

SCHOLARLY PUBLISHING RESILIENCE IN WARTIME UKRAINE: VISIBILITY, PRESERVATION, AND THE LEGITIMACY OF THE SCHOLARLY RECORD

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Abstract

This article conceptualises scholarly publishing as an infrastructure of legitimacy that ensures the verifiability, governability, and preservation of the scholarly record. Drawing on infrastructure theory, it proposes analysing the fragility of publishing systems through three interconnected dimensions: technical, human capacity, and governance. Using wartime Ukraine as an analytical context, the article demonstrates how publication visibility may coexist with the weakening of infrastructural conditions necessary for maintaining legitimacy. The analysis identifies a gap between visibility and legitimacy, in which systems preserve outward continuity while gradually losing capacities related to preservation, editorial labour, and governance. The article further outlines key infrastructural conditions of resilience, including preservation and portability of the scholarly record, reproducible editorial capacity, procedural governability, and custodial sovereignty. It argues that resilience should be understood not as technical continuity alone, but as the capacity of publishing systems to reproduce the conditions under which scholarly knowledge remains reliable and institutionally controlled. The manuscript concludes by discussing the implications of this perspective for science policy and international scholarly infrastructures.

Keywords: scholarly publishing; infrastructure; resilience; scholarly record; science policy; custodial sovereignty

1. Introduction

Scholarly knowledge is a public resource whose value increases with greater accessibility. For this reason, open access has become a central element of science policy — from the European Union’s open science mandates (European Commission, 2021) to the UNESCO Recommendation on Open Science (UNESCO, 2021), endorsed by 194 countries. Within these approaches, accessibility is understood as a key condition of the usefulness of knowledge.

However, accessibility does not exhaust the question of reliability. Open access determines whether a result can be accessed. Yet between research and reader there exists a publishing system — peer review, editorial procedures, archiving, and accountability mechanisms — that determines the conditions under which a result acquires the status of scholarly knowledge. This system is typically assessed through the outcomes it produces, while questions of its fragility and capacity for reproduction remain secondary.

This becomes particularly visible under conditions of systemic stress. Ukraine possesses an extensive ecosystem of scholarly journals: according to Ulrichsweb data, it includes more than 1,500 active scholarly journals, most of which are published by academic institutions; a separate global mapping of university journals identifies 986 such titles in Ukraine (Nazarovets, 2024; Nazarovets et al., 2026). Since 2022, these journals have continued to function in terms of visibility: publications continue to appear, and open access remains an important model of Ukrainian scholarly publishing (Nazarovets, 2026). At the same time, the institutional environment in which they operate has changed substantially: universities have been displaced, research communities fragmented, editorial teams have been working under conditions of overload, and in some cases journals have lost control over their archives and institutional identity (Lopatina et al., 2023; Suchikova, 2024; Finikov et al., 2025; Suchikova & Danko, 2025; Plastun & Kozmenko, 2025; UNESCO, 2024).

This coexistence is not unique to crisis situations. Rather, it reflects a structural characteristic of publishing systems whose evaluation is focused on outputs rather than on the conditions of their production. Visibility metrics primarily capture the technical dimension of system functioning, whereas legitimacy depends on human capacity and governance mechanisms that may change independently.

In this article, scholarly publishing is conceptualised as an infrastructure of legitimacy — a system that ensures the verifiability, governability, and preservation of the scholarly record. From this perspective, the question of publishing resilience extends beyond technical continuity and concerns the ability to reproduce these conditions over time.

The article proposes examining the fragility of publishing systems through three interconnected dimensions — technical, human capacity, and governance — drawing on approaches from infrastructure theory (Star & Ruhleder, 1996; Edwards et al., 2013; Bowker & Star, 2000). Wartime Ukraine is used as an analytical context in which the interconnections between these dimensions become more visible. On this basis, the article develops an approach for understanding the gap between publication visibility and the capacity to ensure legitimacy, while also outlining possible directions for strengthening the resilience of publishing systems.

The arguments presented in this article emerged through discussions within the *Supporting Ukrainian Publishing Resilience and Reform* (SUPRR) programme, which brought together representatives of Ukrainian university journals, international academic publishers, and researchers to exchange experiences regarding the organisation of publishing processes across different institutional contexts. Within these discussions, the resilience of publishing infrastructure repeatedly emerged as a shared problem extending beyond individual national systems.

The aim of this article is to propose a perspective for understanding forms of fragility that remain insufficiently visible within existing approaches to scholarly publishing and to outline their implications for science policy.

