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Managing *Onoma*, the Journal of ICOS: A Multidisciplinary Approach

Abstract

Taking over the editorial office of *Onoma* in January 2019 was a great challenge, not only due to the tradition and brand behind the name, but also due to certain deficiencies which had accumulated over the years and led to considerable delay in the yearly publication of the journal. This study aims at presenting from an inside, but not subjective, perspective the complex process of managing the scientific and administrative issues that appeared while trying to bring the journal of ICOS back among the leading publications in the field. The current approach is multidisciplinary, as it involves linguistics, multilingualism, and onomastics (anthroponymy, toponymy, commercial names, etc.), management, economy, marketing, IT, and philology. The above-mentioned endeavour could not be achieved without the activity of a well-coordinated, competent team, determined to overcome obstacles and careful not to interfere with the high-standard peer review of the studies by the scientific committee or the overall quality of the journal. The ultimate goal consists not only of reinstating *Onoma* in the scientific network of onomastic publications, but also of ensuring better international visibility for the journal, which would enable its being indexed by the most prestigious databases and having a bigger impact factor.

Keywords

Onoma, managing a journal, onomastics

1. The challenges of the “beginning”

ICOS and Peeters, the former publisher of *Onoma*, enjoyed a long, fruitful collaboration.¹ Unfortunately, in 2017 this partnership was considered unsatisfactory for several reasons. On the one hand, the relationship between ICOS and Peeters had been founded on an oral contract, which was no longer supported actively by either of the two original parties. On the other, the transformations recorded by the field of academic publishing (e.g., a marked preference for online, open-access publications), reinforced the importance of keeping *Onoma* up to date in an ever-changing market. Thus, the new paradigm in the publication of *Onoma* was established by ICOS, the owner of the journal, through its members (the General Assembly convened on the occasion of the 26th ICOS Congress in Debrecen, 2017) and Board of Directors (the first actions in this respect were discussed in February 2018, during the meeting of the ICOS Board of Directors in Helsinki). The whole process, from its start in 2017 until the situation in 2019, was long and difficult due to Peeters’ unwillingness to negotiate and provide the information needed to move the journal to another publisher. With the support of Richard Coates, at the time the Chair of the Editorial Board of the journal, ICOS succeeded in finding a way to part ways with Peeters without any restrictive provisos. As a result, Peeters continues to host on its website the archive consisting of Vols. 32/1995–49/2014 (see *Onoma. Journal of the International Council of Onomastic Sciences*, 1999–2014), whereas ICOS has complete freedom to publish the journal as an independent periodical beginning with Vol. 50/2015 (see the “Archive” on the new website of *Onoma*, <https://onomajournal.org/archive/>).

Nevertheless, there are two drawbacks to the aforementioned separation: the restricted access, including for ICOS members, to the volumes published by Peeters, and the lack of transparency as regards the dissemination of the journal to subscribers (libraries, universities, various book-selling companies, and journal distribution intermediaries). This aspect is important financially

¹ According to the website of Peeters (https://poj.peeters-leuven.be/content.php?url=journal&journal_code=ONO), the collaboration between ICOS and the Belgian publisher dates from the years 1994–1995, beginning with Vol. 32, when the Editor-in-Chief of the journal was Willy Van Langendonck.

speaking, because it provides a certain balance between expenses related to printing the journal, shipping the copies, paying the Crossref subscription and indexation of individual articles, website hosting, etc., and selling copies to institutional subscribers.

Focusing on financial profitability, we have made substantial savings to the ICOS budget by sending printed copies in sets, in parcels containing three volumes: 50–52 and 53–55, respectively. At the same time, we have managed to give away the first printed volumes without shipping expenses to about a third of the paid-up members of ICOS at scientific events which we participated in together: ICONN 5 (Baia Mare, September 2019), GeoNames Symposium “Place Names and Migration” (Vienna, November 2019). Similarly, worthy of notice is the very good collaboration with members of ICOS who agreed to receive larger parcels of *Onoma* volumes, grouped on countries/regions, and then helped redistribute the copies. This made the packaging process easier and reduced shipping costs. It is all the more important because packing volumes and sending them requires a lot of time, which prevents us from focusing on other *Onoma*-related activities. However, on certain occasions, the delivery of copies of the journal did not run smoothly. For various reasons, some packages were returned (sometimes even the subsequent deliveries), and this involved extra time and costs, while also leading to the copies being damaged in the process.

