

Case study

Predatory publishing practices – the dark side of open science?

SOURCE: Meriste, H. et al. (2016). Promoting integrity as an integral dimension of excellence in research. URL: <https://printeger.eu/wp-content/uploads/2016/10/D2.3.pdf>

"In 2015, a major debate on publishing and research evaluation surfaced in the Czech academy. It was triggered by controversy over a very productive junior researcher at the Faculty of Social Sciences of Charles University. At first sight, he seems a paradigmatic case of a successful scholar with a long list of international publications, collaborations and co-authorships - exactly what the current research policy in the Czech Republic holds as a normative ideal. However, on second sight and when some of his colleagues started to closely scrutinize his production, the case turned out to be something different: an attempt to game the current research assessment system on various levels - or rather, to take the imperative of the system to the extreme by some perfectly legitimate and some less legitimate ways. [..]

Having gained his PhD in 2007, the academic in question has claimed to have (co)authored or (co)edited seventeen 'scientific monographs' between 2011- 2013 and more than eighty journal articles between 2006-2015. Apart from the extreme productivity, four aspects of his CV are noteworthy. Firstly, the author also acts as an editor in chief, editorial board member, and even publisher of some of the 'European' or 'International' journals listed on his CV. All these journals are English language and target an international audience, have an international review board and international pool of authors. Secondly, even if in SCOPUS, some of the journals on his publication list were also listed in Jeffrey Beall's database of predatory journals. Thirdly, some of the co-authors on these articles in predatory journals were colleagues from the faculty - including the current head of the department. And, finally, as the author later confirmed, one of his co-authors was discovered to be a fictional character supposedly affiliated with prestigious Western European universities (first the University of Strasbourg and later the University of Cambridge).

While some of the academic's actions were rather extreme, they stayed in line with the current imperative of internationalization. The researcher tried to gain 'Western' recognition and certification (listing on the WoS and Scopus databases) for his publishing activities as an author, editor, editorial board member, and publisher based in the East. Interestingly, he not only strove to gain a position in the existing international playing field (which is what the research policy framework in fact tries to encourage) but also, as a skilful academic entrepreneur, to rework and reorder the field at one go by creating new journals and forging new East-West alliances (even if at times with fictitious co-authors). He also specifically offered his teaching and publication 'services' to researchers from Russia and Eastern Europe in relation to whom he positioned his activities as international. Apparently, he aimed at the enactment of a different international than the one of the current global science, in which the international in fact equals the West."

Steps of case analysis (the Four Quadrant Method)

Step 1. Initial perception – **20 minutes.** Please, discuss the following questions in your group:

- *What are the ethical issues at stake in this case?*
- *Who are the stakeholders?*
- *How should stakeholders react to this case?*
- *What should/can stakeholders do to prevent such cases?*

Step 2. The Four Quadrant Analysis – **20 minutes.** Please, discuss in your group and fill in the following table.

<p>I. Relevant Facts: What are the most relevant facts concerning the situation?</p>	<p>II. Uncertainties: Which features of the situation are uncertain, lacking in clarity, or controversial?</p>
<p>III. Courses of Action: What are the practically available options for providing a solution to the case (how to react to the case and how to prevent such cases in the future)?</p>	<p>IV. Contextual Features: What legal, financial and institutional policies and regulations apply to the case?</p>