2. Scholarly Publishing as Infrastructure

If scholarly publishing is understood as infrastructure, it appears not as a separate stage following the completion of research, but as a set of interconnected conditions through which a scholarly result acquires stability, verifiability, and a place within the scholarly record. From this perspective, a journal is not merely a site of publication, but a node within a broader infrastructure that connects technical systems, editorial labour, standards, procedures, institutional authority, and preservation practices.

In the classical understanding proposed by Star and Ruhleder (1996), infrastructure is not a self-contained object. It is relational: what appears to some participants as an invisible background of work becomes for others an object of maintenance, adjustment, and continuous repair. Its infrastructural character is defined not only by material or technical characteristics, but by the ways in which it is embedded within the practices of particular communities. An important implication for the analysis of scholarly publishing follows from this: a substantial part of the conditions sustaining the publication process remains largely invisible precisely because it functions. Peer review, editorial coordination, metadata, archiving, version control, correction and retraction procedures become objects of attention primarily when they cease to function properly.

This logic is further developed through the concept of *knowledge infrastructures* proposed by Edwards et al. (2013). Knowledge infrastructures do not consist of a single centre of control, but of distributed networks of people, institutions, technologies, standards, and procedures that collectively enable the production, circulation, and maintenance of knowledge. In publishing, this means that no individual element — whether a platform, editorial board, repository, or ethics policy — ensures the legitimacy of publication on its own. Legitimacy emerges through coordination among these elements. Consequently, the fragility of a publishing system is also distributed in character: it may accumulate not as total collapse, but as the gradual weakening of particular connections, procedures, and capacities.

Bowker and Star (2000) add another important dimension to this discussion: the invisible labour involved in maintaining classification systems and standards. Infrastructures function through continuous work of categorisation, alignment, and maintenance, which usually remains outside direct attention but determines what becomes visible and legitimate within the scholarly record. In scholarly publishing, this labour often remains outside formal indicators of performance. It is not always reflected in publication counts, indexing, or open access metrics, yet it determines how the scholarly record is organised and maintained. Much of this work takes the form of low-visibility, often voluntary or insufficiently institutionalised activity that ensures the consistency of procedures and standards. Under such conditions, a system may preserve outward signs of functioning while the conditions of its reproduction gradually change.

These approaches suggest that the fragility of scholarly publishing is best understood as a distributed dynamic. A publishing system may remain visible to readers while simultaneously losing some of the capacities that ensure the verifiability, governability, and preservation of the scholarly record (Hinchliffe, 2022). To describe these changes, it is useful to distinguish three interconnected dimensions: technical, human capacity, and governance (Table 1). This distinction does not claim to provide an exhaustive ontology of publishing; rather, its purpose is to demonstrate that different forms of fragility may emerge in different parts of the same infrastructure and may not manifest simultaneously.

The technical dimension includes hosting, editorial platforms, backup systems, metadata, persistent identifiers, indexing, archiving, and long-term preservation services. These elements ensure the accessibility, interoperability, and recoverability of journals. At the same time, technical continuity does not necessarily imply technical resilience. The mere existence of online access does not exclude situations in which publishing infrastructure remains dependent on individual platforms, has limited possibilities for backup or migration, or is characterised by metadata instability (Cramer et al., 2023). In such cases, visibility may be preserved while the long-term preservation and recoverability of the record remain vulnerable (Eve, 2024).

The human capacity dimension includes editors, reviewers, copyeditors, librarians, technical specialists, translators, administrators, and the institutions that support their work. This concerns not only the presence of individual people, but the continuity of editorial roles, skills, trust, coordination, and professional routines. From this perspective, publishing appears as a form of reproducible collective labour that cannot be reduced to platforms and standards alone. When such labour becomes excessively voluntary, insufficiently recognised, or dependent on a limited circle of participants, the system may preserve publication continuity while its capacity to maintain the quality and consistency of editorial processes gradually weakens (Horbach & Halffman, 2020).

The governance dimension includes journal ownership, editorial authority, distribution of responsibility, succession planning, ethical procedures, correction and retraction mechanisms, as well as policies regarding authorship, data, and preservation of the version of record. This dimension should be distinguished from human capacity because the existence of an active editorial team does not guarantee clear procedures and authority, just as formally adopted policies do not ensure their implementation. Governance fragility manifests in situations of uncertainty regarding authority and responsibility.

