

Publication: From Student Forum Paper to Journal Article

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*The process of turning an initial paper into a journal article can be long and often involves substantial revisions, writes **Viviane Gravey**. She reviews the journey of one of her papers, from first conference to journal, and recommends that prospective authors consider what they are looking to achieve with a particular publication and use this to guide them in the decisions along the way.*

My first UACES Student Forum conference was in April 2014, at Aston University in Birmingham. A year and a half into my PhD, I presented my first paper drawn from the results of my doctoral research – still very much a work in progress at the time! Two years later, this paper – or, to be more precise, what became of this paper after a great number of revisions – was accepted for publication in a major journal in the field of EU studies.

In this article, I retrace the journey from Aston to *JEPP*, via Cork, Norwich and Boston, reflecting on the changes the paper went through in order to shed some light on the academic publishing process from a PhD student's perspective.

The paper presents some of the results of the quantitative side of my PhD. It describes which pieces of European environmental legislation were targeted for dismantling (i.e. a direction of policy change epitomised by cutting, weakening or removing policies). It determines whether dismantling came to pass by coding changes to these directives and regulations through multiple rounds of legislative reform.

What Changed in the Paper?

Comparing the [original Aston piece](#) to the final version, the main storyline remained the same: after explaining why policy dismantling has remained a blind spot for both dismantling and EU studies scholars, both papers show that EU environmental policy dismantling did take place – although it was infrequent – before discussing further avenues for research on the topic.

But despite this appearance of continuity, the title changed five times, the paper gained a co-author and lost five figures, as well as almost 2000 words (see Figure 1 below) in the two years between the first and final versions.

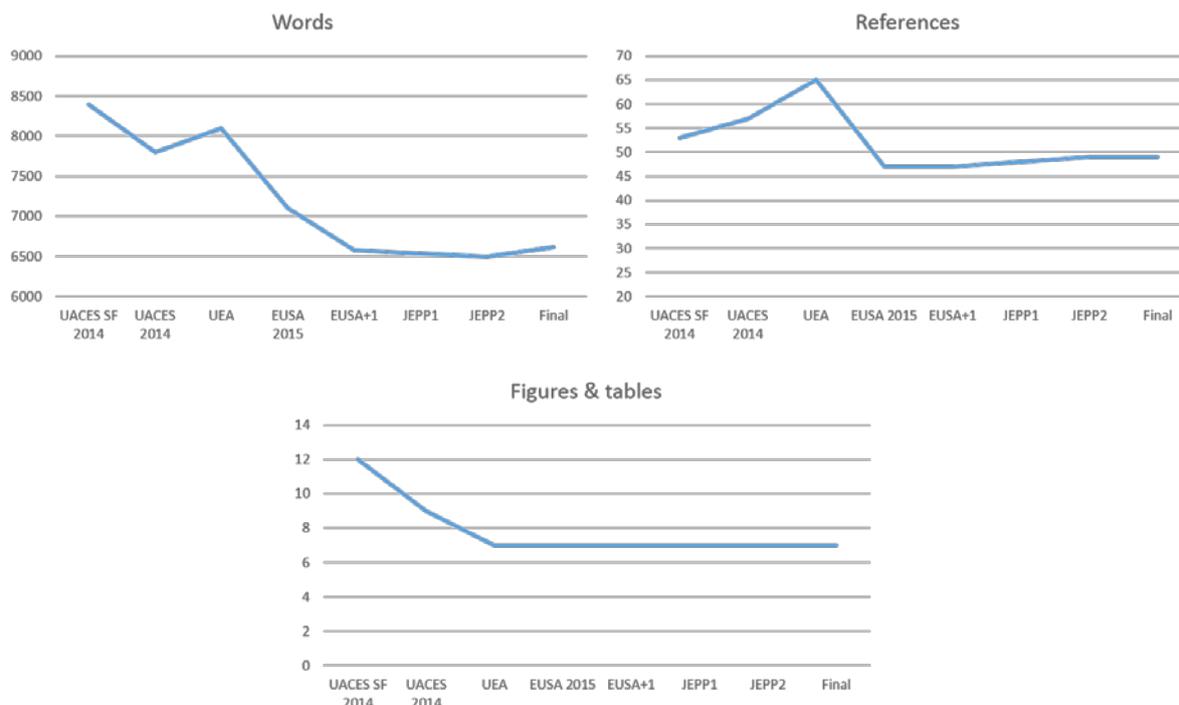


Figure 1: Comparing all eight versions of the paper (own data)

Reflecting back on the writing and publishing process, I have identified three periods:

- ‘Just a conference paper’ (April – September 2014). After presenting a first draft at the UACES SF conference at Aston University, I completed the data collection to cover a greater number of years and address the comments – on how to present my methods, how to contextualise my research – which I had received at Aston. I then presented my revised paper at the UACES general conference.
- ‘Should we do something with this?’ (October 2014 – March 2015). Building on the insights gained in Cork – need to better justify my data collection, to put results in perspective – I discussed the paper at my home university and agreed to revise the paper together with a colleague, with a view to submitting it to the *Journal of European Public Policy (JEPP)*. While very helpful, these in-depth discussions led to a huge spike in references and the word count...
- ‘The revision process proper’ (July 2015 – April 2016). After presenting the now co-authored paper at EUSA, we reduced the word count to fit all our remaining figures within the journal’s word limit. Once submitted, we went through two rounds of revisions (one major, one minor), requiring us to notably clarify the coding framework and our definition of ‘dismantling’, as well as to discuss our tentative explanations in more depth.

Key Lessons from the Process

Looking back, I seriously underestimated the length of time it would take – from checking the formatting of references (and updating them, as references originally listed as ‘early

view' were now fully available), to checking the coding results 'just to be sure'. Last but not least, dealing with the word limit was very time consuming, requiring me to repeatedly cut (then add to address comments, then cut again) words, redraw figures so they would take up less space and comb through the reference list to remove any unnecessary ones.

When writing conference papers, I tend to go for the upper word limit – yet each figure cost words, too (in *JEPP*'s case, each page of figures costs 475 words) – which should be taken into consideration from the outset, and not only when considering publication.

When dealing with reviewers' comments, I greatly benefited from talking about them with colleagues; even comparing them with comments they had previously received, to gain a better understanding of how much additional work was required. Similarly, getting feedback on my answers to reviewers and editors was very useful. So many parts of the PhD process tend to be solitary – this does not need to be one of them.

Finally, the length of the process raises questions about making early drafts available online (which is required for the UACES SF conference, and optional for most other conferences). In my case, the first two versions of my paper ([UACES SF](#) and [UACES general](#)) were fully available online.

Having a conference paper publically available is a way of gaining visibility early in the PhD process, but it may also dim the novelty of the final published piece, and even in some cases increase the risk of plagiarism. This is a very personal decision, which I think is highly dependent on the type of paper and what your aims are (quick publication, finding collaborators at other universities, etc). Overall, I have found the experience both positive and definitely worth it!

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