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IMPACT FACTOR PRESSURES, SCIENTIFIC PRACTICES, AND
THE PLACE OF SURVEY ARTICLES IN THE HISTORY OF
ECONOMICS

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Impact Factor Pressures, Scientific Practices, and the Place of Survey Articles in the History of Economics

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Abstract

The literature in the history of economics has grown to an extent that it is almost impossible for an individual to read, study, and assimilate all the recent works even in a specialized area. Other disciplines have coped with similar growth by developing mechanisms that help members keep up-to-date with the latest scholarly contributions and methodological trends – mechanisms including survey articles. But in the history of economics, and in the larger academic context, survey articles bring serious challenges. One challenge is their unintended consequences for rankings of history of economics journals on the basis of citation measures, as evidenced by Clarivate Analytics decision to exclude three major history of economics journals from its 2018 Journal Citation Report. In this paper, we take this case as representative for illustrating the functions, advantages, and challenges of survey articles. We argue that survey articles should play an important role in the history of economics as mechanisms that mitigate narrow specialization, provide greater visibility, support reflexivity, set and evaluate the research agenda of the field, and work as a ‘technology of distance’ builds up trust among historians of economics.

Keywords: Survey Article, Review Article, Clarivate Analytics, Impact Factors, Publishing and Scientific Practices, History of Economics

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Impact Factor Pressures, Scientific Practices, and the Place of Survey Articles in the History of Economics⁴

1. Introduction

Survey articles are a type of publication common to almost every scholarly discipline. Typically, survey articles seek to provide a systematic account of the literature published in a particular field, sub-field, and/or on a particular topic within a particular time frame.⁵ Two features of the practice of writing survey articles are important to keep in mind. First, authors must not only be knowledgeable about the field, topic, or specific literature they want to discuss. They also have to be explicit on their selection criteria for which works to review. Indeed, a survey article is an organized review of works that contains an important interpretative component, as opposed to offering a comprehensive “list of everything” that has been published. Second, survey articles can serve a variety of purposes, and so they take different forms: among other things, they keep scholars up-to-date with the latest contributions, evaluate these contributions, condense the current knowledge on a topic, set the direction of new research, identify emerging subfields, and serve as teaching devices (Woodward 1977, p. 176-177).

Although survey articles in the history of economics do not constitute a new type of practice or publication, they have become a rather common type of scholarly work since the 2010s.⁶ However, given the relatively small size of the field, both in terms of numbers of scholars and specialized journals, survey articles might end up generating unintended consequences for the rankings of journals based on citations measures. Indeed, in 2018 Clarivate Analytics—the publisher of the Journal Citation Reports (JCR) and producer of the Journal Impact Factor (JIF)—decided to exclude three major history of economics journals from its JCR on the basis that “anomalous citation patterns” had been “found in the 2017 citation data” of these journals (Clarivate 2018). Clarivate understood this distortion of the journals’ Impact Factors as the

⁴ We would like to thank Emilie Lefèvre and Angela N. Creager for their helpful insight and comments.

⁵ Survey articles, review articles, and overview articles are considered synonyms. Here, we provide here a very broad working definition of survey articles. For a discussion of the difficulties of defining survey articles see Restrepo Forero (2003).

⁶ See for example De Marchi and Lodewijks (1983) or Coats (1983) for earlier examples of surveys in the history of economics. The survey episodes in the podcast “Smith and Marx Walk into a bar” is another interesting example of contemporary surveys in the history of economics (see in particular episodes 5 and 14: <https://hetpodcast.libsyn.com>).

result of potential “citation stacking.”⁷ The editors of the affected journals, the presidents of seven history of economics societies, and the editors of eight other history of economics journals appealed Clarivate’s decision, alleging that what appeared to be a “citation stacking” behavior was easily explained by the publication of one single survey article.⁸ Indeed, the editors of the *Journal of the History of Economic Thought* (JHET) and the *European Journal of the History of Economic Thought* (EJHET) explained in a letter of 2 July 2018 that the “History of economic thought [...] is a small field that does not have many citations outside its field journals and a few related areas journals” and that “a survey article that covers what has been produced recently in the field ends up accounting for the majority of citations in a given year to EJHET and JHET.” The presidents and editors of history of economics societies and journals have urged Clarivate to go beyond the numerical evaluation of citations patterns and evaluate whether a detected “distortion” is not the result of, for example, “an academic innovation of a scholarly field or an episodic publication” (letter by editors and presidents to Clarivate, July 30, 2018). Evaluating citation patterns of a relatively small field that studies mostly historical works, exclusively on the basis of the data produced by Clarivate can be problematic.

