

## EDITORIAL

# ***The International Journal of Restorative Justice:* new horizons for independent research and development**

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Academic research and its dissemination should not and cannot only be determined by economic imperatives. We firmly believe that research must be conducted, as far as possible, in a fair and independent way. For this, safe, autonomous

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and international spaces are needed, and a journal can offer such an intermediate space for ongoing exchange and support to a field or to ideas. For restorative justice, researchers all over the world contribute, critically and constructively, conceptually and practically, to the development of a much-needed innovative approach to crime and criminal justice. We therefore present this new journal, following in the footsteps of *Restorative Justice: An International Journal* and its many achievements over the last five years. This editorial offers some explanations for the creation of a new journal.

## 1. Background: a trinket at the hands of purely commercial publishers

Spring 2013 saw the start of a new adventure, with the launch of *Restorative Justice: An International Journal* (see Aertsen, Parmentier, Vanfraechem, Walgrave & Zinsstag, 2013). It began smoothly, as we relied on a supportive publisher – Richard Hart at Hart Publishing – and a group of enthusiastic colleagues active in restorative justice research and practice worldwide. Soon the journal was able to develop its own, original concept. It was able to attract and publish articles of high quality and scientific standards, thanks to the authors who contributed, to a committed editorial team, to the proactive role taken by the Editorial Board and International Advisory Board members, and to the extensive group of anonymous reviewers. Besides academic articles, Notes from the Field and – more recently – Conversations provided our readership with up-to-date information and reflections on developments in an interactive and dynamic way. In the Book Review section, the most important new books on restorative justice – not only those published in English – have been discussed. These contributions made the journal a leading platform, the ‘place to be’ for all wishing to follow and contribute to the promising yet delicate field of restorative justice in a scientifically rigorous way.

In spite of our success, we found ourselves needing to create a new journal with a (slightly adapted) new name, a new cover and new ISSN. Our new publisher is Eleven International Publishing. We – the Editorial Team, the Editorial Board and the International Advisory Board of the journal – started this new initiative, preserving the same basic concept and the same group of dedicated people, but with the above-mentioned necessary modifications.

Such drastic changes, after a short-lived first journal, require some explanation. Here are the main reasons: the most important one is financial, reflecting the commercial imperatives of international publishing nowadays. Like many other academic journals, our journal has been vulnerable to commercial trade, without having a sufficiently strong voice to defend its academic integrity. After only two years, our first journal was unexpectedly sold to Bloomsbury Publishing, together with all other Hart journals. One year later, Bloomsbury sold its package of journals to Taylor & Francis. Our journal became one among many published by the latter group. The consecutive changes of publisher not only revealed our dependent position in economic and legal terms. They also made the editorial work very challenging, as we had to adopt and adapt to new procedures repeatedly and to set up new collaborations with (ever-changing) staff in the various

publishing houses. While these practical complications could be coped with in a sufficiently effective way, the poor promotion and marketing policies caused damage to our aspirations for the expansion of the journal. The final publisher did not have a vision for our journal or its topic and as a consequence was not prepared to invest in specific marketing strategies (as they do for other journals).

In March 2017, the publisher's lack of interest in our journal was made even clearer as we were told that the five-year contract taken over from the previous publishers would not be renewed and that our journal would cease to be published by them. According to the publisher, this decision was not 'personal' but made purely on economic grounds, because in their opinion the journal did not generate enough income to be sustainable. An intense period of negotiations followed. While we had to respect Taylor & Francis' decision to stop publishing our journal, we were committed to saving it with its title and cover, which both were legally owned by them, and continue to be. We were met with a clear refusal on all counts. We then quickly commenced talks with a number of other internationally oriented publishers. Several were not only interested but willing to buy our journal. However, none of the offers were accepted by Taylor & Francis.

For the entire editorial group these unilateral decisions were thought to be counter-intuitive, given the relevance of the topic and the international position the journal had achieved after only five years. We were faced with the hard truth that a purely economic and profit-making rationale dominated a crucial aspect of research work, namely publishing its theoretical development and outcomes. It goes without saying that such experiences yield important lessons for the academic world. They evoke the compelling need for professional organisations, university consortia and political authorities to undertake action in order to strengthen autonomy of scientific research, not least in its crucial publishing activities.

With the full support of the Editorial and International Advisory Board, we started talks and negotiations with several publishers interested in potentially starting a *new* journal with us, or rather a 're-launch' of our recently demised journal. After a period of several months, and a series of discussions, we chose one publisher who was clearly offering us the best deal and reassurances, taking into account legal, financial and editorial arguments. Therefore, we are extremely happy to now start working with Eleven International Publishing, particularly with Selma Hoedt and her team in The Hague, the Netherlands. We are confident and look forward to being able to further develop our journal in an independent and sustainable way, in close cooperation with a smaller-scale publishing house where personal relationships and ethics matter.