Table 1. Three Dimensions of Scholarly Publishing as Infrastructure

Dimension	Includes	Determines
Technical	Hosting, platforms, backups, metadata, identifiers, indexing, preservation	Accessibility, interoperability, and recoverability of the scholarly record
Human capacity	Editors, reviewers, copyeditors, librarians, technical staff, translators, and supporting institutions	Quality, consistency, and reproducibility of editorial processes
Governance	Ownership, editorial authority, succession, ethical procedures, corrections and retractions, accountability	Institutional conditions ensuring legitimacy and control over the scholarly record

Distinguishing these three dimensions makes it possible to understand fragility as an uneven dynamic of change. A publishing system may preserve continuity of publication while individual infrastructural components lose the capacity to sustain the scholarly record. Such asynchronicity explains why external stability is not always an indicator of resilience.

3. Ukraine as a Stress Test

University scholarly journals make these dependencies particularly visible because they combine limited resources, dependence on institutional infrastructure, and a significant share of voluntary editorial labour. Ukraine is considered here as a context in which these dependencies become especially visible under conditions of systemic stress.

3.1 *Technical Dimension: Accessibility and the Vulnerability of the Digital Record*

Since 2022, Ukrainian scholarly journals have maintained continuity of publication and high levels of open access, largely in the form of diamond open access. Indicators of publication activity and citation impact do not demonstrate a sharp short-term decline, suggesting the preservation of system visibility (Hladchenko, 2025; Zimba et al., 2025; Hladchenko & Costas, 2025).

At the same time, these indicators primarily reflect the visibility of outputs rather than the conditions of their preservation. The war has significantly affected the material and digital infrastructure of science: research institutions have been damaged, equipment lost or relocated, and access to servers and local archives disrupted (UNESCO, 2024; Tsybuliak et al., 2023; Suchikova, 2024). For university journals, this creates risks related not only to publication continuity, but also to the long-term preservation of the digital record — including the loss of institutional repositories, instability of hosting, absence of backup systems, or limited possibilities for platform migration.

The displacement of universities creates an additional dimension of this vulnerability: institutions that have lost physical infrastructure are forced to rebuild digital systems under new conditions, which does not always involve full restoration of archives, metadata, and technical connections between elements of the publishing process (Finikov et al., 2025; Suchikova, 2024; Tsybuliak et al., 2023). In such a context, technical continuity does not guarantee the resilience or recoverability of the scholarly record.

At the same time, the question of accessibility cannot be reduced to technical openness alone. In contexts of crisis and war, data openness may involve additional risks associated with potential misuse or harm to individuals and communities. In this sense, FAIR principles are complemented by approaches oriented toward the ethical dimension of data practices, particularly CARE, which emphasises the need to consider context, responsibility, and the possible consequences of data reuse (Suchikova & Nazarovets, 2025; 2026). This adds another dimension to the understanding of technical fragility: even under conditions of formal accessibility, questions of control and safe use of the scholarly record remain unresolved.

3.2 **Human Capacity Dimension: Editorial Labour under Conditions of Pressure**

Editorial processes within Ukrainian university journals are deeply embedded in the academic environment: editors, reviewers, and authors often belong to the same institutions or professional communities. This means that changes in the conditions of academic labour directly affect publishing infrastructure as well.

Data on emotional exhaustion among academic staff demonstrate a substantial increase in stress levels during the war period (Tsybuliak et al., 2025; 2026). Although these data do not refer specifically to journal editors, they reflect the condition of the same human resource upon which editorial activity depends. Combined with the fact that university publishing relies heavily on voluntary or insufficiently institutionalised labour (National Research Foundation of Ukraine, 2025; Nazarovets et al., 2026), this creates conditions under which editorial continuity may be sustained at the cost of increasing burdens placed on a limited circle of participants.

An additional aspect is editorial endogamy — the overlap of author, reviewer, and editor roles within the same institution or local network (Nazarovets & Nazarovets, 2026). Under stable conditions, this may remain relatively unnoticed; under pressure, however, it reduces external scrutiny and makes the system more dependent on internal resources that are themselves already under strain.

3.3 **Governance Dimension: Control, Authority, and the Legitimacy of the Record**

The governance dimension becomes particularly visible in situations where control over institutional identity and archives is disrupted. In occupied territories, cases have been documented of unauthorised appropriation of journals, their re-registration, and disputes over the rights to use journal titles and archives (Plastun & Kozmenko, 2025). Under such conditions, the question of which resource constitutes the legitimate continuation of a journal acquires practical significance and cannot be resolved solely on the basis of formal visibility or the existence of new publications.