To produce its data, Clarivate distinguishes among 42 different types of publications, classifying them, for example, as articles, book reviews, letters, or reviews. According to Clarivate, articles are “Reports of research on original works” which include “research papers, features, brief communications, case reports, technical notes, chronology, and full papers that were published in a journal and/or presented at a symposium or conference.”⁹ Reviews, on the contrary, are “A renewed study of material previously studied. Includes review articles and surveys of previously published literature. Usually [a review] will not present any new information on a subject.”¹⁰ Although Clarivate classifies survey articles in other disciplines under “review,” survey articles in the history of economics have been systematically classified

⁷ Heneberg (2016) defines “citation stacking” as the “behaviour of a network of journals, which work apparently together to cite each other and thus raise their impact factors.” Note that Clarivate does not provide a clear definition of this term, however.

⁸ Although survey articles are generally well-cited publications (Herring 1968; Forgacs 2003), note that these “anomalous citations patterns” were caused by the citations made by the survey article itself, not by the citation that the survey article received.

⁹ See Clarivate https://images.webofknowledge.com/images/help/WOS/hs_document_type.html.

¹⁰ *ibid.*

as “articles.”¹¹ Even if Impact Factors *per se* are and should be the object of criticism, this classification is problematic for our field since Clarivate’s algorithm cannot identify these papers as surveys, recording their citations as standard citations that affect Impact Factors Indexes.

The Clarivate issue has produced a series of reactions from within the history of economics community that question different aspects of this episode. The presidents of the societies and the editors of journals have raised important questions about the effects that Clarivate’s decision might have on (relatively small) scholarly fields and on the adequacy of the procedure adopted by Clarivate in these cases. In particular, the editors and the presidents plead for Clarivate to establish a transparent mechanism of discussion with the editors of the affected journals so that “the involved parties” have “the right to explain alleged ‘anomalies’ before any decision detrimental to the journals is taken” and to establish a “clearly understood timetable for decision taking” (letter by editors and presidents, July 30, 2018).

From a scholarly point of view, historians of economics have also criticized the adequacy of a Journal Impact Factor as a way to measure the “impact” of specific papers (Forder 2019). They have also argued that since “JIF is unlikely to vanish” a better scientific basis of this measure that follows a precise theory of measurement should be provided (Vergara Fernández 2019). Furthermore, Edwards and Meardon (2019) have proposed that Impact Factors could be used as “a measure of average resonance within a scholarly community [...] but only insofar as the statistic’s construction [...] puts it in alignment with the citation practices of the scholarly community.” Finally, other authors have assessed the effects that Impact Factors might have on the scientific and publishing practices of historians of economics. Cardoso (2019) has recognized that while Impact Factors “may prove problematic to the career development of young scholars and [...] therefore to the future of the discipline,” historians of economics “are not obsessed with measuring the value of their contributions by means of impact factors” since other publications such as books and book chapters still play an important role in assessing

¹¹ We have checked the classification of Paganelli (2015), Fontaine (2016), Bianchi (2016), Schumacher et al. (2017), Duarte and Giraud (2016), and Dudenhefer (2009), and all these survey articles have indeed been classified by Clarivate as “articles,” not as “reviews.” To the best of our knowledge, there is no explanation by Clarivate as to why they did not classify history of economics surveys as “reviews.” Of course, the boundary lines between research papers and survey articles are not necessarily easy to draw (Restrepo Forero 2003), and this might be even truer for the history of economics. Yet, given the unwanted effects that survey articles in the history of economics might produce for its JIF, it is urgent that Clarivate revises its classification.

their visibility. Although they confirm this general impression, Hurtado and Pinzón-Fuchs (2019) suggest that historians of economics are not completely indifferent to Impact Factors, since they tend to believe that Impact Factors affect their colleagues' scholarly practices.