2. A new identity of the journal

Once the independence of the journal was gained, it had to be underpinned by a professional web page. Trusting Eugen Schochenmaier’s experience and knowing his passion for onomastics (see Schochenmaier’s blog, “e-Onomastics”, <http://e-onomastics.blogspot.com/>), he was co-opted on the editorial team as Web Officer. We also turned to a colleague from the Technical University of Cluj-Napoca for help with setting up the Wordpress website of the journal, as he had worked on similar projects before (e.g., the website of the Centre of Onomastics of Baia Mare, Romania, <https://onomasticafelecan.ro>). The website host is in Romania for two reasons: the very good internet

infrastructure, with world-renowned broadband speed, on the one hand, and a highly competitive printing price guaranteed by Mega Publishing House, on the other.

The structure of the website is visitor-friendly, in general, and oriented towards onomasticians, in particular. It consists of information about the journal and the Editorial Board, instructions for authors, an archive,² a link to the website of ICOS, contact information, data regarding pageviews (see the homepage of the website of *Onoma*, <https://onomajournal.org>). The visibility of the journal in the international scientific world has been increasing every day since the website was launched (March 2019); this can be quantified by looking at the Flagcounter: 86 countries, with more than 12,850 pageviews (May 2020) and 107 countries, with more than 24,600 pageviews (August 2021).³

Last but not least, the new identity of the journal is also mirrored by the modification of the cover design beginning with Vol. 56/2021. The proposal for this change was made by Richard Coates, and the process was carried out democratically, through the votes submitted by the members of the Editorial Board for the design options drafted by Unni Leino. The alteration is not significant, as the Board considered that it was important to preserve the elements of a successful, long-lasting brand: the emblematic colour scheme and overall structure. Thus, the appearance of the name *Onoma* is now uniform as compared to the previous design, and the ICOS logo is more prominent (in the central part of the front cover).

2.1. Editorial Board

Our managerial ideas have required the expansion of the Editorial Board to be able to deal with the new challenges successfully. On the one hand, we took into consideration the need to have a multilingual team, so that we could provide all the data on the website in the three working languages of ICOS: English, French, and German. At the same time, it is important for us to ensure

² From the spring of the year 2022, the website includes a section with international databases in which the journal is indexed.

³ In July 2022, the Flagcounter recorded visitors from 119 countries, with more than 35,500 pageviews.

that at least one of the blind peer reviews can be carried out by a researcher who is a native speaker of the language in which the article submitted for publication is written, namely any of the three aforementioned languages. On the other hand, doubling the number of Board members aimed at co-opting renowned researchers⁴ in a vast array of subfields of onomastics – anthroponymy, toponymy, commercial names, and so on – and from numerous geographical spaces, so that we could cover the complexity of the subjects approached and the broad geographical backgrounds as much as possible. Nevertheless, we have come across difficulties in the evaluation of the articles. For instance, for Vol. 55/2020, we received 18 articles from the guest-editors in February 2020, and it proved difficult to find enough reviewers. Just as with Vol. 54/2019, we had to turn to external reviewers, to whom we express our gratitude on this occasion as well for the help they have provided. The involvement of scholars outside the Editorial Board was also needed for papers on topics which did not correspond to the current research interests of the members of the editorial team or which referred to Chinese, Icelandic, Albanian, Kosovar, and Kurdish spaces. From this viewpoint, worthy of notice are the personal relationships we have developed with the international scientific community and the possibility of receiving favourable feedback to the requests for voluntary engagement in peer-review activity for *Onoma*.