At the same time, editorial systems are affected by global processes such as the growth of organised fraud, paper mills, and new challenges associated with the use of artificial intelligence (Porter & McIntosh, 2024; Richardson et al., 2025; Naddaf, 2026; COPE, 2023; ALLEA, 2023). For university journals with limited resources, this creates additional pressure on quality assurance procedures, which often already lack sufficient formalisation or institutional support.

3.4 Convergence of Dimensions: The Gap between Visibility and Legitimacy

The dimensions discussed above do not provide a complete picture when considered separately. Their analytical significance emerges through their interaction. The technical dimension demonstrates the preservation of accessibility; the human dimension reveals the dependence of this accessibility on intensive labour; the governance dimension exposes the vulnerability of procedures and authority structures that ensure the legitimacy of the record.

Taken together, these observations point to the possibility of a situation in which visible continuity of publication coexists with the weakening of the conditions that ensure the reliability, governability, and preservation of the scholarly record. The gap between visibility and legitimacy is not presented here as a demonstrated causal relationship at the level of individual journals. Rather, it should be understood as an analytical hypothesis supported by the convergence of different forms of evidence, which becomes particularly legible under conditions of systemic stress.

The analytical value of distinguishing these three dimensions becomes most apparent through comparison. The cyberattack on the British Library in 2023 disrupted the technical dimension: catalogues, digital services, and normal operations were paralysed for months (British Library, n.d.). However, staff continued working, the institution's authority was not questioned, and recovery proceeded through existing lines of authority and stable leadership. The human and governance dimensions remained functional — and it was precisely these dimensions that provided the buffer for recovery.

In the Ukrainian context, all three dimensions are simultaneously under pressure: technical infrastructure has been damaged or displaced, editorial capacity is becoming exhausted, and governance mechanisms in some cases are being contested or losing operational capacity. This is a synchronous disruption — qualitatively different from the isolated failure of a single dimension. For this reason, analysis through the three dimensions is necessary: by looking only at publication visibility or only at technical infrastructure, we would fail to recognise the fundamental difference between these two cases.

4. Resilience of Publishing Systems as an Infrastructural Property

Understanding scholarly publishing as infrastructure highlights fragility as a distributed phenomenon emerging at the intersection of technical, human, and governance conditions. From this perspective, resilience cannot be reduced to continuity of publication or isolated improvements within the system. Rather, it is connected to the capacity to sustain and reproduce the infrastructural conditions that ensure the verifiability, governability, and preservation of the scholarly record (Table 2).

Such an approach shifts attention from the characteristics of individual elements to the organisation of the system as a whole. Resilience emerges as a property of infrastructure that depends on the coherence of its components and their capacity to support one another under conditions of pressure. It is therefore more appropriate to speak not about isolated solutions, but about the infrastructural conditions under which a publishing system preserves its functionality.

The first of these conditions is the preservation and recoverability of the scholarly record. This includes accessibility of materials, resilience to disruption, displacement, or changes in the institutional environment. It presupposes the existence of backups, distributed preservation, and the possibility of transferring archives and metadata without loss of journal integrity. Preservation and portability thus constitute interconnected characteristics that determine the long-term stability of the record.

The second condition is the reproducibility of editorial labour. Publishing systems rely on collective practices that do not always possess a clearly formalised institutional structure, yet ensure their everyday functioning. Resilience in this dimension is connected to the ability to sustain roles, skills, and coordination over time. This includes knowledge transfer, formalisation of procedures, and recognition of editorial activity as a component of scientific infrastructure.

The third condition is procedural governability. The existence of rules regarding corrections, retractions, authorship, data practices, and other aspects of editorial processes forms the basis for maintaining the legitimacy of the scholarly record. Resilience depends on the operationalisation of these procedures and their consistent implementation. In situations where they remain informal or situational, the system becomes vulnerable to errors and conflicts.

Particular significance also attaches to control over the scholarly record itself — its archives, metadata, journal identity, and editorial authority. This aspect may be described as custodial sovereignty: the ability of a publishing system to retain effective control over its own record infrastructure. This constitutes a condition for interaction with broader infrastructures without losing the capacity to ensure institutional continuity.