However, there are, at least, two further reflections that are important but remain so far undiscussed among historians of economics. The first concerns the citation practices of historians of economics and in particular whether we cite each other's work appropriately. Trautwein (2017) suggests that historians of economics neither read nor cite each other sufficiently. The second concerns an examination of whether "distortions" detected by Clarivate were the result of a deliberate attempt to increase Impact Factors of specific history of economics journals or not. Other academic communities, such as soil science and medicine, have been inescapably led to serious discussions of this matter after cases of manipulating journal Impact Factors by some community members were exposed (see for example van Groenigen et al. 2018; Sevnec 2004; van Noorden 2013; de Lusignan and Moen 2016). Although we do not explicitly explore these concerns in this paper, we strongly argue that they should become part of a future conversation in the field, especially among young scholars. Such a conversation should particularly address the question of which values govern and should govern our scientific, editorial, and scholarly practices.¹²

In this paper, we adopt a reflexive and critical stance, and examine the role that survey articles play in different scholarly fields with a special focus on the history of economics. We first offer a short history of this practice in section 2. In section 3, we argue that survey articles are an important kind of publication in the history of economics for several reasons: 1) survey articles serve as mechanisms that hinder narrow specialization of historians of economics, favoring their role as "coordinating generalists" advocated by Trautwein (2017); 2) survey articles provide greater visibility to the field; 3) they serve as regulating devices to support reflexivity; 4) they serve as mechanisms to both evaluate the current and set a new research agenda, defining the boundaries of the history of economics; and 5) they serve as a 'technology of distance' which generates cohesion between scholars that are scattered in every corner of the

¹² See Uzun (2017) for a discussion on morally appropriate ways to increase journal Impact Factors consisting in credible and appropriate editorial standards and practices as well as their enforcement, such as providing "a trustful publication platform, [...] an objective review process; having a low acceptance rate; working promptly; providing good professional English editing [and] a statistical review; continuing the education of editors, authors, and reviewers; and following major international editor associations," among other things.

world and which might help us continue build our identity as historians of economics. This paper is not only a defense of the importance of survey articles for the history of economics; it is also a plea in favor of a specific kind of survey articles that we define more precisely in section 4.

2. A short history of survey articles as a scientific practice

The history of survey articles, as the evolution of academic publishing in general, offers a window on the evolution of a field and on the development of a scientific community. Writing surveys has first been a practical answer to the increasing quantity and dispersion of knowledge produced since the 17th century, both in terms of content and geographical distance. Despite their importance, however, there is not much literature on the history of survey articles. Two relatively concise literatures can, however, be pointed out: one focused on the 19th century (and before) and the emergence of review-articles as a practice in France, Germany, and the UK, in relation to scientific societies; another focused on the 20th century and on review journals that published exclusively survey articles. The genre in itself, and across centuries, has not been the subject of a general history.¹³

One of the key figures in establishing survey articles as a scientific practice was Jöns Jacob Berzelius, whose “annual surveys” first published in 1821 established the German tradition of the *Jahresbericht* (Beckman 2016).¹⁴ If survey articles were first *regularly* produced in the latter part of the nineteenth century, particularly in Germany (Woodward 1977, p.175), Berzelius was himself reproducing an earlier genre which appeared in the context of the *Académie des sciences* in Paris, regularly producing its *Mémoires*. These summaries of discoveries were the basis for Georges Cuvier’s 1810 *Rapport historique sur les progrès des sciences naturelles depuis 1789*, considered as one of the first review articles ever written. German and French practices also influenced the production of English-language review articles, notably by the British Association for the Advancement of Science (BAAS) starting in the 1830s (Csiszar 2018, p.142 and chapter 6).

¹³ For a comprehensive contribution, see the PhD thesis written by Olga Restrepo Forero (2003, Chapter 1).

¹⁴ Woodward describes two major types of reviews: “the *Jahresbericht*, which was a comprehensive descriptive record of annual contributions made in a field of study, and the *Ergebnis*, which was selective, critical and heuristic and focused on a particular scientific problem and its solution” (Woodward 1977, p.176).