2.2. Instructions for authors

Despite the clear publication guidelines on the website, some of the contributors and articles submitted, respectively, do not observe language and typesetting requirements, and this can cause delays in the publication of *Onoma*. The most common problems we have come across are as follows:

- (a) The length of the articles. Some of the articles in the volumes already configured when we took over the journal were extremely long, i.e., around 11,000–13,000 words, contrasting with shorter contributions of no more than 4,000 words. To avoid such discrepancies in the future, a paper length

⁴ To mention just two examples: Frank Nuessel, former Editor-in-Chief of *Names. A Journal of Onomastics* (between 2008–2019) and Peter Jordan, former Editor-in-Chief of *Mitteilungen der Österreichischen Geographischen Gesellschaft (Annals of the Austrian Geographical Society)*.

limit was imposed: research reports and articles should contain about 5,000 to 8,000 words (including references and the trilingual introductory texts: title, keywords, and abstract), whereas reviews of books/scientific events and notes should not exceed 2,500 words.

- (b) The absence of trilingual titles, keywords, and abstracts. In the past, the members of the Editorial Board made sure that paper titles, keywords, and abstracts were published in the three working languages of ICOS. Thus, they dealt with the translation of these elements themselves. When this was not possible, the assistance of members of ICOS who were native speakers of the given languages was employed. Although the number of the members on the Editorial Board has doubled, we decided to change the submission policy and require that all article manuscripts include the paper title, keywords, and abstract in English, French, and German, provided by the authors upon submitting their work for consideration. This enables the members of the Editorial Board to focus on reviewing various materials, which is the very reason why they were co-opted on to the team.
- (c) The lack of a thorough language check. According to the style sheet of *Onoma* (Onoma Editorial Board, 2019), authors who are “non-native speakers must have their contributions checked by a native speaker or ensure similar level of competence by other means” (p. 2). This refers to the translation of paper titles, keywords, and abstracts as well. It is the authors’ responsibility to ensure that their contributions observe the style and grammar rules in the working language of choice. We trust authors’ goodwill upon the receipt of their articles for publication. Thus, if authors do not follow this principle, they run the risk of having faulty papers published. At the same time, it could lead to delay in the publication of a journal volume if language inaccuracies are found at a later stage during the editing process.
- (d) The correspondence between the entries in the bibliography and in-text references. On most occasions, we discovered such inconsistencies upon creating the hyperlinks between the references in the body of the articles and the entries in the list of references at the end of the paper. Before submitting the final draft for publication, authors should ensure that their work does not contain referencing inaccuracies. In the case of themed volumes, the guest-editors should check that papers do not feature any of the aforementioned incompatibilities.

Therefore, to avoid the occurrence of another delay or even a blockage in the publication of the journal, we have adopted a series of measures in view of making the editorial process more efficient (see also Aguinis & Vaschetto, 2015). The approval of a paper for publication consists of two stages: a positive evaluation as a result of a double-blind peer review and the typesetting approval by the Editorial Secretary. For instance, there have been articles for which we had to wait a significant amount of time, even more than a month, to obtain the proper formatting, although the content of these articles had been accepted for publication after the blind peer review. In the future, the failure to observe all the language and formatting requirements may lead to a delay in the publication of an article or even its rejection, as this denotes a lack of consideration towards the journal and implicitly towards everyone involved in its publication. At the same time, in the case of themed volumes, it is the duty of the guest-editors to see that all the aforementioned requirements are closely followed. By making every party involved responsible for their share in the publication process, we can reach our goals and meet deadlines, including the punctual issuing of the volumes. All the above-mentioned are essential for the indexation of *Onoma* in the most prestigious international data bases: Web of Science, Scopus, ERIH PLUS, Ebsco, etc., and ultimately, for the growth of its impact in the scientific world (see Baykoucheva, 2015, pp. 103–121). This goal was taken into account when the submission guidelines were drawn up, and the results appeared soon: in the spring of the year 2022, *Onoma* was included in the ERIH PLUS list of academic journals (<https://kanalregister.hkdir.no/publiseringsskanaler/erihplus/periodical/info.action?id=445413>).

