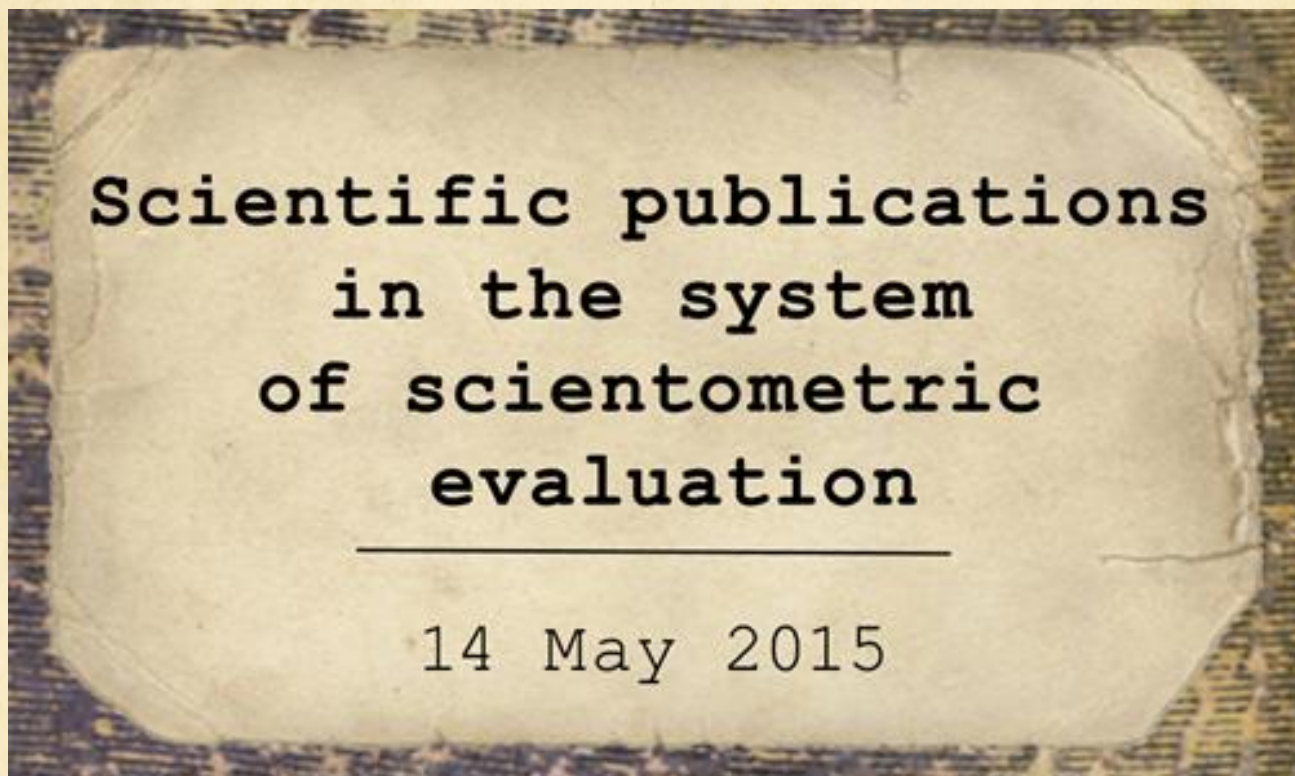




Central and Eastern European Online Library



Dear Ladies and Gentlemen,

by accepting the invitation to attend to this colloquium and to speak about the „Scientometric Assessment System“ I risk being considered by you in latest 30 minutes as being a schizophrenic personality. I represent the „Central and Eastern European Online Library“, which is definitely and only a distributor, neither a scholarly editor nor an Academic publishing house. We are a service-provider to scholarly publishers and editors. We literally consider our role as the role of a servant. Wherever we fulfil the tasks assigned to this role yet in a deficient way, then it is due to our limited resources. It should never be regarded as the result of incongruous ambitions or any other misinterpretation of our role as a service provider. We cooperate with nearly 600 publishing houses and editorial institutes from that part of Europe stretching from Szczecin to Varna at the Black Sea and from Vilnius to Tirana. We always tried to carefully monitor the needs and requirements of these publishers and editors, and we can proudly claim to have been, since 2000, for many of them and for their published products the first gateway to find reception in the rest of the world.