Original contributions (e.g., first-hand reports of experimental results or exposition of an authored theory) were quantitatively *not* the most important texts of academic journals. Various types of reviews were, in fact, the bulk of scholarly journals before the Second World War. Survey articles, however, are not considered to be original work and, in a retrospective history that encompasses a contemporary conception of science, were not of interest to historians: Restrepo Forero (2003, p.37-39) provides the example of the classical study of the *Philosophical Transactions* by Bazeman which concentrates on what he thought were “research articles,” which represented “five percent [of the journal pages] in the early years to 20 percent in the last decade of the eighteenth century, to 40 percent in the early nineteenth hundreds” (Restrepo Forero 2003, p.39). In fact, “the rise and spread of scientific journals had to do with [their] multiple communicative goals”: “reporting on published books,” “summarizing scientific and literary information coming from different sources” and different languages, reporting on past events, etc. The “purification” strategy that consists in looking at only certain types of publications using categories of the present has always been fully developed in the history of economics. However, as in other scientific publications in the nineteenth century, economics journals did not consist only of research papers: “[u]ntil the 1920s, many items of interest are concealed in the ‘Book Reviews’ and ‘Notes,’ and thus tend to be overlooked by a reader used to looking to articles for significant contributions” (Tribe 1992, p.36).¹⁵

Except for survey articles appearing in journals in the nineteenth century, review journals emerged in the twentieth century, alongside with journals made exclusively of abstracts. Review journals first appeared in Physics in the 1920 – e.g. *Reviews of Modern Physics* was created in 1928 to cope with the increasing literature in various subdisciplines (Starace 2019). To our knowledge, *The Journal of Economic Surveys* is the only example of such journals in economics. It was created in 1987 to provide “a means by which economists can keep abreast of recent developments beyond their immediate specialization” (JES’s website). *The Journal of Economic Abstracts* was created in 1963 and became the *Journal of Economic Literature* in 1969. It contains “commissioned, peer-reviewed survey and review articles, book reviews, and annotated bibliography of new books” (JEL’s website).

¹⁵ For example, some of Francis Y. Edgeworth’s major contributions are review articles and were published in the “Reviews” section. See Newman (1990).

Survey articles were not used only for internal purposes related to how each field should organize its information. During the two world wars, external pressures shaped the organization of sciences and imposed new standards, especially related to information on scientific knowledge, particularly in the U.S.—one example is the development of classification systems. Those classification systems allowed governments to find specialized experts in any field needed for particular purposes (see Cherrier 2017 for the case of economists' classification). After the wars, science policies and institutions put in place to warrant the war effort endured. The professionalization of academia and the scientification of public policy organized a need for better information on scientific knowledge, where to find it, and how to evaluate it.

In the 1960s, two U.S. official reports were concerned with the management of scientific information (Restrepo Forero 2003, p.95) and many debates between government agencies, scientific and information experts followed. What was (again!) perceived as an “explosion of information” led to technical discussions on the format and the types of systems management, including the status of survey articles as their content provided both didactic and bibliographic information (Woodward 1977, p.175). “Information Science” became a field in itself and much of the discussion focused on the organization of information in relation to the evaluation of the worth of academic research.

Scientists, editors, librarians, document analysts, and information scientists engaged considerable effort during the 1970s to identify and classify literature reviews, and cope with new demands from the academic community as well as with a new financial organization of science (Csiszar 2017). This effort was particularly important in the U.S., affecting entire fields worldwide. “The need for reviews” as a matter of “distill[ing] or drown[ing] in” knowledge (Herring 1968) took different forms in different disciplines. Systematic reviews began to be established in the 1970s. Statistician Gene V. Glass coined the ‘meta analysis’ method in 1975, while he conducted research in the areas of psychotherapy and education psychology. Meta-analyses have been widely produced ever since, from psychology to economics. “Cochrane reviews,” named after Doctor Archie Cochrane who famously advocated for the use of randomized controls to make medicine more efficient, became central in health sciences during the same period, just as formal reviews of results and literature in computer sciences and law.

