Publish or Perish

A sentence in the preface of the book *Web Cartography – Map Design for Interactive and Mobile Devices* written by Dr Ian Muehlenhaus (see my review [here](https://www.gim-international.com/content/article/publish-or-perish)) particularly caught my interest. Recognising that textbooks on the design of web maps are few and far between, Dr Muehlenhaus states: “Those that do exist tend to either be extremely technical or edited volumes that are often too academic for non-experts.” This image confirms my own observation, which I expressed in the preface to my book *Geoinformation – Technologies, Applications and the Environment*, published by Springer in 2011. I wrote: “It is becoming increasingly seldom that a textbook is written by one or a few authors...Today it is not unusual when 25 authors, or more, are involved...The topics covered are complicated and specialised.” The crux is – why? Why are so many books published as a collection of edited conference papers? Why do so few professors have an interest in structuring existing knowledge in their field of specialisation and presenting it in a form suited to an audience of students and practitioners? I think I know the answer: the disinterest originates in the current system of reward and career at universities. Taking a closer look at this situation, the tasks of a university are threefold: (1) creation of knowledge; (2) conservation and structuring of knowledge; and (3) transfer of knowledge to students, practitioners and society as a whole. A naïve observer would think that these tasks have the same weight and are equally rewarded, but nothing could be further from the truth. The task listed as number 1 – the creation of knowledge – has been hurled out into the far zenith (okay, I may be exaggerating slightly but it is certainly true to some extent). Nowadays it is no longer the actual creation of knowledge which matters, but rather its countable derivative: the number of articles published in high-ranked scientific journals or, to use the jargon, the ‘impact factor’. I recently published several articles in this magazine and I am pretty sure that some of them will become course material. But their formal impact factor will be zero – no reward and no credits because they have been published in a professional journal instead of a scientific one. And that’s not all. It is also the ability to attract funding that counts. I know of professors who have never gained a PhD, who have never published a scientific syllable, but who were appointed because of their network and thus their skills in collecting money. I know of professors who were appointed on the understanding that their education obligations would be de facto non-existent. I know of professors who are very good in knowledge transfer but whose careers have stagnated because they never gained a PhD. When will it stop? I see signs all around the world that members of academia are getting sick and tired of the whirligig of science as a paper-production industry. I see how they are suffering as the reward-and-career system is all but bankrupt. Indeed, they are longing for release from the straitjacket of ‘publish or perish’.