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Tom Wilson and Information Research: Pioneers of the diamond open access

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Abstract

Introduction. This paper explores the professional and editorial legacy of Professor Tom Wilson, whose contributions to the fields of Information Management and Information Behaviour have shaped academic discourse and enabled the internationalisation of scientific communication in these areas.

Method. A reflective and historical analysis was undertaken, drawing on the authors' direct experience with Professor Wilson and the Information Research journal, combined with archival records, editorial documents and published articles over a 30-year period.

Analysis. The narrative was structured around key milestones in Professor Wilson's career and the evolution of the journal, with special attention to the editorial policies, innovations in open access, and the support for Ibero-American scholarship. The methodological approach is qualitative, based on testimonial evidence and document analysis.

Results. Findings reveal the central role of Information Research in fostering a truly open, collaborative, and multilingual scientific community. Tom Wilson's editorial vision enabled early adoption of diamond open access principles, rigorous editorial practices and technological standards that anticipated many later developments in digital scholarly publishing.

Conclusions. Professor Wilson and Information Research are pioneers of diamond open access publishing. Their work continues to influence global scientific communication, especially in emerging academic communities.

Introduction

Professor Thomas Daniel Wilson (Tom) has earned many merits throughout his teaching and research career, in which he introduced us to the study of information management and information behaviour in context practically since the beginning of these disciplines. In these cases, the same phenomenon occurs with the passage of time, both form a binomial that is very difficult to separate, if not indivisible (Díaz-Ortuño et al., 2011). It is possible that, prior to Tom Wilson, other authors may have made partial approaches to explore these concepts, but who, with his effort, dedication, and wisdom, often accompanied by a great team of collaborators, has allowed their development and implementation within the scientific community as topics of interest?

'Information Research: An international electronic journal', whose thirtieth anniversary we celebrate with this special issue, has been witness and repository of much of this work. As reported in the 'About the Journal' section of the journal's website, Tom Wilson founded the journal in 1995 at the University of Sheffield, and he has edited it for most of that time. In the 'About the journal' page (Information Research, n.d.), it is commented that in 1995, 'the Internet and the World Wide Web were in their infancy, and the idea was to create a journal that covered the information disciplines in general', recalling the significant changes in our field during this period of exponential proportions (almost hypergeometric) compared to previous periods where evolution followed much slower rhythms.

The international vocation of the journal appears in its title and is one of its strong points. There is no doubt that this is a true reflection of another outstanding aspect of Tom Wilson's personality: his eagerness to visit as many countries of the world as possible to get in touch with colleagues and students. Thanks to this open and collaborative attitude, we had the opportunity to meet him personally, and, since then, Professor Wilson has been for us like that lighthouse that guides to the ships in the night to a safe harbour where they can rest and refresh themselves. His first visit to Murcia was to give a seminar about information management in the same year that we began researching in the field of library and information science and documentation at our university (1989-1999). Since then, the contact has been permanent, and the bond has strengthened to the point that he is the only person who has been awarded an Honorary Doctorate from our university at the proposal of our faculty to-date (October 2010). The [investiture ceremony of this academic distinction](#) coincided with the celebration of the ISIC-2010 conference in our university. This made it possible for a few of his friends and colleagues to witness the high level of recognition and devotion that we feel in this humble university in the south of Spain for our friend. He is just another member of our family: 'Uncle Tom'.

In 1995, Professor Wilson participated as a guest speaker in the seminar to launch the [UNESCO Chair in Information Management in Organizations](#), a project coordinated in collaboration with the University of Havana, which took place at the Faculty of Economics, at the National Autonomous University of Mexico. This was a few months before the launch of the International Master's Degree in Information Management, which has now run more than twenty-five times in different Latin American countries, and which has allowed many teachers and researchers to access the doctorate and progress in their academic career.

