
Ulrike Gretzel
Editor-in-Chief of eRTR
Professor of Tourism, University of Queensland

A Vision for eRTR

In times of government-sponsored research excellence assessment exercises and incentive programs based on quantitative metrics (the question of the role of a journal like the eReview of Tourism Research arises. What is or can be the impact of a journal like eRTR? As an open platform there is certainly a great opportunity for attracting citations. This would mean encouraging the most prominent scholars to publish in the journal. It would also require marketing of the platform and ensuring through search engine optimization that Web traffic to the site remains high. This of course stands in stark contrast to its idea of being free, open and accessible and constitutes the reason why most open journals charge enormous fees for publication.

There is also the idea of a platform that makes research accessible and attractive to the industry and the public. This usually falls under the category of broader impact and is often funded specifically by funds granting agencies. “The Conversation”, an Australian website (<http://theconversation.com/au>) is the most prominent example of a platform that seeks to promote academic research to a wider audience. Such translation of academic research into industry-friendly formats was actually the founding idea behind eRTR but was never implemented due to the visions of its early editors and the lack of industry buy-in. The knowledge library sponsored by Tourism Research Australia (<http://www.tra.gov.au/Knowledge-library/Tourism-knowledge-library.html>) constitutes a recent example of an industry-led initiative in this area.

Another niche that has become increasingly sought after is the publication of research by junior researchers. Journals of Undergraduate Research are increasingly popping up to provide these junior researchers with an outlet for their studies. The Journal of Undergraduate Research and Scholarly Excellence at Colorado State (<http://jur.colostate.edu/>) and the Journal of Undergraduate Research at the University of Florida (<http://ufdc.ufl.edu/JUR>) are only two of several examples. These journals are mostly aimed at encouraging undergraduate students to write. There are also journals edited by postgraduate students, e.g. the Flinders Journal of History and Politics (<http://www.flinders.edu.au/sabs/history/fjhp/>), providing training for postgraduate students in reviewing and publishing papers.

So where does eRTR fit in? It is an open journal that is free and purely based on volunteer work with its contents and technical platform being owned and managed by Texas A&M University. It fulfils a training aspect as well, but with a broader agenda than other journals. First, it has an open policy for its editorial board with volunteers representing all levels of research experience but certainly with a focus on recruiting reviewers early in their career. This of course means that there has to be an investment from the editorial team into training reviewers. Reviews are not blindly sent to authors but rather scrutinized by the editor and further interpreted for authors if needed. Feedback is also given to the reviewers if requested. Second, rather than aiming at increasing its rejection rate, as is often the case with other journals, it operates under the assumption that authors should be given a chance to revise their work unless the work does not relate to tourism or is plagiarised. As such, it also has a development agenda in that it seeks to be accessible to readers and authors in countries that do not have strong publication cultures or operate under different paradigms from the mainstream journals that are usually situated and managed in the global North. This requires a different review and journal management culture and a lot more work on behalf of the editor but positions eRTR uniquely in a space that is inherently neglected by publishers.

Consequently, eRTR is not just open in terms of providing research articles at no cost but also open in its structures and access for authors. Its impact should be measured by the number of downloads from developing countries and students, the number of early career researchers involved, and the diversity of countries represented. What is the future of eRTR? There is none without an editorial team, a review board and authors that look beyond traditional measures of academic performance and are willing to invest time and effort in a project aimed at giving authors and readers a platform built on diversity and openness.