Nevertheless, it should be pointed out that the section “Instructions for authors” is a work in progress. It undergoes continual review and update, so as to provide authors with a comprehensive and straightforward guide to what publishing a paper in *Onoma* requires, ranging from what they should know before submitting a manuscript to how the editing and publication processes unfold. At the proposal of an author with rich editorial experience, we have decided that as of 2022 authors can also submit review articles, namely scientific texts that are at the crossroads between reviews and actual articles.

3. Statistical references

When we took over the journal in January 2019, there were 20 articles which we published as Vols. 50 (5 articles), 51 (11 themed papers: “Asian Onomastics”), and 52 (7 articles, 3 of which were new). As we wished to make up for the five-year delay, Vols. 50 and 52 were non-themed. Once it became clear that the journal was getting back on track, we began receiving and publishing more and more articles from one volume to another, as well as reviews and notes, which is indicative of researchers’ interest in publishing in *Onoma*, on the one hand, and the journal being anchored in topicality, on the other. We are open to collaboration not only with experienced scholars, but also with young researchers who are eager to develop their careers: Vol. 54/2019 (“Young Scholars of Onomastics”) is eloquent proof in this respect.

Between January 2019 and October 2021, we received 95 articles for peer review. Of these, 85 had positive evaluations, while 10 could not be accepted for publication (see Figure 2). When one of the two blind peer reviews was positive and the other negative, we turned to a third opinion to uphold the objectiveness of the evaluation process. Apparently, the acceptance rate seems higher than that of other scientific journals (see Figure 1). However, this could be due to the prestige of *Onoma*: most authors who wish to collaborate with this journal are competent and/or experienced researchers in the field.



Figure 1. Number of texts published in *Onoma* Vols. 50–56

Source: authors’ own work.

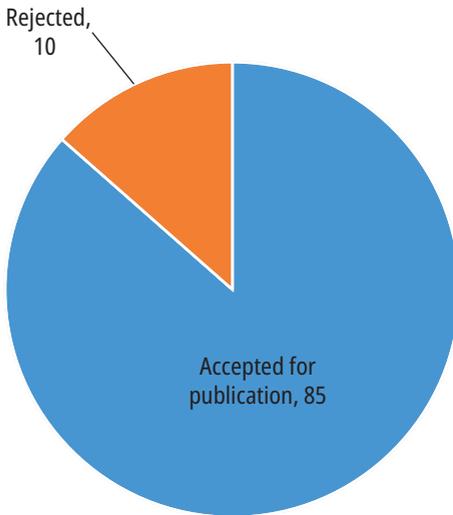


Figure 2. Status of papers received for peer review

Source: authors' own work.

The published materials included 65 scientific articles, 11 reviews for recent books (published in the years 2019, 2020, and 2021) and nine notes or introductory chapters to themed volumes (51, 53, 54, 55, 56) (see Figure 3). As regards grouping the 65 scientific articles according to topic, there are 49 themed articles and 16 non-themed papers (see Figure 4). This can be accounted for by the fact that five of the seven volumes published between 2019 and 2021 are themed issues.

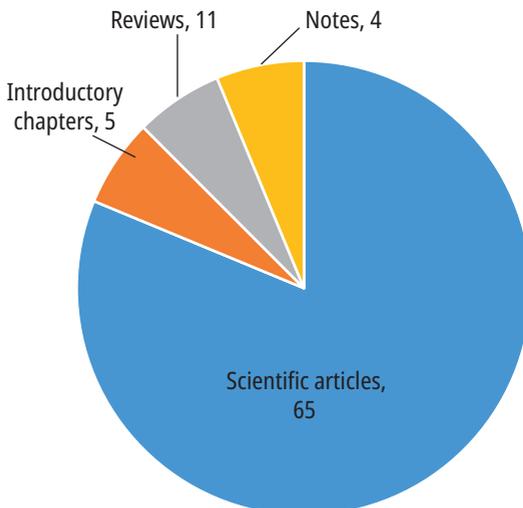


Figure 3. Types of materials published in *Onoma* Vols. 50–56

Source: authors' own work.