The needs and requirements, however, develop in an endless process and, as it has always been in the last 300 centuries of European civilisation, whether you are able to keep pace with this development depends from your geographical location: are you operating in the very centre where those needs usually are invented or emerge, or rather in the periphery, or on one of the countless meridian circles in between? When counting those circles in terms of grades of inclusion or exclusion we luckily find that in the meantime Warsaw is much closer to Berlin, Paris or London than Tirana and Skopje might be to Warsaw today – at least in the field of scientific publishing. This is a success-story for Poland and, as likewise in many other fields of social, economic and political development, it remains an open question, why we don't find stories of only approximate success in so many other places, regions and states. Not to speak about the implementation of scientometric tools or about inclusion of national scientific communities into the global digestive system of evaluating millions and millions of scholarly texts, of calculating impact-factors of individuals, journals and research institutes.

Let me return to my schizophrenic deviation: minimum twice per week I receive an author's email complaining about the fact that his or her name is listed in our C.E.E.O.L. repository on the wrong place in the hierarchy of two, three or four authors of a journal article. This is jeopardizing the correctness of their official publication lists, when they do any application in the academic system. My reaction usually is two-folded: I send them an answer, on the one hand promising improvement to come in very near future, and on the other hand I try to communicate my deep feeling of scepticism towards the usefulness of this kind of evaluations and rankings.

Skeptical Approach

Skepticism, traditionally, is a branch of philosophy. Scientometrics, as of late, is a phenomenon in the context of Big Data. When scientometrics meets philosophy, then scepticism is the only appropriate result. Why is it like that?

Scientometrics is a management tool, since it is about the optimal allocation of resources. Its very target is to withdraw the decision on such allocation of resources from the realm of human arbitrariness and to subject it to the rule of objective, empirical criteria. By doing so scientometrics is promising thorough optimization for the resource-allocation in the global academic sector.

It is always the promise of optimization that necessarily provokes skepticism from the philosophical side. How many “brave new worlds” have we been promised during the last centuries, all of them endowed with the attributes of being a more or less perfect new world. The other way round: How many social, political, economic disasters of the last 150 years have initially been legitimated by a promise of optimisation?

In our collective memories we remind two centuries of progress and optimism, two centuries of an overwhelming and global trust into our human capacities to develop the steam engine, the Diesel-engine, the telegraph, the automobile and thousands of other technical achievements and modern comforts. It seemed to be quite a natural consequence in the realm of progress to develop as well projects of finally optimizing the human being itself. The elder generation among you may still remind Stalin's famous wording about the "writers as engineers of the human soul", which later became the title of a famous novel of Czech writer Josef Škvorecký.

We have learned that "engineering" can produce lots of comforts when dealing with our environmental objects, and we have paid an incredible prize to learn, that "engineering" ends-up in morbid disasters when dealing with our own existence as human beings.

Since we know that all projects of optimizing human beings will fail and always create catastrophes, a new concept of global improvement has shown-up: if we cannot overcome human weakness then perfectness must be achieved by utmost exclusion of the human factor from processes of decision-making. This is what nowadays we are promised in projects based on Big Data and on the capacities of computers which go so far beyond our own skills and powers. Trust is not given any longer to human calculation, thought and engineering; now we trust in the combination of statistic algorithms and a maximum of empiric data processed by these calculations.

What we are promised today by scientometrics is a brave new world of science to be achieved through infallible decisions on the factor allocation within this world of science. On the first glance only it seems those factors are mainly funds, but in fact the factors are the human actors in the world of science.

The text inviting to this venue speaks about "the scientist and scientific organisation appraisal system". Appraising as such is mainly out-sourced to algorithms. If, for a human being, the criteria of a decision are compulsory, because they are objective, empirical, beyond any doubt reliable and perfectly mapping reality, then the decision as such, as a human act, becomes obsolete. Decision, then, is just the act of human obedience to compelling appraisal provided by statistics, processed by computer algorithms, based on a giant agglomeration of data.

I won't follow this line of questions until I arrive at a serious conclusion. I wanted to speak about scepticism only, not about pessimism. But I hope some of you agree with me and with my cautious assumption that scepticism might be our appropriate and primary attitude towards scientometric optimization.

Political Approach

Let me call my second approach a political one. It starts with the already mentioned statement that those resources to be allocated are mainly public resources (in terms of public funds being used for the appointment of scientists and for the accomplishment of their scientific research projects). The very simple and modest question I would like to ask is, whether in this case the entire "digestive system" processing those Big Data and producing the rankings in terms of impact factors, whether this system shouldn't be in public hands as well?

In other words: we observe since many years now processes of more or less monopolist harvesting and agglomeration of information triggered by the internet. We observe pretty nice initiatives emerging in the scientific world like, for instance, the Mendeley project. It appeared in our world with this attractive sex-appeal of a grass-root initiative, driven by an idealistic, non-profit-oriented stimulus – not to make the world perfect, not even significantly better, but just easier to handle. Once this project had found a critical mass of some hundred-thousand scholarly users worldwide communicating on Mendeley about their mutual research-projects, it raised the interest of the big economic players on the scene and – before somebody could say knife – it was sold out to Elsevier.

