



ISSN: 0976-3376

Available Online at <http://www.journalajst.com>

ASIAN JOURNAL OF  
SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY

Asian Journal of Science and Technology  
Vol. 17, Issue, 01, pp. 14106-14108, January, 2026

## CASE STUDY

# FROM INDEPENDENCE TO SCHOLARLY INTEGRATION: A DOCUMENTED CASE STUDY

\*Sam Osmanagich

Independent Researcher, Archaeological Park: Bosnian Pyramid of the Sun Foundation

### ARTICLE INFO

#### Article History:

Received 26<sup>th</sup> October, 2025  
Received in revised form  
11<sup>th</sup> November, 2025  
Accepted 17<sup>th</sup> December, 2025  
Published online 30<sup>th</sup> January, 2026

#### Key words:

Independent Research; Scholarly Integration; Peer review; Open science; Research legitimacy; Academic Gatekeeping; Interdisciplinary Methodology.

\*Corresponding author:  
Sam Osmanagich

### ABSTRACT

Independent researchers operating outside formal academic institutions frequently encounter structural barriers to scholarly participation, including limited access to peer-review channels, epistemic skepticism toward non-affiliated authors, and reduced bibliometric visibility. While open-access publishing has expanded dissemination opportunities, it has not fully resolved legitimacy asymmetries embedded in institutional science (Merton, 1973; Latour, 1987). This article draws on the author's own longitudinal research examining the methodological transition of an independent researcher from marginal academic positioning to sustained participation within the peer-reviewed scholarly ecosystem—while maintaining full institutional independence. Using verifiable bibliometric data (DOIs, ORCID records, indexed publications), conference proceedings, and interdisciplinary peer-review outcomes from 2005–2025, the study identifies concrete strategies enabling scholarly integration. Results indicate that independence and scholarly legitimacy are not mutually exclusive when methodological rigor, transparent metrics, bibliometric traceability, and discipline-appropriate framing are systematically applied. The article proposes a replicable pathway model for independent researchers seeking scholarly integration without institutional affiliation, contributing to contemporary discussions on open science, decentralization of research authority, and post-institutional knowledge production.

Citation: Sam Osmanagich. 2026. "From Independence to scholarly Integration: A Documented Case Study", *Asian Journal of Science and Technology*, 17, (01), 14106-14108.

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## INTRODUCTION

Modern scientific knowledge production remains strongly structured around institutional affiliation. Universities and academies function as primary arbiters of legitimacy through control of peer review, funding mechanisms, and citation infrastructure (Merton, 1973; Ziman, 2000). Numerous studies have documented systemic biases disadvantaging non-institutional researchers, particularly in interdisciplinary or paradigm-challenging domains (Bourdieu, 2004; Gieryn, 1999). Although digital platforms and open-access journals have lowered barriers to dissemination, epistemic authority remains unevenly distributed (Tennant *et al.*, 2016; Björk, 2017). Independent researchers are often required to demonstrate higher-than-average methodological transparency to compensate for perceived legitimacy deficits (Nosek *et al.*, 2015).

This article addresses the following research question:

What concrete methodological, bibliometric, and infrastructural steps enable an independent researcher to transition from marginal positioning into sustained participation within the peer-reviewed scholarly arena while retaining independence?

## METHODOLOGY

**Research Design:** The study employs a qualitative longitudinal single-case study design, appropriate for examining complex interactions between institutional structures, publication systems, and

researcher agency (Yin, 2018). Reflexive case analysis is widely used in science-studies and sociology-of-knowledge research where the researcher's trajectory constitutes empirical material (Flyvbjerg, 2006).

**Data Sources:** Primary data sources include:

- Peer-reviewed journal articles (n = 35) published between 2024–2025, each assigned a DOI via Crossref or Zenodo;
- ORCID author record documenting chronological publication metadata;
- Conference proceedings (n = 2) accepted through peer review and indexed with ISBN/ISSN;
- Editorial correspondence and reviewer reports (qualitatively analyzed, anonymized);
- Public bibliometric platforms (Google Scholar citation indexing).

Earlier phases are documented retrospectively through archival records and publication history. Secondary sources include scholarly literature on academic gatekeeping, open science, and legitimacy construction (Merton, 1973; Latour, 1987; Bourdieu, 2004).

**Analytical Metrics and Indicators:** To move beyond narrative description, the study operationalizes scholarly integration using five measurable indicators:

**Analytical Procedure:** Each publication was evaluated for:

- Presence of explicit methodology and data disclosure;
- Statistical or measurement transparency;
- Reviewer-requested revisions and acceptance outcomes;
- Journal indexing and discoverability.

Temporal comparison allowed identification of threshold moments marking transition into sustained scholarly participation.

Indicator	Metric	Operational Definition
Peer-review participation	Count of accepted articles	Articles accepted after formal peer review
Bibliometric traceability	DOI + ORCID linkage	Permanent digital author-article identity
Disciplinary breadth	Journal scope diversity	Publications across $\geq 4$ disciplines
Methodological conformity	IMRAD compliance	Use of standardized scientific structure
Independence retention	Institutional affiliation	No salaried academic appointment

## RESULTS

**Phase I: Marginalized Independence (Pre-2005):** Prior to structured academic engagement, research dissemination occurred primarily through books, lectures, and non-indexed outlets. While extensive empirical fieldwork existed, absence of bibliometric identifiers (DOIs, indexed journals) resulted in low scholarly visibility, consistent with documented patterns of institutional exclusion (Gieryn, 1999).

