

## Editorial ethics: a stakeholder perspective on the ethical challenges faced by the powerful gatekeepers in academic journals

This track at the EBEN – research conference 2022 in St. Petersburg aims to explore, challenge and problematize ethical challenges as well as possible solutions relating to editors as gatekeepers who hold their positions within an asymmetrical power structure. We are particularly interested in discussing and learning from editors who decide the fate of work submitted to their journals – as a means to achieve transparency and enhanced understanding of previously mentioned challenges. We welcome papers that are addressing the above, and consider the following questions (but not meant as an exhaustive list) at the core of establishing a future research agenda:

1. The public: The legitimacy of science in the context of public life is challenged, partly due to scandals of scientific fraud and the deconstruction of scientists as authorities in a post-modern world. How do editors create a precise control-system in order to enhance high scientific quality, avoid publishing unethical material and protect the public trust of scientists?

2. It is a responsibility for institutions to contribute to develop the values and democratic processes of society: How do editors use their and the journal's role as gatekeepers to develop and protect the fundamental democratic values of society as truth and well-founded arguments?

3. The publishers: International journals are important vehicles in the intensified commercial system of ownership. Publishers have an economic agenda influencing on the editors priorities. Does this imply that editors are forced into dilemmas between publishing according to an agenda of a large production and using enough time to develop the quality of a more limited number of articles? How do they solve such a dilemma – through some sort of a compromise?

4. Do the publishers policy of publishing steer the editors in directions that make it difficult to act according to the ideal of academic freedom? Does this imply that it is impossible or difficult for editors to prioritize topics important for society?

5. The reviewers: Do editors take sufficient precautions when it comes to the quality of the comments of the reviewers? Do the editors read the articles in order to be able to evaluate if the comments are of sufficient quality or contain mistakes? Alternatively, do they rely blindly on the reviewers following their comments categorically risking that mistakes pass by without noticing? Do the editors feel that shortage of time is a challenge in fulfilling the duties of their role as controllers?

6. Whistleblowing: Is it necessary to implement a system of whistleblowing in the structure of international journals, as a parallel to this type of democratization of the private and public sector? Would international publishers and editors benefit if their authors/contributors challenged and helped them through a kind action-research-process to develop a responsible institute of whistleblowing? Is it reasonable to assume that this would heighten the scientific quality of the journal in the long run?

7. The editors: The role as an editor of a journal implies some duties; these duties could be formulated in text or as an oral tradition of values that the editor experiences as obliged to follow and fulfill. The duties may come from different authorities, the society, an institution or the editor as an individual. As macro, meso and micro duties, they may overlap or come into conflict with each other. What the editor as an individual experience as the most important duty might differ from one journal to the other.

8. What is the most sensitive and undiscussed problems of being an editor? Which relations are involved; to the authors and reviewers, or to the publishers and owners? What type of power is in play, what type of unspoken and/or articulated ethical norms are broken?

9. Do the editors take into consideration that they ought to aim at a reasonable gender distribution between male and female authors and reviewers?

10. Do the editors discuss important decisions with their colleagues in the journal? Alternatively, do they take such decisions more or less on their own? If they have been acting for a long time in the role as editors, what do they consider as their main mistakes and main achievements? Have the system of the journal created possibilities to learn to avoid doing such mistakes?

11. Do editors feel that important conflicts have framed the journal during the last decade? If, so what type of conflict is this? Who are the winners and who the losers? Are the winners some specific authors as the weakest part in the system or the publishers as the strongest part?

12. Academics in charge of the ranking: Some raise the issue if academics involved in various journal-rankings have too much impact on the inclusion/exclusion of particular journals. Journals may try to influence on the choices of these academics, in order to receive the status of ranking. A journal may also be allowed to be included on a list even if the articles in the journal do not thematically fit with the list. In addition, rankings of journals may also have a deciding factor on what type of knowledge is being produced - and not produced - and subsequently submitted/accepted in journals. Few peoples are involved in creating such rankings – the concentration of power tends to be a monopoly.

Are there any risks that some journals might receive or give preferential treatment and/or that the scholarly community is not sufficiently equipped with detecting if such behaviour exist? Are cross-cultural challenges part of this picture? If journals from countries outside the western world want to participate on ranking lists the criteria of which is chosen by a few western academics, does this imply a risk for preferential treatment in order to be part of “the establishment?” Could this be linked to the recent discussion of the center/periphery exclusion-mechanism of post-colonialism?

The case puts several problems on the agenda: The lack of integrity of the editors, the question of an open discussions about the legitimacy of the criteria for deciding the list, the need of a responsible institute of whistleblowing if spirals of silence around severe violations of such norms occur, if personal scientific merits (as for example publishing) implies the unethical willingness to cheat and violate scientific and ethical norms.

10. Minorities: The modern history of Academia is sometimes understood as a system forced by the discussions of public life to integrate minorities that once was excluded from the participation in the privileges of scientific production. The re-production of the system of editors in academic journals may be interpreted considering this traditional mechanism. Is there a kind of hegemonic structure reproduced in this part of Academia, favoring groups that used to be favored?