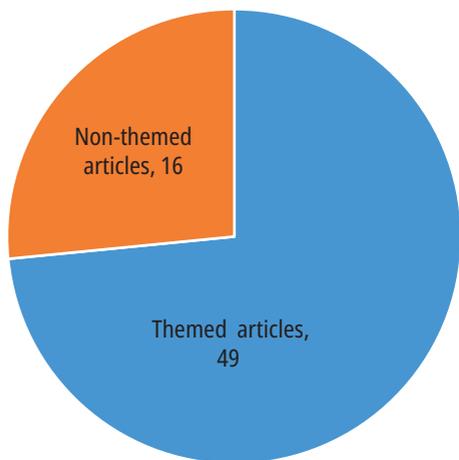


Figure 4. Scientific articles published in *Onoma* Vols. 50–56 according to topic

Source: authors' own work.

With respect to the language in which the materials submitted for publication were written, it is noteworthy that most manuscripts are in English (78), followed by those in French (6) and German (1) (see Figure 5). This tendency can also be noticed in Vol. 56/2021, which reinforces the status of *lingua franca* of the English language not only internationally in general, but also, and more significantly, in advanced scientific research (19 in English, 2 in French, including the reviews). Although we offer the possibility to choose one of the three working languages of ICOS, most authors have opted for English, including native speakers of French and German.

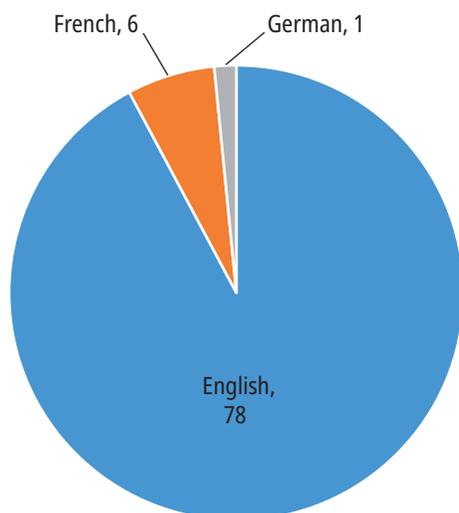


Figure 5. Distribution of scientific articles in *Onoma* Vols. 50–56 according to the languages in which they were written

Source: authors' own work.

As regards authors' places of origin,⁵ one can count 35 countries spread on all continents (see Table 1). The most numerous texts were written by authors from the following states: Finland (7); Germany and the UK (6 each); Italy (5); Bulgaria, Denmark, Poland, and the USA (4); the Czech Republic, France, Indonesia, and Romania (3); Australia, Canada, Hungary, Lithuania, Russia, Serbia, Singapore, Slovakia, South Africa, South Korea, Sweden, Taiwan, and Ukraine (2); Austria, Croatia, Ghana, Iceland, Israel, Jordan, Latvia, Norway, Slovenia, Turkey, and Vietnam (1). This illustrates the impact of the journal throughout the world and the researchers' interest in disseminating their work via the pages of the journal.

Table 1. Distribution of number of articles according to authors' geographical appurtenance⁶

Country of affiliation	Number of articles (each)
Finland	7
Germany, UK	6
Italy	5
Bulgaria, Denmark, Poland, USA	4
Czech Republic, France, Indonesia, Romania	3
Australia, Canada, Hungary, Lithuania, Russia, Serbia, Singapore, Slovakia, South Africa, South Korea, Sweden, Taiwan, Ukraine	2
Austria, Croatia, Ghana, Iceland, Israel, Jordan, Latvia, Norway, Slovenia, Turkey, Vietnam	1

Source: authors' own work.

