

Editorial

Editing Croatian scholarly journals: achievements and challenges

Journals published from small and emerging professional communities face difficulties, which often negatively affect the research performance and hinder the scientific progress at a national level. There are a few good examples of how changes in the education system and research management with limited financial resources translate into advanced research and better visibility of locally produced knowledge. The Croatian experience, in its benefits to authors, researchers, journal editors, and educators over the past two decades, is exemplary. It is one reason Croatia is hosting this year's conference of the European Association of Science Editors (EASE) – a major scientific and educational event for science editors – which will gather representatives from most European and other countries. The theme of the conference is the complexity of editing, and some of its presentations will reflect on the Croatian experience. For our part, we will provide space for items on editorial policies and peer review in Croatian journals, digital archiving in the Hrčak platform, and editing national journals in this and forthcoming issues of *European Science Editing*.

Croatia has well established traditions of publishing, particularly in the natural sciences and biomedicine. Its oldest periodicals, *Liječnički Vjesnik* and *Periodicum Biologorum*, were launched in 1877 and 1886, respectively.¹ This is perhaps one of the reasons why so many Croatian journals are currently listed in the SCImago Journal & Country Rank database (131) and have outstanding values of the impact indicators, with the *Croatian Medical Journal* being the flagship European periodical, based on repetitive and comprehensive bibliometric and bibliographic evaluations.² Remarkably, the *Croatian Medical Journal* remains one of the few general medical journals covered by Thomson Reuters Current Contents Connect® database.

To better understand what Croatia has gained within a short period of transforming a small socialist society into a modern European nation (1991-2013), we should refer to the outstanding profile of the country in the Web of Science® database. There are currently 54 Croatian journals tracked by this highly selective hub of 'elite' periodicals.³ For a non-Anglophone country with a population of 4.28 million, this is a great achievement. Two of the indexed journals have relatively high two-year impact factors: *Biochemia Medica* – 1.873 and *Croatian Medical Journal* – 1.25 (Thomson Reuters Journal Citation Report® science edition 2013). And both journals are archived in PubMed Central.

A turning point for improving the visibility of Croatian journals was the launching of the Hrčak digital platform in 2005, which has expanded its archive from the initial three to the current 356 periodicals.⁴ More than half of the archived journals in the field of science, technology and medicine are published in English only, and the majority of journals (76%) have international editorial boards.⁴ Despite all these achievements, the transparency of peer review remains a challenge.³ The national journal editors can improve

transparency and make their journals more attractive for the global scientific community by publicizing the employed models and quantitative indicators of the peer review.

Croatia, as many other emerging scientific powers, faces the challenges of plagiarism and other forms of misconduct in research papers. An analysis of 754 items, submitted to the *Croatian Medical Journal* in 2009 and 2010, revealed that 85 (11%) of these submissions, mostly from China, Croatia and Turkey, contained plagiarized text.⁵ The latter can, at least partly, be explained by the difficulties of writing in English, which make the authors recycle chunks of texts from published sources. The temptation to misappropriate writings can be overcome by learning lessons from others' mistakes and by referring to proper writing and editing services. Plagiarism, along with duplicate publication, is the main reason for retractions of Croatian papers. Although the number of the retractions is not high (7 in PubMed), it may not represent all, requiring more efforts of editors and reviewers at pre- and post-publication review to detect the misconduct and 'clean' the literature of unethical papers. Importantly, of the seven retractions in PubMed, three were issued by the *Croatian Medical Journal* and one by the *Archives of Industrial Hygiene and Toxicology*, the top-tier national periodicals with established policies of ethical publishing.

Obviously, these and many other challenges faced by Croatian editors are not unique, and they can be overcome by discussing them with colleagues from EASE and other learned associations at educational meetings, which are focused on selected topics, such as plagiarism, pre- and post-publication review, and open access.

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