Structured and hierarchical fields, such as physics and chemistry developed structured or more formalized ways to write review articles. The quantitative aspect of these fields' practices also

influenced the format of reviews. While the notion that reviews would help to make the “research front” progress by a cumulative process prevailed in the “hard sciences,” this conception hardly appeared in social sciences and humanities where qualitative literature reviews dominated. Survey articles, just as Impact Factors, function as evaluators of knowledge. Yet, survey articles have followed particular paths within each field and so they have evolved in ways that are specific to their structure and the kind of knowledge produced in them. Whereas Impact Factors apply a metric that pretends to be universal and that is imposed from above, survey articles present a form of evaluation that is adapted to each field and so can be considered a better way to evaluate knowledge. Although the type of knowledge produced in different fields was different in substance, the way to evaluate its value became standardized in a rather similar way with the advent of Impact Factors.

The rise of systematic reviews in the 1970s is related both to the “evidence based science” movement and to the quantification of scientific knowledge for financial purposes. Evaluating the worth/value/quality of knowledge is one of the explicit objectives of reviews which coincides with one of the objectives of impact factors: to assess the value or significance of works published in a specific field. The link between the practice of surveying and reviewing and the creation of metrics to evaluate science is an old one (Csiszar 2017). In 1974, the Institute of Scientific Reviews (ISR) launched the *Index of Scientific Reviews*. The director of the ISR and “self-proclaimed first information scientist” (Restrepo Forero 2003, p.96), Eugene Garfield, is also the creator of the Impact Factors. The impact of evaluation schemes on fields that are substantially different in the type of knowledge they produce can be explored through an examination of the role survey articles could and should play in a specific qualitative field.

3. The role of survey articles in the history of economics

While the role of survey articles is commonly thought of to be that of keeping scholars up-to-date with the most recent and important developments in their discipline, survey articles play many other roles which are not necessarily stated explicitly and which might be performed unconsciously by their writers. Woodward (1977, pp. 176-177), for example, distinguishes between 6 “historical functions” and 7 “contemporary functions” that survey articles might fulfill. Among the historical functions which are “fundamental to the development of science,” Woodward (1977) enumerates i) the peer evaluation of published papers, ii) the collation of

information from other sources, iii) the compaction of existing knowledge, iv) the superseding of primary papers as the written record, v) the identification of emerging specialities, and vi) the direction of research into new areas. Among the contemporary functions, which are “those which benefit the individual user” supplying her/him with information about a field, Woodward lists the following: i) informed notification of the published literature, ii) current awareness of related fields, iii) back-up to other literature searching, iv) searching for alternative techniques, v) initial orientation in a new field, vi) teaching aids, and vii) feedback.

A more reflexive examination, however, provides other ways to understand the role and functions that survey articles play in the development of scientific disciplines. Restrepo Forero (2003, p. 20) for example, calls attention to the role that historical narratives in survey articles play as a way to “strengthen the position of the field as a whole,” reinforcing “the idea of the superiority of the present over the past,” creating “the past and the community to which that past belongs.” In a word, survey articles contribute to creating the “official history,” the “standard narrative” of a specific field, or as Wilson (2017) and Blum (2017) put it, “science’s imagined past.” This official history might help setting the boundaries of the field, demarcating what constitutes important contributions and what falls outside the field. What’s crucial in understanding what sociologists of science call “boundary work” is not only the function to distinguish or select what is part of a field (Gieryn 1983): boundary work also signals information about the knowledge produced in the field to audiences both *in* and *outside* the field. For example, surveys can serve as points of entry to non specialists, who are looking for a map of a particular field.

In the particular case of the history of economics, a survey article might collect and assess recent publications dealing with the works of a particular author (see Paganelli 2015 on Adam Smith) or on a particular subject (see Boumans 2018 on the history of econometrics); it might study the evolution in the publications of a specific journal such as *History of Political Economy* (HOPE) (see De Marchi and Lodewijks 1983; Dudenhefer 2009; Edwards (forthcoming); Giraud (forthcoming)), or in general economics journals (see Duarte and Giraud 2016); or it might also provide an account of the recent literature in the history of economics, identifying new trends in the field (see Chassonnery-Zaïgouche, Herfeld, and Pinzón-Fuchs 2018).

