is a book or some other kind of publication...! Experienced engaged scholars, editors at presses committed to public, open, and digital humanities publishing, and Commons users all have valuable advice to share.
5. *Graft* emerging publicly engaged scholarship onto the sturdy stock of library and archival expertise in metadata creation, deposit, and indexing to secure the best chance of discovery and re-use – share what is possible when you have it and make it useable by others! Librarians and archivists are key partners in ensuring the discoverability and long-term viability of this kind of work.¹⁰
6. *Gather* collaborative writing opportunities – open up channels for expert knowledge gifting between participants to unlock publishing pathway potential! This journal, by formalizing a community of scholars, and use of the Commons open up these opportunities.
7. *Regenerate* open scholarship principles – promote open educational resources as radically inclusive publicly engaged humanities solutions! Imagine this journal – and all the informal and semi-formal commons and communities where publicly and community engaged work is flourishing – as a community garden where we can work together to nurture deep roots and cultivate the mycorrhizal networks of a new publishing ecosystem.

As the goals of publicly engaged scholarship become ever more deeply rooted in a values-based publishing paradigm, we envision a flourishing publishing landscape underpinned by radical inclusivity: inclusive of a broad range of voices, matched by a broad range of genres and formats. An ecology that is moving toward an alternative model of evaluation and career progression; one that recognizes public engagement, and all the knowledge and products emerging from that activity, just as much as publication.

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¹⁰ Urberg 2020.

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¹¹ Fisher-Livne and May-Curry 2024 and Ellison and Eatmon 2008.

¹² Burton, Davis, and Brennan 2024.

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