**Phase II: Methodological Alignment (2005–2020):** Initiation of systematic archaeological and geophysical field research increased empirical robustness, yet publication resistance persisted. A critical turning point involved methodological normalization, including:

- Adoption of standardized measurement protocols;
- Explicit separation of data presentation from interpretive claims;
- Alignment with discipline-specific terminologies.

This phase corresponds with literature emphasizing boundary-work as a prerequisite for legitimacy (Gieryn, 1999).

### Phase III: Scholarly Integration without Institutional Absorption (2021–2026)

Full scholarly integration occurred through cumulative implementation of:

- DOI-registered peer-reviewed publications;
- ORCID-based author identity consolidation;
- Strategic submission to interdisciplinary open-access journals;
- Conference participation with indexed proceedings.

By 2025, the researcher demonstrated continuous peer-review acceptance across archaeology, engineering, environmental science, public health, and statistics—meeting all operational indicators defined in Section 2.3.

## DISCUSSION

The findings corroborate prior research indicating that institutional affiliation is not a necessary condition for scholarly legitimacy, provided methodological standards are rigorously met (Nosek *et al.*, 2015; Tennant *et al.*, 2016). The case illustrates how independent researchers can substitute institutional infrastructure with open-science tools, achieving comparable bibliometric outcomes. (e.g. Osmanagich 2015a; 2015b) Notably, independence enabled long-term, high-risk interdisciplinary research seldom supported within

short-term academic funding cycles—supporting arguments for decentralized research ecosystems (Latour, 1987; Ziman, 2000).

**Limitations:** This single-case study does not claim statistical generalizability. However, analytic transferability is high due to transparent metrics and replicable steps. Comparative multi-case studies are recommended for future research.

## CONCLUSION

This study demonstrates a viable, evidence-based pathway from marginalized independent research to sustained scholarly integration without institutional absorption. By systematically adopting peer-review conventions, bibliometric identifiers, and methodological transparency, independent researchers can participate fully in the academic knowledge system while preserving autonomy. The findings are particularly relevant for technology-driven and interdisciplinary researchers operating outside traditional institutional frameworks.

**Practical Implications for Independent Researchers:** Based on the documented case study and supporting literature, several practical implications can be formulated for independent researchers seeking scholarly integration while preserving autonomy:

1. **Bibliometric Identity Is Foundational**  
Establishing a persistent digital identity through ORCID and DOI-registered publications is essential. These tools substitute for institutional affiliation by ensuring traceability, accountability, and long-term visibility.
2. **Methodological Over-Transparency Is an Asset**  
Independent researchers benefit from exceeding minimal methodological disclosure standards. Explicit data descriptions, clear statistical methods, and reproducible protocols help counteract epistemic bias against non-affiliated authors (Nosek *et al.*, 2015).
3. **Journal Scope Alignment Is Strategic**  
Successful integration depends on selecting journals whose thematic scope aligns with interdisciplinary or emerging research rather than forcing submissions into narrowly orthodox outlets. Open-access journals with formal peer review provide viable entry points.
4. **Standardized Structure Enables Legitimacy**  
Consistent use of IMRAD structure, formal referencing, and discipline-appropriate language significantly improves peer-review outcomes, independent of institutional status.
5. **Independence Can Be a Methodological Advantage**  
Maintaining independence allows long-term continuity, interdisciplinary synthesis, and exploration of high-risk or unconventional research questions that are often constrained within institutional funding cycles.

Collectively, these implications suggest that independent researchers need not pursue institutional absorption to achieve scholarly legitimacy. Instead, legitimacy can be constructed through systematic adoption of scientific standards, transparent documentation, and strategic use of open research infrastructure.

**Acknowledgements:** The author acknowledges the contributions of numerous independent scholars, field researchers, engineers, statisticians, medical professionals, and volunteers who participated in multidisciplinary research activities at the Bosnian Valley of the Pyramids and associated sites over the past two decades. While this article is a single-author work, the broader empirical foundation upon which it is based was made possible through open collaboration, knowledge exchange, and field support provided by the international research community. The author also acknowledges the role of open-access publishing platforms, digital bibliometric infrastructures (including DOI registries and ORCID), and peer reviewers whose critical evaluations contributed to methodological refinement and scholarly clarity.

## Statements

**Ethics Approval and Consent to Participate:** Not applicable. This study does not involve human subjects, personal data, or interventions requiring ethical committee approval.

**Consent for Publication:** Not applicable.

**Availability of Data and Materials:** All data supporting the conclusions of this study are derived from publicly available bibliometric records, peer-reviewed publications, conference proceedings, and author-maintained open repositories. DOIs, ORCID records, and publication metadata are accessible via the author's official scientific website and standard academic indexing platforms.

**Competing Interests:** The author declares no competing financial, professional, or institutional interests that could have influenced the content or conclusions of this article.

**Funding:** This research received no external funding. All research activities, publication costs, and infrastructure were supported independently by the author and through the non-profit activities of the Archaeological Park: Bosnian Pyramid of the Sun Foundation.

**Authors' Contributions:** The author solely conceived the study, designed the methodology, collected and analyzed the data, interpreted the results, and prepared the manuscript.

**Author Information:** **Sam Osmanagich, Ph.D.** is an independent researcher specializing in archaeology, interdisciplinary science, and the study of ancient civilizations. He is the founder and principal investigator of the Archaeological Park: Bosnian Pyramid of the Sun Foundation and has published peer-reviewed research across multiple scientific disciplines.

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