

Local journals in Scopus¹

DECEMBER 2017

Vít Macháček and Martin Srholec

Summary

- The primary purpose of scientific journals is the critical reflection and sharing of research results. Nonetheless, articles in these journals have become an instrument for the evaluation of science, on the basis of which funding or career promotion decisions are often made. This adds other incentives to publish beyond the desire to share new knowledge. Evaluation methodology, popularly known as the "coffee grinder", has significantly boosted these secondary incentives. It is a question whether the process of scientific publishing pursues other goals than the original, praiseworthy intention to sharing of new valuable knowledge.
- We focus on journals indexed by the Scopus citation database. If a journal meets the criteria for indexing, it becomes branded to be scientific, which is then blindly used in evaluation. However, not all that glitters is gold. There exist vast differences among indexed journals in the way they contribute to the development of scientific knowledge. Indexing alone, thus, sometimes means no more than the journal has a publicly available description of the peer review process, English language abstracts and titles and full content available online. In addition to top journals, in which seminal scientific work is published, many marginal to dubious titles are also indexed.
- In this study, we analyse journals on the basis of the affiliation of their contributing authors. We track how many articles originate from authors based in the same country, and even in the same institution, which publishes the journal. We also take into account the concentration of authors from just a handful of countries and institutions. We are not concerned, thus, with the citation impact of journals, as is typical in studies of this type, but instead we offer a less traditional look at who publishes in them. This is an issue worth

¹ This study received support from the research programme Strategy AV21 of the Czech Academy of Sciences. Preliminary results of this study were presented at the Scopus Content Selection and Advisory Board meeting in Prague on November 3rd, 2017. We would like to thank Štěpán Jurajda, Daniel Münich, Michael Šebek and participants at the aforementioned meeting for valuable comments and suggestions. Any inaccuracies, omissions, errors and opinions are however down to the authors.

exploring, because many local journals have learned how to artificially increase their citation indexes.

- The study provides answers to these questions in particular. What are the characteristics of Czech and Slovak journals indexed in Scopus? Which journals appear to be only local and which are, in contrast, international? How many predominantly local journals are published in comparable countries? Are there also journals which publish a large share of articles that originate from the home institution of their publisher? How does this vary by type of publisher and field of research? Who publishes research articles in these journals and why? Why do certain academics devote so much time to this type of publishing? What does this mean for research evaluation? What should be done about it in the future?
- The results show that there are several times more locally oriented journals published in the Czech Republic and Slovakia, as well as in the other former Eastern Bloc EU countries, than in comparable advanced countries. In the Czech Republic around one fifth of all indexed results are concentrated in Czech journals with a high percentage of articles from domestic authors. In this respect, the Czech Republic most resembles Lithuania or Bulgaria and lags markedly behind even Southern European countries like Portugal or Greece. Roughly half the authors contributing to Czech journals are based in the Czech Republic, and another tenth in Slovakia. In contrast, the vast majority of articles which come out in journals published in comparable advanced countries are written by foreigners. The publishing of national, or at best regional, indexed journals appears to be an Eastern European phenomenon.
- Some of the journals published in the Czech Republic or Slovakia are just as good as respected international journals, however, a clear majority of them have only provincial status. And some of them resemble a kind of academic "samizdat", publishing under its own auspice what cannot be accepted elsewhere. Predominantly local journals are most often published by universities, scientific associations and private publishing companies. In contrast, relatively few of them are published under the umbrella of the academy of science of either country. Local journals are spread across many scientific fields. They can be found not only in the social sciences, but also in natural sciences, and especially in the medical sciences. Journals in the humanities and artistic fields require a specific approach, as by definition they are focused on local issues and for them, thus, the local focus is natural.
- We discuss the presented results with respect to the entry and evaluation criteria of journals and most importantly their enforcement for indexation in the Scopus citation database. We ask to what extent the publishing of locally oriented journals is beneficial for the Czech science and what it offers to Czech academics, who regularly contribute to them. We also consider how publishing in local journals is related to the evaluation and financing of research. We conclude with a number of recommendations specifically for the field of evaluation, which have the potential to bring the Czech research system closer to that of advanced countries.