We may conclude from this deal, which happened in early 2014 and about which nobody told us the price of transaction, that there is an economic value behind such a thing as a copy of Facebook

dedicated and limited precisely and exclusively to scientific communication. We don't know the value in terms of Dollars or Euros; however, it gives me the creeps somehow to learn that the biggest publisher and distributor of scientific content on the world now has access to the communication among scientists and – at the same time – is preparing a highly sophisticated tool in the sector of scientometrics.

When speaking about scientometrics we speak about power. Speaking about power should be a political matter. The more if this is a power of exclusion and inclusion. And the more again, if we speak about this topic in a region where we are well experienced with exclusion. I can hardly imagine any private stake-holder disposing of this power AND at the same time being interested in making use of it to overcome the inclusion-gap between centre and periphery. And we speak here about centres and peripheries on the global scale!

There is, of course, an alternative strategy to overcome this gap. In the analogue world it is called, as the perspective may be, "attraction of the talented" or simply "migration" or otherwise "brain-drain". There is, of course, a virtual version of brain-drain as well: it becomes true, if the great talents migrate with their texts from their home- or periphery publishers to the publishers in the centre who promise them a faster and a higher impact factor.

Again I do not come to a conclusion with this line of my thoughts and questions. I only hope some of you will agree with my thesis that it is at least worth asking those questions.

Legal Approach

There is a third approach, I name it the legal one. Although it seems as if scientometrics and Open Access are in no way connected with each other, there is – as far as I can see – a basic link between both phenomena. But let me start by quoting the director of Silesia University Press from Katowice, Prof. Paweł Jędrzejko, from a letter he recently sent to numerous colleagues in other university presses. And if you allow I would like to quote him a bit at length:

"Wolters Kluwer, de Gruyter, EBSCO, Elsevier... all scholars recognize these world-renowned brands. However, as it seems, not all scholars realize that the business model adopted by these institutions involves serious costs which the author, editor – or, as it is the case with public universities – the institution needs to pay to have a publication placed in databases and thus made available to the readers, and to have it indexed and registered in bibliometric services. Although some western universities can afford to bear such costs, in the case of academic institutions from Central and Eastern Europe placing works in databases administered by big commercial companies absorbs most of the budget earmarked annually for academic publications.

Deans, Directors of Institutes and Departments, and Faculty Committees for Academic Publishing face difficult choices: they can only afford to place some texts in the high-rated journals, there is not enough money to pay for the placement of all of them in high-visibility services. And yet, the financing of particular academic institutions depends on parametrization results, which are, in turn, the function of an algorithm where both the citation index and impact factor play a central role. Furthermore: correctly or not, the IF and the Hirsch index often serve as indicators of the individual achievement of a particular scholar and constitute a determining parameter in many tenure-related or professorial procedures. And all of the above is clear and unproblematic as long as academic institutions are financed at a different level than is the case with Central European universities: in Germany, universities receive about 2% GDP, in Scandinavia - about 3%. In Poland... 0,29% GDP."

I lived in Belgrade from 2009 to 2012. After those three years I personally know at least seven young scholars who, all of them, since long time have finalized their doctoral thesis but lack of money to pay for the final examination. Who the hell speaks about any perspective to afford paying the publication? No need to repeat what I just have said about in- and exclusion.

But what is the link between Open Access and the business-model described by the director of SUP? It almost seems too simple to come into the mind of serious people, but: any economic transaction is based on mutual interested. It is so basic and simple that, when asking the online dictionary for the English translation of the German word "Interessent" (the interested person) you find as result the "prospective buyer". As long as we had a publishing sector where the reader was considered the main interested person, it wasn't but logical to ask him for a payment when buying a book or a journal.

Open Access, from the above mentioned publishers' point of view appeared all of a sudden as the stiff-necked refusal of readers to pay for what they want to read. It took some time for the publishers to realize the dark clouds that appeared on the business-horizon, and when finally they realized, it already began to rain. Following our basic economical rule there was no other exit strategy from the problem than to identify a different group of people who, besides the readers, might have such an interest in publishing – an interest being economically relevant and strong enough to make them pay for. This interest was created on the authors' side by linking publishing of their texts with scientometrics and impact factors and so with career opportunities.

Whether this was just a coincidence or whether there is more behind than hazard - for a third time I need to leave you with unanswered questions.

So what, after so much of scepticism, is finally the problem with my schizophrenia?