As regards the number of authors per piece of published material, one can mention that most articles (72) have sole authors, whereas 13 papers are the result of the collaboration of up to four scholars (see Figure 6). This is specific to the humanities, as opposed to the exact sciences, in which the majority of scientific writings are collective endeavours, signed by multiple authors.

⁵ For this distribution, we took into account the institutional affiliation declared by the authors, not their places of residence.

⁶ The resulting total (89) is slightly higher than the aforementioned number of manuscripts accepted for publication (85) due to the fact that some articles are co-authored by researchers from different countries.

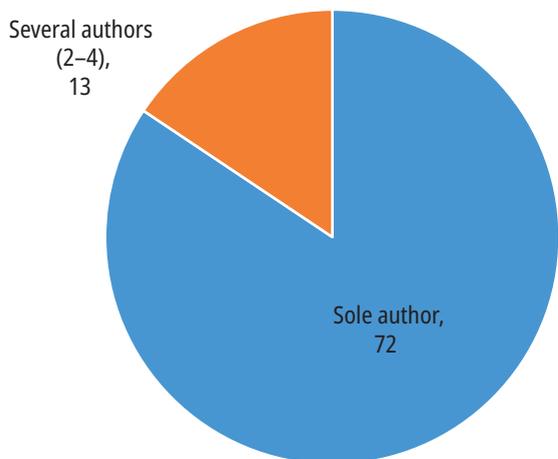


Figure 6. Number of authors per published material in *Onoma* Vols. 50-56

Source: authors' own work.

Concerning the content of the studies accepted for publication, it should be underlined that most papers refer to anthroponymy (37), also favoured by the publication of Vols. 55, “Personal Names and Cultural Reconstructions”, and 56, “Dynamics of the Anthroponymic System”. Toponymy was approached in 17 articles. Another themed volume, 53 – “Literary Onomastics”, presented the analysis of names in literature in 11 studies. Varied or interdisciplinary topics were developed in 20 articles (see Figure 7). At the same time, according to the authors’ interest in topical or historical subjects, we can see that 42 articles can be considered to propose synchronic approaches, whereas 43 are diachronic studies (see Figure 8).

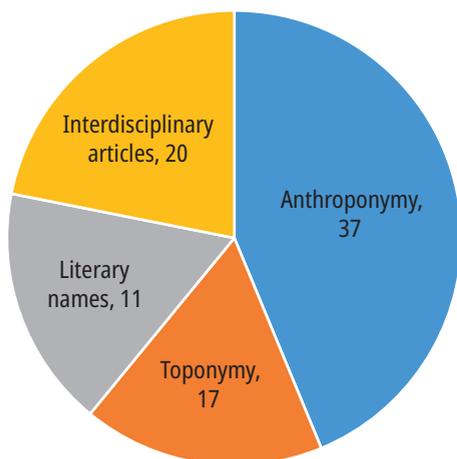


Figure 7. Topics of studies published in *Onoma* Vols. 50-56

Source: authors' own work.

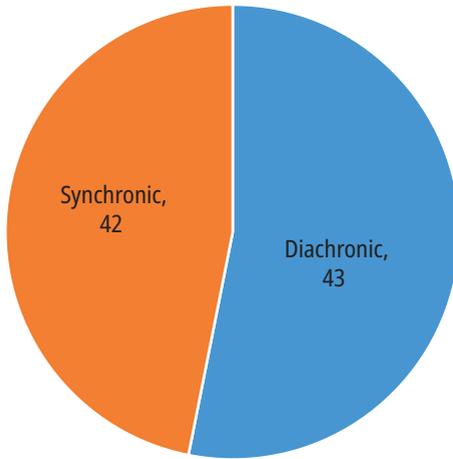


Figure 8. Distribution of articles in *Onoma* Vols. 50–56 according to authors' approach

Source: authors' own work.

