

When a Good Thing Goes Bad

Questionable Publishing Practices of (big) Publishers

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Agenda

Part I:
«A great public good.» The
advent of Open Access
Publishing

Part II:
Questionable practices:
«Predatory publishing»

Part III:
Being pulled in all directions: the
current situation

Part IV:
Where does that leave
researchers? Strategies,
resources and alternatives

Part 1:

«A great public good.»

The Advent of Open Access Publishing

Visions of a better scholcom landscape

Budapest Open Access Initiative 2002/2012/2022

- **Definition:**

- By "open access" to this literature, we mean its free availability on the public internet, permitting any users to read, download, copy, distribute, print, search, or link to the full texts of these articles, crawl them for indexing, pass them as data to software, or use them for any other lawful purpose, without financial, legal, or technical barriers other than those inseparable from gaining access to the internet itself. The only constraint on reproduction and distribution, and the only role for copyright in this domain, should be to give authors control over the integrity of their work and the right to be properly acknowledged and cited.

- **Motivation:**

- An old tradition and a new technology have converged to make possible an unprecedented public good. The old tradition is the willingness of scientists and scholars to publish the fruits of their research in scholarly journals without payment, for the sake of inquiry and knowledge. The new technology is the internet. The public good they make possible is the world-wide electronic distribution of the peer-reviewed journal literature and completely free and unrestricted access to it by all scientists, scholars, teachers, students, and other curious minds.
- <https://www.budapestopenaccessinitiative.org/>

..and in practice:

Different ways to publish in OA

Open Access **Gold**:

Article (or book) is published in an OA journal and:

- Immediately accessible
- With an open licence (CC)
- Comes with a bill for APCs (Author Processing Charge)

Hybrid Open Access:

- Same as above **but** in a subscription-based journal (R&P)

Open Access **Green**:

Article (or book) is made available in repository

- possibly after an **embargo (check!)**
- possibly as a post-print

Open Access **Diamond**:

- Same as OA gold **but** no costs to reader or author
- Scholar-led

The rise of the author-pays model

Read & Publish - How does it work?



- Big Deal license with legacy publishers that evolved to include subscriptions and funding for Open Access
- READ: institution has access to a publisher's subscription content. Pricing often based on current subscriptions
- PUBLISH: APCs for the institution's faculty are waived and built into the contract price

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The rise of the author-pays model

Alternative OA publishing houses



- New business model brought about the rise of new publishing venues
- Purely digital, OA Gold alternatives to legacy publishers
- Examples: BMC, PLoS, PeerJ, eLife, Frontiers, MDPI



Parallel rise of predatory publishing

Part 2:

Questionable practices: «Predatory publishing»

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«Predatory»

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Towards a consensus definition

Building on Jeffrey Beall:

“an exploitative business model in the scholarly publishing market that is devised solely for financial gain’ that ‘has become an epidemic practice over the last two decades.” ([Xia](#), 2021)

Working definition e.g. for ALLEA

Predatory journals and their publishers are "entities that prioritise self-interest at the expense of scholarship and are characterised by false or misleading information, deviation from best editorial and publication practices, a lack of transparency, and/or the use of aggressive and indiscriminate solicitation practices.” ([Grudniewicz](#) et al, 2019)

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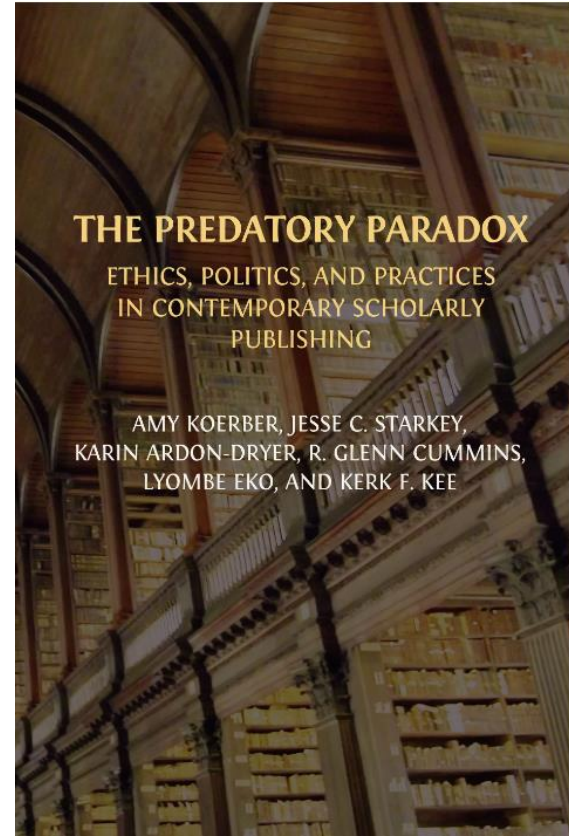
«Predatory»

Is a definition (still) possible?