Hence, survey articles in the history of economics play various roles contained in Woodward's (1977) list and in Restrepo Forero's (2003) analysis. Indeed, survey articles first allow historians of economics to "overcome barriers of communication" as Roy Weintraub (2015, p. 361) put it. At the occasion of the release of a survey article series for *HOPE* in 2015, Weintraub calls attention to the role that these kinds of articles might play in order to avoid "silo-ing" in a field such as history of economics that, compared to 1969, has become very specialized today. Weintraub (2015, p. 361) refers to survey articles that should be written in history of economics journals, explicitly making the point that historians of economics should be "generalists" within their discipline. In this sense, historians of economics should be able to "comment intelligently" in subjects as diverse as Adam Smith, François Quesnay, or Turgot, on "the links between neuroeconomics and experimental economics," or "on a paper concerning Takama Yasui's role in reconstructing mathematical economics in Japan in the post-World War II period."

Hans-Michael Trautwein (2017) has defended a somehow different role for surveys written by historians of economics. To Trautwein (2017), survey articles might be one possible way for historians of economics to keep their "comparative advantage" *vis-à-vis* economists. Historians of economics should act as "coordinating generalists," able to counteract the trends of fragmentation of economics by, among other things, writing major survey articles in economics journals such as the *Journal of Economic Perspectives* (JEP), the *Journal of Economic Literature* (JEL), or the *Journal of Economic Surveys* (JES). Indeed, historians of economics could use survey articles to "bridge gaps between specialisations by taking historical perspectives" (Trautwein 2017, p. 27).

In a word, while Weintraub defends the idea that historians of economics should write survey articles in the history of economics and hence be generalists among historians of economics, Trautwein seems to defend the idea that historians of economics should write survey articles in general economics journals and be generalists among economists. We believe that survey articles written by historians of economics should serve both purposes, as mechanisms to overcome barriers of communication within our community, and to counteract fragmentation not only in history of economics but also in economics.

Note that this call for "generality" can be found in other disciplines, such as physics which pleads for the use of review articles as a way to acquire general knowledge about specific

subfields. However, this call does not appear to be central to the practice in other fields *today*. The fact that this seems important to surveys written by historians of economics is probably related both to the size and nature of our field.

But survey articles written by historians of economics do not serve exclusively the purpose of attaining generality, they serve as a way to define, narrow down, or expand the boundaries of our discipline. As Restrepo Forero (2003, p. 181) puts it, survey articles contribute to provisionally settling some disciplinary boundaries “without much debate, in a routine-like manner.” Indeed, by conveying a sense of “completeness in the review, reviewers do boundary work without seeming to be doing just that.” The way in which certain works are presented and cited marks the limits of the field, the subject, or questions under review.

Two interesting examples of history of economics survey articles that do boundary work are Duarte and Giraud (2016) and Fontaine (2016). Duarte and Giraud’s (2016) explicit aim is to assess the position of history of economics works within the economics discipline. Since the professionalization of the history of economics in the 1960s, historians of economics have troubled to define their identity (Backhouse and Fontaine 2014), struggling between identifying as economists (Kurz 2006), historians of science (Weintraub 2002; Shabas 1992; 2002), or intellectual historians.¹⁶ Through a bibliometric survey of the history of economics literature published in economics journals, Duarte and Giraud (2016) provide an examination of the relatively small place that history of economics articles occupy in economics journals, and evidence that the kind of “methods and narrative styles” that these papers adopt “are remote from those used by historians of economics” (p. 431). In conclusion, the authors recommend historians of economics not to base their research on economists’ preferences, but to concentrate on doing their job better “by sharpening their tools [...] in order to produce expert knowledge at the subdisciplinary level” (p. 458).