4. *Onoma* – open access online journal / print journal

In the first half of the year 2021, there have been discussions regarding the most suitable form of publication for the journal published by ICOS, since many scientific events and journals have been carrying out their activity online.⁷ As a token of respect for printed books and for “classical” readers, who prefer browsing through the pages of a printed publication, it was decided that “*Onoma*” be published both in electronic and in printed formats, with an impression of a consistent number of copies which would be enough for us to distribute to all paid-up ICOS members, to other subscribers, and several important universities/libraries.

More thorough debates have been held on the access to the electronic format of the journal. Two main opinions have been predominant among the members of the ICOS Board of Directors: 1) full open access; 2) free open access for older volumes, with a one-year embargo for current volumes, whose access remains unrestricted for paid-up members of ICOS. In agreement with

⁷ The concern for the digital publication of scientific journals was manifested by Tenopir and King in the early days of the World Wide Web (Tenopir & King, 1997). In this respect, see also Hovav & Gray (2004), Klus & Dilger (2020), Pagliaro (2020), Paltridge (2020) and Vincente-Saez et al. (2021).

the members of the Editorial Board, we considered that we have to keep the present format (full open access), and we succeeded in persuading the ICOS Board of Directors in June 2021 that this was the sensible decision. We adduced several arguments, all referring to the future of the journal:

- It ensures maximum international visibility for the databases in which we aim to index the journal (Web of Science, Scopus, ERIH PLUS, Ebsco, etc.) and for researchers, students, etc.
- It can help increase the impact of the journal in the international scientific world by facilitating the reading and citation of the articles, and the impact factor of a journal depends on its articles being widely cited. The increasing visibility of the journal in the international scientific world can be quantified by looking at the number of page views (see the Flag-counter) and the multitude of countries interested in the journal's website (<https://onomajournal.org>).
- The open access format is used by most journals on onomastics (*Names*, *Voprosy Onomastiki*, *Onomastica*, etc.). To abandon it would undermine our chances on the competitive market.
- We should not be afraid that the number of paid-up members of ICOS would drop if *Onoma* remains an open access journal. We have not recorded a major decrease in the number of paid-up members since *Onoma* began being published in this format. On the contrary, we have gained subscribers, and this has led to the significant increase of the ICOS budget. When *Onoma* was published by Peeters, ICOS paid very large amounts of money and did not enjoy any advantage from selling the journal to universities and libraries all over the world. We now have more than 15 subscribers and their number will continue to grow when they see that *Onoma* publishes high quality studies, appears on time, and at a decent cost.
- To put away the fear that the number of paid-up members of ICOS might decrease due to keeping *Onoma* an open access publication, the issue can easily be solved by ensuring a bigger difference in the ICOS congress fees for members/non-members of the organisation.

5. Conclusion

This bird's-eye view of the existence of *Onoma* over the last two and half years proves that the journal is back on track, that it is very much alive and acknowledged by scholars who are interested in publishing the results of their research. The workload is increasing with every volume issued. If Vols. 50–54 were between 120 and 246 pages long, Vol. 55 spans 331 pages, whereas Vol. 56 has got 344 pages. In total, Vols. 50–56 of *Onoma* amount to 1,552 pages of name studies, which may be considered the premise for future onomastic research. We have already established the topics of the following volumes:

- 57/2022: “West Slavic Onomastics” (guest-editors: Urszula Bijak, Milan Harvalík, Iveta Valentová);
- 58/2023: “Place Names as Cultural Heritage” (guest-editor: Peter Jordan).

Depending on the non-themed articles we receive along the way, every volume will also include independent studies, book reviews, and notes. As editors, we are open to collaborating with any scholars in the international scientific world, without making allowances as regards the quality of the materials published. In a competitive society, such as the present-day world, *Onoma* will continue promoting the highest scientific and deontological standards and will contribute to the establishment of onomastics as one of the important fields of linguistics.

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