Defining "Predatory" is far from a simple task and the term "is the product of a desire to find simple solutions and understandings to what is inherently a complex problem." ([Koerber et al](#), 2023)

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Predatory Publishing

Fallacies and Paradoxes

Fallacies

- Researchers are helpless prey
- All research published in a predatory outlet is bad
- Predatory publishers come from the global south
- New models by traditional, prestigious publishers are acceptable (e.g. ACS [controversially](#) charging 2.500 USD for OA green without embargo)

Paradox

- In APC-based OA publishing the author has become the client
 - Publishers cater to this new client by providing optimized services and faster turn-arounds
 - Efficiency should be welcome but is eyed with much suspicion

PROBLEM: How to tell the difference

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Predatory Publishing

Evolving damage

Early concerns

- Research lost in bogus journals
- Work lost to researchers
- Loss of trust in research and science

Current concerns

- Bogus publishers continue scams with increasing sophistication
- Sustainability fears as reputable publishers pursue
 - a steady price-hike of APCs
 - increased output
 - both

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Predatory Publishing

The development of damage

Conclusions

The APC business model is used successfully by a minority of fully open access journals, and is more common in particular subject areas, particularly science and medicine. The fact that half the APC charging journals listed in DOAJ in 2011 are no longer listed in DOAJ in 2021 demonstrates that a journal's APC model and/or inclusion in DOAJ are not indicators of stability. Journals from the 2011 dataset that are still publishing showed price increases well beyond inflation rates, suggesting that an APC market could replicate the inelastic market long observed with subscription journals. Impact factor, measured by relative JCR or Scopus ranking, correlates with higher APCs. While the per-journal global average APC has increased at less than the rate of inflation, the per-article global average APC has increased at a rate far beyond inflation, and price band analysis indicates an overall concerning trend of price increases. Meanwhile, more OA journals and articles are published by universities (as distinct from university presses) than any sector, and this sector is associated with a greater tendency not to charge APCs, and when APCs are charged, to charge much lower fees than other sectors. This is a model worthy of further exploration.

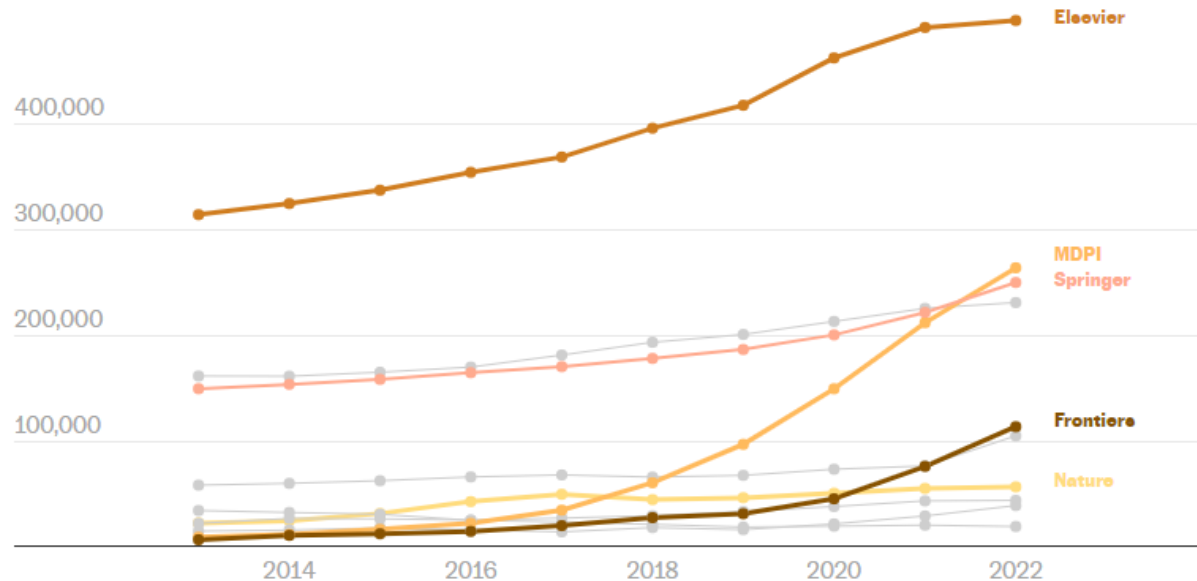
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Predatory Publishing

The development of damage

In 2022, major publishers published 1.6 million articles, more than twice as many as nine years earlier

Annual articles published by each publisher



Part 3:

Being pulled in all directions
The current situation

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Current discussions

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Quo Vadis Open Science?

Various interest groups

- Researchers
- Publishers
- HEIs
- Funders
- Governments



conflicting goals

What is at stake?

„People with influence have to sit down and have an uncomfortable conversation, to decide the future of scientific publications, because, if this continues, we may lose the most important thing about science, which is scientific rigor. If you lose that, you lose everything.” ([Pablo Gómez Barreiro](#))

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Current discussions

The case of MDPI

This year, its flagship journals, *The International Journal of Molecular Sciences* and *Sustainability*, will, respectively, host 3,514 and 3,512 special issues with a closing date in 2023, equivalent to more than nine special issues a day. In addition to concerns about how peer review can be conducted effectively at this scale, questions have been raised about the relevance of some special issues to the journal's main theme: one *Sustainability* special issue on “gender issues in sport and leisure,” which closed last year, included papers on doping in sport and how anxiety levels in female Chinese Ph.D. students were affected by “funny running.”