Fontaine (2016), too, attempts at defining the boundaries of the history of economics as part of the history of social sciences. However, he does so in a way that includes works produced by authors who have been traditionally considered “outsiders” to the profession just because they are not part of economics departments, they have not been trained as economists, or they do

¹⁶ See Donald Winch’s profile on the Intellectual History Archive digital repository of papers on Intellectual history as an example. <http://arts.st-andrews.ac.uk/intellectualhistory/>

not publish the bulk of their work in history of economics journals. According to Fontaine (2016), these outsiders are not concerned with writing the “‘discipline history’ of economics” but with producing “other histories of economics” (p. 375). To Fontaine, the place from which these “other” historians of economics are writing is paramount to understand the kinds of narratives they produce.¹⁷

By surveying these “other histories of economics” and by showing that “the place of the history of economics in the history of science is more significant today than it was only a quarter of a century ago” (p. 374), Fontaine is doing two things: he is advocating for 1) expanded boundaries for the history of economics in terms of authors, institutions, historiographical and thematic questions, and 2) he is integrating the history of economics into the broader history of the social sciences community.¹⁸

Another sense in which survey articles serve as a way to understand the boundaries of history of economics is by assessing the institutional setting of the field. We provide such tentative assessment in a previous publication (Chassonnery-Zaïgouche, Herfeld, and Pinzón-Fuchs 2018). While our central purpose was to assess whether there have been significant changes regarding the scope, method, and sources of works in the history of economics, we combined the analysis of the papers with some sociological data to characterize the demographics of the field. Our aim was to contribute to understanding the diversity (or lack thereof) present in our field. A lack of diversity is not only revealed by topics, methods, and sources studied and applied in papers published in the major history of economics journals, but also in the geographical locations of historians of economics, in the authors’ identities, and in their departmental affiliations. By choosing to study “what is new” in the history of economics literature, combined with specific sociological and geographical variables, this survey assessed the extent to which the “other histories” referred to by Fontaine (2016) might have permeated traditional history of economics journals or not, contributing to change the questions addressed by historians of economics (or not).

¹⁷ For an analysis of the important role that “places” play in the production of knowledge and its credibility see Mata (2009) and Gieryn (2018).

¹⁸ Note that attention given to new venues for publication also reveals Fontaine’s intention to expand, as well, the audience of historians of economics.

Survey articles might also serve as a way to correct for a more practical issue related to what the editors of *JHET* and *EJHET* have denounced regarding Clarivate's decision: that works in the history of economics are not frequently cited in journals within and outside the field.¹⁹ Whereas the size and nature of the field does not "favor" bigger citation numbers, if scholars in other fields are not reading (hence not citing) works in the history of economics, this might be because historians of economics are failing to communicate their knowledge effectively. If, on the one hand, the field is thought of as one of "generalists," the works produced by these generalists should be such that economists would find them informative, important, and easy to read. If, on the other hand, the field is thought of as a subfield of "specialists" on the history of economics, high-quality survey articles might be a mechanism that historians of economics could use to make more visible this "emerging speciality" (Woodward 1977) within the broader scholarship of the history and sociology of knowledge.

4. What kind of survey articles do we need in the history of economics?

The kind of survey articles that is appropriate to a specific field depends on both the structure and nature of each field. The history of economics is a relatively small but international field whose members are scattered across countries. This means, among other things, that the history of economics should cope with various professional practices linked to different cultural areas.

Given the scattered structure of the community of historians of economics, survey articles might serve as "technologies of distance." Whereas Porter (1995) considers "quantification" as the typical technology of distance among scientists, we argue that survey articles might provide a technology of distance for historians of economics that is qualitative in its content and reflexive in its function.²⁰ While trust in other scientific fields is constructed upon the standardization based on a kind of rigor and uniformity provided by numbers, mathematics, and quantification, trust in the history of economics should be primarily understood as a way to reduce distance between us. This distance is not only geographical but it has also become topical, methodological, and somehow relative to the diversity in our practices as historians of economics. Survey articles might contribute to setting a standard of professionalism in our field

¹⁹ This point has been made by Trautwein (2017, p. 26) as well.

²⁰ Note that we are not ruling out the use of quantitative methods in survey articles in the history of economics. We think, however, that any quantitative analysis necessarily encompasses a strong qualitative respect.

which is not only expressed in its boundary-setting function, but in achieving a more practical result: that historians of economics read, understand, and respect each other.