As mentioned before, the concept and the aims of the journal remain the same. We aim to be an explicitly internationally oriented journal, addressing the variety of countries and regions, with a special encouragement to developing countries. *The International Journal of Restorative Justice* (IJRJ) focuses on a heterogeneous mix of professionals, disciplines, research institutes, other organisations and interested persons. While most colleagues from the previous five years stay on board, for which we are grateful, some new colleagues have been invited to join the Editorial Board or International Advisory Board, in order to better rep-

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resent the diversity of regions and disciplines. The journal will continue to publish three issues a year, with the same sections as before: an Editorial, four to five research articles, Notes from the Field, Conversations and Book Reviews, as well as an Annual Lecture.

## 2. A strong journal to support the sustainable development of restorative justice

We have created this journal to witness, evaluate and foster the developments of restorative justice, which are gaining momentum around the world, as proved by the number of countries, regions and towns having introduced new practices and legislation, and by the increasing number of organisations, conferences and publications dealing with restorative justice. As has become clear, developments happen around the world in a number of different situations. Clearly, restorative justice – whether a field, a programme, a practice or even a fashion – corresponds to a basic human and societal need and is not stopped by borders or politics. It is a flexible and creative approach that works best when adapted to local customs and practices and when communities can appropriate its values and principles (see e.g. the Editorial by John Braithwaite (2015) in *RJIJ* 3(3) about paralegals in Bangladesh).

International conferences on the topic are blooming all over the world, from Ireland to Albania, from Columbia to Vietnam, from Iran to Argentina, from Canada to Mexico. National conferences can be found in many countries as well; recently in Brazil, Chile, France, Nepal or Scotland. These conferences and seminars are crucial to encourage and foster discussions, comparisons and debates on the different approaches to theoretical thinking and practices and to influence policy. They also show the importance of learning from one another and of relating the results of such conferences through quality publications (see e.g. the special issue of *RJIJ* 5(3), which resulted from a seminar in Canada organised by George Pavlich & Lori Thorlakson, 2017).

Restorative justice has spread widely – although unequally – to all parts of the world, with a great variety of practices. Its popularity and rapid development is not solely due to the failures of the criminal justice system (see e.g. Kelly Richards (2014), ‘A promise and a possibility’ in *RJIJ* 2(2)). At the same time, the more restorative justice is politically endorsed worldwide, the more there is a risk of co-option, ‘routinisation’ and standardisation. Some claim that restorative justice is a victim of its own success, as in many cases it has failed to be true to its founding principles. For others, restorative justice has become just a term used to cover, name or define practices that are not actually or actively restorative. Indeed, examples of such problematic practices and situations can be observed in several parts of the world. To avoid such malpractices, it may be helpful to develop clear policies and standards. But this is insufficient. Policy itself needs to be guided and supported by tangible, high-quality research on socio-ethical, judicial and empirical issues. Comparative research about countries and their journey through legislative quagmires, including tales of challenges and successes, is crucial. An impor-

tant issue is to support the enlargement and growing diversity of restorative justice practices, while keeping the focus on restoring man-made harm and injustices according to genuine participatory, dialogue-driven and democratic principles (see e.g. Victoria McGeer & Philip Pettit (2015) in RJIJ 3(3)).

The development of restorative justice is entering a new phase, as important regional and international organisations are in the process of reviewing existing legislative and policy-making instruments: this is true both for the United Nations with the 2002 ECOSOC Resolution on Restorative Justice Programmes in Criminal Matters, and the Council of Europe with the 1999 Committee of Ministers Recommendation on Mediation in Penal Matters. Both initiatives aim at broadening the scope of restorative justice to make its practices fit for different institutional and societal contexts, while also further elaborating and specifying its operational principles. Regional and international organisations in the field of restorative justice should join forces in order to preserve its core principles and common standards, and (again) to influence the political agenda of international bodies (see also John Blad's (2015) argument in his Editorial 'The politics of restorative justice' in RJIJ 3(1), and the Conversation in this issue). The endeavour is enormous if not Sisyphean, as penal policies and practices find themselves worldwide at a crossroads of highly ambivalent developments, between emancipation and repression.

Given the new focus on regional and international principles and practices, the time is ripe for critical engagement with, and oversight of, restorative justice. It is, for restorative justice scholars, 'now or never' (see Shadd Maruna's (2016) Editorial in RJIJ 4(3)). This all makes the mission of ongoing research, debate and reflection so crucial (see e.g. the Annual Lecture on evidence-based research by Heather Strang and Larry Sherman (2015) in RJIJ 3(1)).

Here are the ambitions for *The International Journal of Restorative Justice*: to inform and exchange at an international level, to bring together and provide the intellectual tools for researchers and practitioners (see also editorial by Aertsen et al. (2013) in 1(3) of RJIJ), and policy makers to work together, to promote respectful yet critical debate, and to support restorative justice through sound scientific explorations, evaluations and theoretical thinking. We hope to publish deep reflections on the socio-ethical challenges that go with the development of restorative justice, well-thought-out juridical comments on the legal frameworks for restorative justice and empirical research that contributes to a better understanding of restorative processes and their improvement. The fulfilment of these ambitions is dependent on the active participation of the international community of academics and 'enlightened' practitioners and politicians searching for better ways of doing better justice in a better world. This is an appeal to you for submissions, feedback and other types of active participation to our new journal. We count on you.

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