Scientific Criticism

**Impactofactorian Rhapsody** - Reflections on publishing to come to the point and to earn a point

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**Summary**: This short contemplation of a phenomenon popularly named impactomania aims at sharing the author's thoughts about the contemporary challenges of scientific publishing in a hopefully unbiased manner. It also tends to propose some personal suggestions about its future and a place of an ordinary researcher in these, still unstable and unpredictable conditions. For the sake of clarity and collegial correctness, no publisher, journal or author will be by any means explicitly mentioned: the essence of this writing is conceived of being strictly out of anything backchat- or condemnation-like. By the same reason, there is a deliberate decision of not quoting references, regardless of what assistance they could be.

*Hark, who knows what?*

Fragile is the knowledge.

Dr. Karaklaić

**Overture**

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of an ordinary researcher in these, still unstable and unpredictable conditions. For the sake of clarity and collegial correctness, no publisher, journal or author will be by all means explicitly mentioned: the essence of this writing is conceived of being strictly out of anything backchat- or condemnation-like. By the same reason, there is a deliberate decision of not quoting references, regardless of what assistance they could be.

**Adagio**

During the past few decades, there has been occurring a constantly increasing change in evaluating an individual research contribution. Irrespective of the country status, in terms of the amount of its budget expenses foreseen for science, the researchers worldwide are basically in the same position. Unlike what was more or less common in many countries of the last century, an average researcher today is heavily pressured to publish papers, book chapters and monographs in order not solely to advance in his local scholar hierarchy, but to survive. Due to a general trend of cutting down the grants and, indirectly, the number of active researchers, we are witnessing a kind of desperate struggle to publish ‘what counts’ in the journals ‘where it counts’, with myriads of publishers and journals attempting to attract the authors to join their editorial boards and write for their journals, promising as fast publication as (im)possible.

**Pas de deux**

The aforementioned lucidly coined term *impactomania*, translated as the madness for impact factors, has a complex structure and compound impact upon an individual dealing with science and being within a system of evaluation: due to an obligate kind of impactoscopy, a researcher is underwent something akin to an impactotomy, with uncertain, long-term and often irreversible consequences. These two processes may be easily the chief tools for amortising the overwhelming explosion of the number of publishers, papers and authors, leading to a disablement of being aware of, if not all, then, at least, majority of pivotal published works on a certain issue. The needle is becoming tinier and thinner, while the haystack seems not to cease growing: as a consequence, a natural reaction of impactophobia is desperately needed to be overcome and transformed into the impactophilia, at any price.

**Andante**

In order to meet the firmly established standards, it seems that each researcher manages for himself. There are many peer-reviewed journals, which are official heralds of national or international associations, and where it is no secret that the membership may, without any negative attitude towards these by the author of these lines, may help in finding a kind of shortcut in publishing one’s paper. On the other hand, we must not forget the fact that the researchers are not alone in their travails, since the publishers are obviously in the identical circumstances, judging by the rapid growth of call-for-papers and other sorts of announcements, usually distributed by e-mail and targeting the authors with whom they had already collaborated. In the light of this, we may regard the advance of offering the open access option among the so-called traditional journals with no publication fees. The very idea of open access is substantially good, but is not affordable for all. The amounts need for this service can surpass thousand(s) of US dollars and, in return, require available funds, provided by projects, which, again, are more and more difficult to win.

For the last fifteen years or more, we have been witnesses of unequal attitude towards the exclusively open access journals from developed countries, on one side, which have developed and are developing in enterprises, and the same type of publications from developing or the third-world countries. It would be quite sufficient to take a quick look at the position of both groups of journals and see that the latter often get and, in just few years, are able to lose their impact factors, because of numerous reasons, including and unexperienced journal management without elemental review procedures and obvious preference for the authors of their own
surrounding. However, these sad facts are for the former too: although those publishers and journals are much more successful in transparent management and using their accumulated know-how, it is equally true that the reviews of the manuscripts submitted to their journals often demand months to be communicated to the author and too succinct, like they were written in the last moment and despite all time devoted to the reviewing process. In this way, a high esteem and correspondingly high impact factors of the developed ones become as questionable as those of the developing ones, but with a certain final outcome that the former are privileged and by far less exposed to losing their minimally fluctuant and essentially firm positions on the most significant yearly updated lists for any researcher.

**Allegra**

In a sharp contrast to impactomania and all its accompanying manifestations, there is a category that may be called impactosanity, widely present among numerous research communities out of the English-speaking area, such as Chinese, Russian or South American, which are not evaluated for the world’s most important impact factor, seeming quite happy with publishing the articles with solely abstracts in English and devoting their editorial and publishing efforts primarily to their own country’s scientific benefit. It is curious that such approach is present in the countries with their scientific communities entirely orientated towards impactomania as well, but, there, it usually represents a kind of luxury, reserved mainly for the researchers with the top titles, who are thus free, at last, to write articles on the topics of their own preference and not imposed by current scientific trends, which were breathing in their neck during their whole career.

**Coda**

On the basis of a most modest experience of the author of these paragraphs, all researchers, irrespective if they are from Serbia or elsewhere, are free what way they choose. With a little additional effort, it is possible to meet both the current but ephemeral demands relating to a specific project or other obligations and fixed date goals, and maintain, develop and bring forth one’s own scientific desires, to whatever extent linked to their official research duties. This should make one more personally satisfied and thus substantially more motivated to stand before the future scientific challenges. If we ask ourselves what all this has to do with Ratarstvo i povtarstvo, we may just say that such a journal, with more than a half a century long and ceaseless production, may assist both local and international community in fulfilling such individual goals: the choice of threading one or another path, though, remains exclusively within the responsibility of each of us as truly free individuals.