



DiGeSt

Journal of Diversity and Gender Studies

DiGeSt: The Journal's Genesis

Marysa Demoor

Prof. Em. English Culture and Gender Studies & Founder of DiGeSt, Ghent University
marysa.demoor@ugent.be

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Genesis and origins

Ten years is an important period. *DiGeSt*, the academic journal for gender and diversity studies, was launched ten years ago. The idea of the journal, however, took shape three years earlier the summer of 2011. Until then, the Centre for Gender studies at Ghent University published an annual yearbook, collecting the presentations of researchers mainly working on projects that used gender as their crucial angle. These papers were presented at the Genderforum. This series of symposiums for academics and interested members of the public that had started in the early 1990s began quite low key, with the organisers, for instance, taking care of some sandwiches and coffee for the attendees. Researchers were invited to present their ongoing investigations and were later expected to send in their papers for publication in the *Verslagen van het UGent Centrum voor Genderstudies [Reports of the UGhent Centre for Gender Studies]*. A publication in the annual became a rite of passage into the world of publications for budding researchers.

The launch of the Gender and diversity policy unit in October 2008 offered tenured positions to three policy officers, and therefore the future of the gender forum and its annual seemed secure. However, people are totally unpredictable. Once tenured, those three persons responsible for the organisation and the subsequent publication of the papers, reneged on their duty and abandoned the gender project. They rejected the feminist label and wanted nothing to do with anything related to it. *Verslagen* too had lasted for a decade when this implosion occurred.

As the head of the policy unit, I had to act swiftly. At the time, research was mainly measured on the basis of peer-reviewed publications in English-language journals. So, I saw this as an opportunity to upgrade the annual publication. A first meeting about the future of the Centre and its annual with concerned young researchers happened in August 2011. The minutes of the meeting conclude that if the *Verslagen* were to be continued, it had to be in the shape of an English-language peer-reviewed journal. A meeting in February 2012 with the then publisher Academia Press, led to a propitious agreement. The publisher wanted to continue our collaboration, but asked for the journal to have a wider remit and was happy to include diversity as well as gender. We needed a new title, a mission statement and an editorial board. Academia Press, uniquely, offered to remunerate the reviewers with a book voucher. This was all good news. The title was an easy one. Diversity and Gender Studies automatically led to *DiGeSt*, a noun with the stress on the first syllable.

The next step was to appoint a chief editor. Several of the young people committed to the project could not assume this editorial responsibility on top of their ongoing engagements. I myself could not do it because I had suffered a major head trauma at the time and was not sure when and if I would recuperate from this in time for the launch and the running of the journal. The only person who saw herself taking on the challenge was Liselotte Vandenbussche (see figure 1).



Figure 1: Liselotte Vandenbussche (in red) as an invited speaker at a gender forum session (chair Marysa Demoor, in black).

Liselotte was a young mother of two at the time and in search of a new academic position. She obtained a new job appointment while in the middle of working on and launching *DiGeSt*. To start a new journal is no easy matter. To start it and have to combine it with a new job is sheer impossible, but somehow Liselotte managed to do it. She took care of the cover design with the money she still had in her university budget. The people she invited to submit their ideas for the cover were her friends Els Van Hemelryck and Gunther Fobe. They sent in several designs for the cover of which we show three below, the first one on the left being the chosen one.



Figure 2: a sample of the designs for the cover of the new *DiGeSt* journal; © Van Hemelryck and Fobe.

Some of the top researchers in gender studies contributed articles to the first issues: the late Professor Kate Belsey, Professor Rosi Braidotti and Professor Margaret Homans were marvellously generous with their time and research. Academia Press took care of the publication in its own meticulous way. The launch was scheduled for 25 June 2014 with a keynote speech by today's Belgian deputy Prime Minister and minister for public administration, Petra de Sutter. Publishing the early issues was a slow process. There were few spontaneous submissions, so to start with we had to invite well-known scholars and warn them that their submission had to pass a peer review evaluation.

Milestones in the life of an academic journal



Figure 3: Pictures of the launch in 2014: left: Professor Petra de Sutter launching the new *Digest* journal on 24 June 2014; right: some of the attendees of the launch.

After the first four issues Liselotte passed on the editorial torch to one of the most active members of the board, Birgit van Puymbroeck. This change of the editorial chair came at a time when Academia Press was swallowed by Lannoo Publishing and the journal went through rocky waters. Lannoo was not interested in academic journals and did, for instance, not understand the process of peer review, so the search began for another supportive publisher. Lannoo was the publisher until December 2016 after which the University Press of Leuven (UPL) very briefly became the new host. UPL took care of a paper edition as well as an online publication in the JSTOR database. However, UPL like Lannoo had little enthusiasm for this budding journal so the editors quickly realised that *DiGeSt* needed a new publisher and one that would keep this ship sailing preferably also online.

On 25 April 2018 at 6.30 p.m., *DiGeSt* celebrated its five years' anniversary with short presentations by myself, as founder, Birgit Van Puymbroeck, the then chief editor, and members of the editorial board.



Figure 4: David Paternotte speaking at the 5-years' celebration of *DiGeSt* in April 2018.

It was after this roller-coaster period that Mieke Vandenbroucke became chief editor at the end of 2018. Like the previous editors the position came at a moment when Mieke was applying for a tenured job, and she had to abandon the editorship fairly soon after, when offered a prestigious position at the University of Antwerp. Mieke remained on the team, as an assistant editor, ready to help and support.

In the summer of 2019, Mieke Vandenbroucke together with the newly appointed chief editors Ladan Rahbari and Tina Goethals, secured a place for *DiGeSt* on the Open Journals Initiatives of the UGent library (<https://www.digest.ugent.be/>). The new team of editors were also keen on intensifying the international dimension of the journal with respect to the editorial and advisory board. The efforts to internationalise the journal had started right from the beginning. It took some time, however, before the board was to be joined by specialists located beyond the Belgian borders. This policy was continued under the chief editorship of Florian Vanlee and An Van Raemdonck. Florian served as editor during the difficult Covid years and recently received a heartfelt eulogy on the journal's Facebook page.

More recently the editorship by a twosome became a team of four when Louise Benson James and Chloé Janssen accepted to join the core editorial unit. With this new, devoted group of editors, it will be full speed ahead for the journal.

International reputation

In the vast array of new journals launched in the last decade of the last century, *DiGeSt* was to start as just one of many focussing on issues such as gender or diversity. It was the combination of the two and its huge academic ambition that set it apart. The early mission statement had this as its programme:

DiGeSt aims to be a **leading journal** in the fields of **the social sciences and the humanities**. It publishes original work written in English from a wide array of disciplines including sociology, anthropology, communication sciences, political sciences, philosophy, history, arts, and literature. In addition, it is open to work from other disciplines such as psychology and educational sciences, especially if a strong link is provided with frameworks that are also used in the social sciences and the humanities. (my emphasis)

Its ambition is reflected in the above-mentioned contributions to the first issues by leading scholars in the field as well as the early special issue on intersectionality (vol.2, 2015). These were careful steps in a conscious process that wanted to transmogrify the journal into the unavoidable reference point for every starting researcher. If that process of change was undeniably difficult at the beginning, it is slowly getting in that top position now. The recent issue on TERFness (vol. 10) is the acknowledged source for the Wikipedia entry on 'TERFness'. There is no doubt about it. At the age of ten, *DiGeSt* has become the point of reference on subjects related to diversity and gender. Here's a toast to the next ten years.