

MUNI

Masaryk University's attitude towards the publisher MDPI

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The publishing habits of many fields have recently undergone a significant transformation in favour of considerable disciplinary diversity, an increase in scientific literature in general, and the use of new digital technologies. The trend towards open science in the broader sense is a common and desirable phenomenon in scientific publishing today. However, the positive effects of open science and the traditional model of credible peer reviews can be disrupted by publishing practices parasitic on the system of scientific publishing (so-called predatory journals and publishers). These practices, as well as other phenomena such as the overuse of metrics, lead to a relativisation of the reliability and importance of the traditional publishing model, and subsequently to the development of new models (e.g. post-publication peer review) that seek to diminish the importance of the causes of this reduced credibility.

Masaryk University (MU) takes the principled attitude that the quality of scientific work cannot be evaluated only through the prism of the external features of a journal or other publication channel, and at the same time respects that academic activity needs a high degree of freedom and diversity in order to allow desirable innovation, the application of individual talents, and interdisciplinary cooperation. In accordance with the international document 'The Agreement on Reforming Research Assessment' and participation in the Coalition for Advancing Research Assessment (CoARA), MU has adopted assessment principles based on the meaning, relevance, and quality of the scientific work itself, not only on external signs (represented by e.g. metrics). Nonetheless, Masaryk University simultaneously rejects the undesirable phenomenon among its employees and students of publishing in so-called 'predatory' journals, according to the principles anchored in the document 'MU's Attitude towards So-Called Predatory Publishers and Scholarly Journals', dated 7 January 2016, and in the wording of its future updates.

The publisher MDPI is perceived ambiguously by the global academic community. Some journals of this publisher are indexed by the respected world bibliographic databases of Web of Science and Scopus, which signals that these journals are able to meet the quality requirements within the evaluation process necessary for their entry into the given database. This usually guarantees that the journal concerned does not meet the characteristics of predatory publishing in the traditional sense, as represented by formal criteria (see e.g. the Think. Check. Submit. service). For a part of the professional community, journals published by this publisher are nevertheless an unacceptable publication channel due to individual experiences and doubts about the quality of peer review, field relevance, aggressive marketing policy, and the pronounced increase in the number of published journals (especially so-called 'special issues') and the like. In the academic community, some of these phenomena are considered new forms of so-called 'predatory practices'.

The debate over MDPI has reached a point where doubts cannot be considered marginal. Despite the above-mentioned principled attitude of MU, in the case of systematic publication in the journals of this publishing house, a risk of damage to one's reputation and negative consequences for individual careers within the global community, and in the various external evaluations of research results over which MU no longer has any influence, cannot be ruled out. Therefore, on the basis of a decision of the Rector's Board dated 7 February 2023, MU is issuing the following recommendations to its academic community in accordance with the above-mentioned principles for the assessment of research and publishing activities:

MU employees and students should carefully consider whether to publish in MDPI journals. Although certain questionable elements of editorial and publications board practices cannot be ascribed to the publishing house as a whole, the number of journals that the academic community perceives as unreliable points to a systemic problem of journal quality management within this publishing house. It is also recommended to:

- carefully consider whether to participate in the publications boards of MDPI journals, especially in so-called special issues whose publication may not be managed by the journal itself and whose level of review quality may thus be further reduced (however, this practice generally varies from publisher to publisher).
- if possible, preferentially choose journals that do not raise doubts about the relevance and quality of their editorial activity and that enjoy the respect of the global community (e.g. journals of professional societies).
- view this issue both from the position of the evaluated (author) and from the position of the evaluator (review, evaluation, committee).