Integration into international scholarly infrastructures thus becomes a question of the conditions of participation. Metadata standards, identifiers, and open protocols expand opportunities for inclusion within global knowledge networks. At the same time, forms of integration that restrict the possibility of migration or entail the loss of control over the record may intensify vulnerability. Engagement with such infrastructures therefore requires combining interoperability with preservation of control over the record — a principle that may be described as *sovereignty-compatible harmonisation*.

Resilience of publishing systems is therefore determined by the capacity to sustain these infrastructural conditions in their interaction. It is a property of system organisation rather than of its individual components.

Table 2. Infrastructural Conditions of Publishing System Resilience

Infrastructural condition	Primarily associated with	What form of fragility it reduces	Why it matters
Preservation and portability of the scholarly record	Technical	Dependence on individual platforms, vulnerability of archives, limited recovery capacity	Ensures long-term preservation and recoverability of the scholarly record
Reproducible editorial capacity	Human capacity	Concentration of editorial labour, instability of roles, exhaustion	Sustains continuity and quality of editorial processes over time
Procedural governability	Governance	Uncertainty of authority, instability of procedures, situational decision-making	Ensures consistency and predictability in maintaining record legitimacy

All of these conditions share a common framework: integration into international infrastructures must occur without loss of control over the scholarly record, which defines the limits of their implementation.

5. What Makes Publishing Resilient and Why This Is a Matter of Science Policy

This article proceeds from a simple observation: in most approaches to the analysis of scholarly publishing, attention is focused on outputs — publications, open access, and indexing. Such indicators effectively reflect the visibility of the system, but are considerably less capable of capturing the conditions under which the publishing infrastructure itself functions.

The distinction proposed in this article between three dimensions — technical, human capacity, and governance — makes it possible to conceptualise publishing as an infrastructure in which these conditions are distributed and interconnected. From this perspective, fragility does not necessarily manifest as the cessation of publication activity. It may instead take the form of a gradual weakening of the system's capacity to sustain its own functioning and reproduce the conditions necessary for its operation. It is precisely this situation that is described by the gap between visibility and legitimacy: a condition in which external signs of functioning are preserved while the infrastructural preconditions of reliability are changing.

The infrastructural conditions identified in this article — preservation and portability, reproducible editorial capacity, procedural governability, and custodial sovereignty — do not constitute a universal set of solutions. Rather, they indicate directions in which resilience acquires an infrastructural character: as a property of a system that depends on the coherence of its components and their capacity to support one another.

The experience of wartime Ukraine renders these dependencies more visible, but it is not unique in its underlying logic. Dependence on unstable digital solutions, increasing burdens on editorial labour, uneven governance procedures, and growing challenges related to research integrity are characteristic of many publishing systems. Under stable conditions, these processes unfold more slowly and are partially compensated for by institutional resources; under conditions of crisis, they become more visible. In this sense, war functions not as an exception, but as a situation that renders the structural dependencies of infrastructure more legible.

Such an approach has direct implications for science policy.

First, it raises the question of how the “state” of publishing systems is defined. Evaluation frameworks that rely exclusively on visibility indicators fail to account for changes in a system's capacity to sustain its own functioning and create the risk of situations in which increased openness is not accompanied by strengthening of infrastructural conditions. This implies that evaluation approaches should be complemented by indicators related to preservation, editorial capacity, and governance procedures alongside metrics of visibility.

Second, the question of conditions for participation in international knowledge infrastructures becomes increasingly important. Initiatives oriented toward interoperability and openness expand opportunities for inclusion within global scholarly networks, but do not always take into account the conditions necessary for preserving control over publishing infrastructure — including archives, metadata, and institutional identity. Combining interoperability with the preservation of such control is critical, particularly for systems operating within unstable or transitional environments. This requires incorporating requirements for portability and preservation of infrastructural control into the conditions of integration.

Third, the preservation and continuity of publishing infrastructure under conditions of conflict require more systematic consideration. Cases involving the loss of control over archives, institutional identity, or editorial authority demonstrate that infrastructural vulnerability possesses not only a technical, but also a legal and institutional dimension. This indicates the need to develop international mechanisms capable of supporting the continuity and legitimacy of publishing systems under such conditions.

This article does not propose exhaustive solutions to these questions. Its purpose is rather to suggest a way of formulating them: to consider scholarly publishing as an infrastructure whose resilience cannot be reduced to continuity of publication, but is connected to the capacity to reproduce the conditions of knowledge legitimacy. The fragility of publishing systems is a structural characteristic that requires consideration at the level of science policy design.

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