Near the beginning of the journal, Professor Wilson opened the possibility of publishing articles in Portuguese and Spanish languages to collaborate in the dissemination of studies and research carried out in the Ibero-American area, entrusting the responsibility of editing this section to [Professor José-Vicente Rodríguez Muñoz](#), our colleague and manager. This development was fundamental for the communication of our research within an international environment to which Tom Wilson introduced us, not only for the members of our university, but also for many colleagues from Spain, Portugal, and Latin America who took advantage of the space that Tom Wilson kindly opened. *Information Research* has been the repository of many of the articles derived from the doctoral theses written in our department over the last thirty years, some of which have received

considerable attention and interest from the research community. Today, we continue to receive abundant requests for translation of articles, although the current trend is to write them in English (the current *lingua franca* of science). We can safely say that both the journal and its editor are partly responsible for the internationalization of science communication in our field.

Information Research has always been a digital journal with the same level of editorial management as other journals that have been around longer and have larger budgets (something imaginary in our case). Everything has been made possible by the willingness of a multitude of colleagues who have never hesitated to respond affirmatively to Tom Wilson's calls to collaborate with the journal. In all these years, we have learned many things, and we would like to highlight some of them. The first was our immense surprise at the level of dedication and attention that world-class researchers and authors paid to the tasks of reviewing and editing articles within a collaborative context imbued with harmony, fairness, and respect for the decisions made by all participating colleagues. This has helped many of us to replicate it in other editorial projects in which we participate, learning from each other. Another aspect to highlight is the formality of the editorial process, which many authors were not used to in our local environments at that time. The use of an XHTML template for the rigorous layout of the articles allowed greater interoperability and dissemination of texts within the Semantic Web ecosystem, also embryonic and incipient when its use was implemented. Continuing with the formal aspects, the journal's style sheet, which is still maintained today, is another of the strengths of our journal, even though such things have been trivialized in other journals over time.

Older readers of this journal may remember that, shortly after *Information Research* was indexed by the [Social Science Citation Index](#) database (now part of the [Web of Science](#)), it became necessary to introduce some changes in the naming of articles and to save a copy of the article and the references used in a digital archiving system ([webcitation.org](#), now [Internet Archive](#)) to try to mitigate the decay of the Web ecosystem at that time. Tom Wilson cleverly drove this process and made the assignment of permanent article identifiers to encourage preservation of documents when these concepts were practically embryonic. A couple of years ago, we conducted a survey to verify the existence of *missing citations* of our journal articles in the [Web of Science](#) (a problem present in many open access journals and which adds yet another task for their editorial boards). What was our surprise (actually, not so much surprise), when we verified that *Information Research* had received almost all of these citations. Rigor in the editorial process is part of our vital genome.

Regarding indexing in databases and the journal's position in impact indexes (the latter have not been of much concern to Tom Wilson), the journal has always been listed by the main producers and distributors, in addition to having an impact factor both in journal citation reports (now journal citation indicators; JCR/JCI) and in the scientific journal rankings (SJR) index, where our publication receives more citations due to its greater geographical scope. This again demonstrates that the internationalization of the journal is one of its strengths.

What has never changed is open access to the contents published in our journal without applying any cost to the authors of the articles (the controversial and pernicious article processing charges (APCs)). Our journal is, since its inception, a *diamond open access* journal (Fuchs & Sandoval, 2013). And here is the paradox: *Information Research* was open access before the Budapest Declaration (2002) was drafted (see JLIS.IT Redazione, 2012). *Information Research* was also *diamond* when this category of publication had not yet been established to distinguish true open access from that intended by commercial publishers. Open access provides free access to content, commercial publishers, financed with public money because of a poor implementation of Plan "S" (cOAlition S, 2019) that has given rise to the proliferation of predatory journals and/or those of low scientific quality and greatly damages the communication of science. *Information Research* is a clear example of the opposite, of how Tom Wilson's dream has been consolidated in a publication of international reference, open to all types of authors, whether established or novice, and to all disciplines related

to information science. For these reasons, we believe it is fair to say that both the journal and its promoter and editor until last year are ‘pioneers of open access’, ‘heroes’, using the terminology of [The Lens](#) database, together with all of us who have dedicated our time to *Information Research*.

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