roundtable review

PUBMET 2015 : Roundtable on the Croatian OA Journals Evaluation Criteria

Organized by the Department of Information Sciences of the University of Zadar and the Ruđer Bošković Institute, the 2nd PubMet 2015 International Conference was held September 24-25, 2015 in Zadar. The focus of this conference was scholarly communication in the context of open science: scientific PUBlishing as the most visible part, and METrics, used in the various processes of evaluation (PUBMET). This year's topics were focused on new trends in the publishing of scientific journals and books, openness, new formats of digital publishing, innovations in the peer review processes, the relationship between traditional and new metrics (bibliometrics, altmetrics), the new models and approaches to the evaluation of researchers and academic institutions, editorial policies, and best practices in journal editing. The organizers brought together a diverse community of researchers, university teachers, publishers, editors, librarians/information specialists, policy-makers, as well as experts from other fields of research and development.

During the conference, a roundtable discussion was held on the quality evaluation criteria of Croatian open access journals. Due to the current practice of journals being evaluated by the Ministry of Science, Education and Sports (MSES), the main problem could be addressed with a somewhat provocative question: Do we need Croatian journals?

A discussion was therefore initiated on the issues of why Croatian journals were important, why it was important to publish in the Croatian language, on the critical review of the MSES criteria for funding scientific and professional journals, as well as on the issue of charging applications and publication of papers.

A number of participants from various institutions agreed to the fact that Croatian journals were important for researching topics of local (regional) interest (which is in line with the Leiden Manifesto), reducing the gap between science and its application within the community and the economy, for authors' easier access to the scientific community, as a window into the world of the local scientific community, and especially for the preservation of local culture and scientific activities. Moreover, journals in Croatian are particularly important for the development of scientific and technical terminology in the Croatian language, and for expanding accessibility of their contents to the local readership.

Among other things, the participants in the discussion stressed that the priorities of MSES for funding journals should be based, in addition to the current traditional model of the publishing industry, on the quality of their contents, article completeness, and editorial quality (this would, among other, include criteria, such as whether the magazine contained semantic metadata, whether it was to be published in XML format, and whether it supported RDF, etc.), as well as that it was inappropriate for the evaluation of a journal to rely solely on certain formal, often questionable, criteria.

It was pointed out that, today, journal evaluation criteria are becoming ever more stringent in major databases like WoS, but also in Croatia, ignoring the fact that the editorial board itself cannot influence the results of certain criteria, nor for example, can they influence into which group the WoS database aggregator will classify their journal. As the speakers noted, the formal criteria of indexing is also questionable, since for some journals, this depends on the database taken for evaluation by MSES. Thus, for some fields there are very relevant specialized journal databases that reveal the quality of a journal better than general databases. One such example are medical journals, for which the MEDLINE database is far more relevant than the general WoS database. Therefore, such specialized databases should not undergo secondary evaluation by MSES as has been the practice.

Some of the speakers also supported the idea to positively evaluate if the editorial board uses a computer program such as the "Open Journal System", which transparently shows the authors the processing stage of their article, and through which the editorial board, authors, and reviewers communicate. However, some speakers warned that many editorial boards lack the resources to introduce and maintain additional semantic metadata.

Also proposed was that, in future, journal evaluation criteria should include as many elements of modern digital publishing as possible, as well as systematic training of editors, membership in editorial associations, participation in conferences, ethical policy, and innovations in journal editing.

The roundtable ended with the conclusion that the conference organizer is to prepare a joint proposal of all the views here presented, and forward it to the MSES. The joint proposal would also serve as a basis for a discussion on how to improve the current journal evaluation criteria.

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