We propose a list of elements that should be explicitly stated in history of economics survey articles and that should contribute to building this professional standard. This list, of course, is not exhaustive. Survey articles in the history of economics should:

- make explicit the research question they are addressing
- make explicit the criteria of selection for the corpus
- make explicit the separation between the corpus of the references as content of the survey and other literature used in the survey
- include elements on the sociology of the field that provide the necessary reflexivity for historians of economics to understand their discipline

Taking into account these elements, surveys in the history of economics would also make explicit that their corpus is but a subset of all the publications of the field. Although survey articles can have the pretension of being exhaustive and of providing a sense of completeness (Restrepo Forero 2003), every survey article is necessarily the result of explicit choices made by the authors of both qualitative and quantitative surveys.

Another important issue that must be posed is the following: who should write survey articles? As put in the Weinberg Report, this is an issue of utmost importance: “Those asked to write reviews or to give invited papers reviewing a subject should be selected by the scientific societies with the same care as are recipients of honors or of appointments to the staff of a university” (Weinberg 1963, p. 27). Indeed, writing survey articles implies a great responsibility given their intended and unintended consequences for the development of the field, and so the choice of their authors should be taken seriously. In particular, survey articles act as mechanisms to set the research agenda of a field, and so most of the time it is well-established scholars who are requested to write them (Forgacs 2003).

Most importantly, however, the author of a survey article should be “at the cutting edge of a particular field” (Forgacs 2003 p. 93), which sometimes also means that the author is someone that does not necessarily have the time to embark in a heavy and arduous work of writing a survey article. Even more so since survey articles are not necessarily considered prestigious publications. As Herring (1968, p. 30) puts it, survey articles “can do the task adequately only

if their authors invest a great deal of thought—and really *creative* thought—in their preparation” which does not consist just in putting together a complete list of works. “There is a genuine intellectual challenge,” consisting in creating “new simplicity out of the complexity of the literature” (Herring 1968, p. 30).

Working in teams might be a way to make this burdensome work more efficient. Indeed, both the division of labor and the assigning of different sets of publications to read and specific sections to write among the reviewers might alleviate the task somehow. However, there is a more important, methodological point that teamwork necessarily provides and that enhances the quality of the survey. Working in teams implies the necessity of having constant communication and discussion about how to compile the survey. In particular, working in a team means that the decisions that are made to choose the relevant questions and materials must be discussed and thought of out loud, and so, authors who work in teams are compelled to make these criteria and their research question explicit.

Irrespective of the kind of authors that write survey articles effectively in the history of economics, these authors should be confronted to questions about their training to write this kind of work. Like any other scholarly practice, writing survey articles requires learning and reflecting on what good survey articles are. Therefore, we think that our community could do a more important effort in providing training for doing so. A way to do this could be by organizing workshops in conferences or summer schools which do not teach exclusively the practical aspects of writing a survey article, but which take a more reflexive stance and discuss the role and important consequences of this practice. However, writing good survey articles is not exclusively a matter of training; it is also a matter of creating the right kinds of rewards and incentives that make of this practice a more prestigious one. In the same way that the creation of prizes for good survey articles were discussed in the 1970s (Restrepo Forero 2003, p. 98), historians of economics could discuss about ways to increase the prestige of these publications in the field by creating a system of subsidies or awards that recognize good work performed in this area. These training and awarding mechanisms could contribute to “professionalizing” this practice among historians of economics, who would produce, read, and request more and better survey articles. Note, however, that these mechanisms would have an important effect not only on the writers but also on the readers of survey articles and on the editors that request them. And so, enhancing the practice of writing survey articles is something that should concern the entire community.

5. Conclusion

In this paper we have provided a defense for the production and publication of survey articles in the history of economics. We have shown that survey articles have been constitutive elements of every scientific field since, at least, the 19th century. Indeed, survey articles are mechanisms that contribute to 1) hindering narrow specialization, 2) providing greater visibility, 3) supporting reflexivity, 4) evaluating and setting the current and future research agenda, hence defining the boundaries of the field, and 5) providing a mechanism that builds up trust among historians of economics. Finally, we have plead for both a particular kind of survey articles and a way of understanding and enhancing this practice in our field.

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