

National propensities?

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Dear Sir/Madam,

The recent paper by Macháček and Srholec (2021) on 'predatory' publishing in Scopus usefully highlights the challenge of relying on Scopus (and other citation indexes) as a proxy for the quality of published research. By corollary, it also points to the limitations of Beall's list as a useful guide to so-called predatory publishing: the overlap of journal articles that appear in both databases highlights the subjectivity of journal quality (Tsigaris and Teixeira da Silva 2020).

The authors' analysis of these overlaps leads to a geographical mapping of national 'propensities' to publish in poor quality journals. It should perhaps be no surprise that national research systems and universities seeking to improve their research rankings and 'productivity' will incentivise researchers to publish in Scopus-listed journals. Given the gatekeeping cultures and high article-processing charges that characterise many top-ranked journals, it is again no surprise that these researchers will submit work to Scopus journals that are perceived to be 'easier' or cheaper to publish in. An attention to the global research economy shaping academic publishing practices, or broader questions about how best to measure quality, is lost in this focus on identifying 'predatory' journals and speculative assumptions about national propensities.

The authors' discussion elides the fact that *all* systems of research evaluation produce distortions of varying kinds. As the anthropologist Marilyn Strathern (1997) observed almost a quarter of a century ago, systems of academic audit simply can't escape the effects of Goodhart's Law (which, in brief, can be glossed as 'when measures become targets, they cease to be good measures'). Take Macháček and Srholec's own country, the Czech Republic. It, too, has a research evaluation system that has in recent years come under heavy scrutiny based on the publicity surrounding Wadim Strielkowski, a former Charles University economist who came to national attention after publishing 17 monographs and more than 60 journal articles in just three years. As Stöckelová and Vostal (2017) note in their analysis of the case, 'rather than examining these seemingly different issues (scientific underworld/predatory publishing vs established publishers/quality assurance providers) as conflicting in principle, it is more appropriate to explore them as related and to an extent constitutive of each other' (p. 516).

The bottom line is that all parts of the world face the challenges of building robust and accountable cultures of science. To conjecture that the wealth accumulated by oil and gas economies makes these countries' scholars more vulnerable to 'predators' is missing the forest for the trees. It is equally possible that the lack of 'so-called' predatory publishing found in the lowest income economies is a reflection of different university expectations around academic publishing. This analysis also ignores the limited (and declining) inclusion of non-English-language articles within these indexes (Moskaleva et al. 2017). Our own visualisation of the coverage of citation indexes highlights how little we know about non-English scholarly

production, and how our views of the global landscape are skewed by Web of Science and Scopus (Bell & Mills 2020). These indexes cover a very small proportion of published research, especially once we look beyond the English-language literature. Wagner (2018, p. 106) estimates that 'more than 90% of science remains unseen, unaccounted for, and omitted' from these indexes.

Going forward, we would hope that *Scientometrics* fosters more research into the global research economy shaping scholarly knowledge production, including the dominance of a few major publishing conglomerates (Chen, Posada and Chan 2019), journal gatekeeping, and the distortions that result from university promotion requirements or national guidelines (Biagioli and Lippman 2020). This would provide a counterweight to analyses that continue to use Beall's controversial list, or further reify his concept through a geographical mapping of propensities. Otherwise, we run the risk of perpetuating a pernicious dichotomy between the 'higher' research cultures of the west/global north and the 'backward' ones of the global south/east (Stöckelová and Vostal 2017).

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