The letter of Paweł Jędrzejko came into my hand because we together, Silesia University Press and the Central and Eastern European Online Library, have initiated a process which hopefully, in two weeks, will result in the presentation of a project proposal to the European Commission. And it will be a central concern in this project-idea that we and all those 500 plus X institutions publishing scholarly texts and documents in the region described above – that we need some public support in order to finally overcome the factors and sources of exclusion.

I will always stay with my scepticism facing the so-called revolutions in scientific publishing and the promises of optimization. But, as a manager of the Central and Eastern European Online Library I can and will never expect our publishers and their authors to pay the price for my personal sceptical aberrations. So we accept the challenge to implement all technical facilities needed to foster the integration of all publications and their authors into the international bibliometric and scientometric procedures. This will be the very first time that C.E.E.O.L. applies for support from public funds. We are going to do it together with other University Press publishers hopefully from Hungary, from Romania, from Lithuania and the Czech Republic. Whatever we will achieve in a project run by this small group of publishing houses and one distributor will be open and will be shared on demand with any publisher running a scholarly / scientific program in the region.

We have agreed in a preparatory meeting that C.E.E.O.L. as a brand name and with its original team will remain in the realm of Social Sciences and Humanities, but the future database we have in mind will allow us to gather and to distribute content from all areas of scholarly and academic work. The back-end content management will remain in one large repository of documents and metadata, but the front-end, the web-site can be cloned into various subject-specific portals, all of them built on the same database and technology.

Currently from Poland alone we have 23.000 authors in our database, and being in the database means: each of them is there with at least one single document. We will count on the authors' assistance. They will get their own log-in parameters will be allowed to administrate and to update person-related data like for instance the institutional affiliation. And we will implement all the essential facilities enabling the web-crawlers of the scientometric digestive system to harvest all that information and data they are so hungry for.

Strange enough is the fact that nearly simultaneously with applying for a project in the European Union's Horizon 2020 Programme we will already launch a new C.E.E.O.L. which is currently in the phase of beta-testing. It will not yet bring full satisfaction as far as scientometrics is concerned. It will

be, however, a significant step forward, because it will be hosted in the cloud, all publishers can work directly in the database when administrating their content, their metadata and their authors.

We strongly try to decentralize. The new C.E.E.O.L. has been re-programmed from zero, albeit not from tabula rasa, because we have gathered and invested a lot of experience. All technical work has been done in Bulgaria and we'll keep this team under constant service contract in future. It allows us a much higher flexibility in reacting to new technical challenges. We will look for skilful and responsible persons to be engaged into C.E.E.O.L. as national or regional coordinators for Poland, Romania, Czech and Slovak Republic, Hungary, as we already have such coordinators for Bulgaria and Ex-Yugoslavia.

And already with this re-launch in a few weeks we will change the licensing-model for libraries. Whereas up to now a library could get access to C.E.E.O.L. only by subscribing to the entire repository, librarians in future can compile their particular portfolio of journal subscriptions for their institution. This will probably result in some disappointment for some of the journals attracting only few subscribing institutions. But the old model prevented many small libraries from subscribing to C.E.E.O.L. because the price for the full collection was just too high as compared to the expected usage. So we hope to win a significant number of those smaller institutions as future subscribers to C.E.E.O.L. content.

Last but not least news connected to the forthcoming re-launch (probably even the most important news in this context): the repository itself will extend its content portfolio as beginning of July from up-to-now only journals to eBooks as well, which again can be provided by all publishers cooperating with C.E.E.O.L.

And since I just mentioned the magic word of "pricing" let me finish with news from Leipzig, where the director of the university library couple of weeks ago publicly announced the stop of negotiations with Elsevier about renewals of subscriptions. That didn't happen for the first time; the Konstanz University had published the same decision two years before. In both cases the library budgets couldn't afford any longer to pay the prices demanded by the publisher. Konstanz at that time had published as a result of their calculations an average price of 3.200 € for an annual journal subscription with Elsevier. Leipzig didn't calculate an average but spoke about the most expensive journal they had subscribed to with a price of 21.000 € per year.

We at C.E.E.O.L. can take the annual fee paid by the largest institution from among our customers and calculate an average price based on 1.150 journals. We arrive at an average price of 4,25 € per journal per year. This price, for a long period, could be considered as a **symptom** of exclusion, because no librarian was ready to pay more for access to scientific content from our region. Today these 4.25 € must be considered rather as an **affirmation** of exclusion. This is why we won't continue to distribute Central- and South-Eastern Europe so significantly below value. We'll do it only where individual publishers ask us to do so. And Open Access, anyhow, does its own...

Wolfgang Klotz

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www.cceol.com

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