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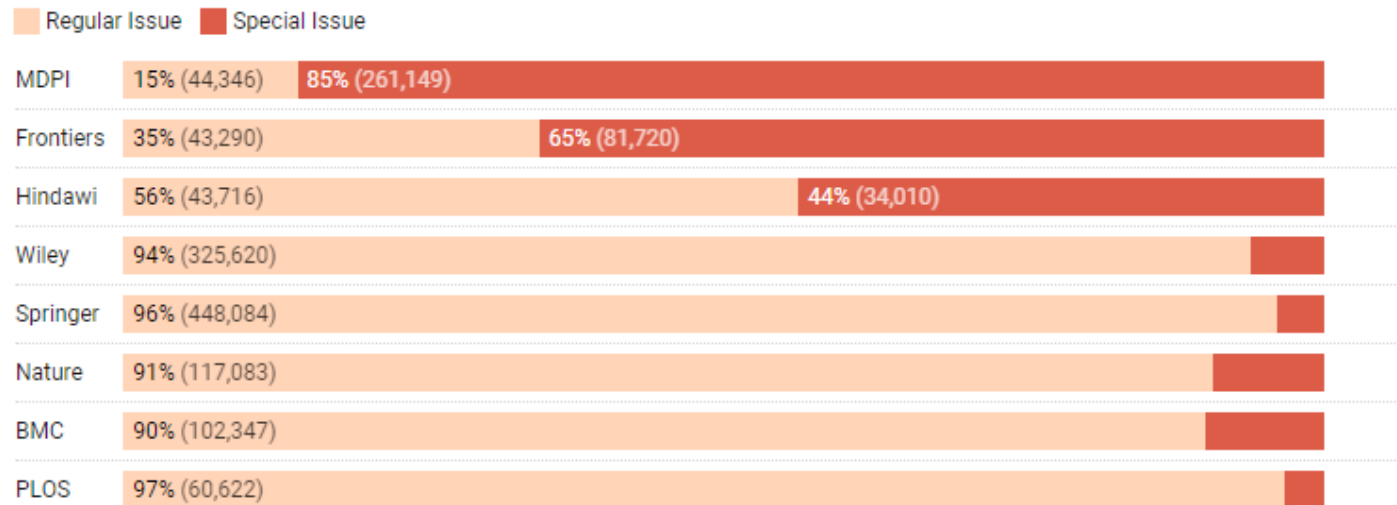
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Current discussions

The case of MDPI

Some publishers publish more special issues than regular issues

Data 2016-2022



Source: 'The strain on scientific publishing,' by Mark Hanson, Pablo Gómez Barreiro, Paolo Crosetto and Dan Brockington

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Current discussions

The case of MDPI


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BTW Mir geht das #MDPI Bashing wirklich auf die Nerven. Klar gibt es dort sehr zügige Verfahren mit Publikationsdruck für Revenue, aber das ist doch bei den #STM Verlagen nicht anders. Und gerade der #Nature Brand wirft eine Zeitschrift nach der anderen auf den Markt, die sofort mit „renommiert“ attribuiert werden.  laborjournal.de/rubric/hinterg...

[Translate](#)



www.laborjournal.de

Laborjournal online: Hintergrund - Der MDPI...

Die unorthodoxen Methoden des schweizerischen Verlagshau...

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[Müller, 2022](#)

How to solve the deeper issue?

"The key to our collective survival is our collective knowledge and our willingness to collaborate in good faith. To unlock and utilise the great and growing pool of knowledge, we need to reimagine higher education as an open commons.

Scholars are not cogs in a capitalist knowledge factory. We need stewards of the public knowledge commons."

([Czerniewicz et al](#), 2023)

Part 4:

Where does that leave researchers?
Strategies, resources and alternatives

Where does that leave researchers?

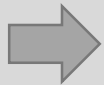
With hard decisions!

Pro APC-based publishing

- Fast publication
- Possible access to funding
- Uncomplicated submission and review process

Cons

- Concerns about quality
- Questions of affordability and equity
- Concern about reputation and unwanted effects on career



Make sure to be informed **BEFORE** you submit your manuscript

How to recognize a good journal

Some pointers

- **Context:** Is this a new publisher, form („Special Issues“), journal?
- **Appearance:** Professional site?
- **Quality control:** editorial board, authors, peer-review, editing, layout of the journal
- **Business model:** Is it credible?
- **Reputation:** Is the journal known? Where is it indexed? What do colleagues think?

Where to find information

- White lists like [DOAJ](#)
- [SherpaRomeo](#)
- [OS-Team](#)

At Uni Bern:

- [OA-Finder](#)
- [B!SON](#)

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Open Access and Open Data resources at Uni Library Bern

OPEN ACCESS



[OA](#)

Here you find an overview of the subject area Open Access.

BORIS



[BORIS Publications](#)

Here you find information about the institutional repository of the University of Bern.

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Thank you for your attention

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