

# Questionable and Unethical Publishers: How to spot them and enable researchers to avoid being trapped

ALLEA Workshop

Ethical Aspects of Open Access: A Windy Road

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- Questionable publishers
  - What are we taking about
  - Getting the numbers right
- The Drivers
- Tools to detect questionable journals
  - Blacklists?
  - Whitelists!
  - Empowering researchers to make clever decisions

Questionable or unethical  
publishers

Questionable publishing is **not** a  
phenomenon that is specific to  
Open Access publishing!

## October 2013

NEWS

### Who's Afraid of Peer Review?

John Bohannon

Dozens of open-access journals targeted in an elaborate *Science* sting accepted a spoof research article, raising questions about peer-review practices in much of the open-access world.

## February 2014

NATURE | NEWS



### Publishers withdraw more than 120 gibberish papers

Conference proceedings removed from subscription databases after scientist reveals that they were computer-generated.

## Questionable publishers

- Predatory publishers – (Beall)

- Definition of predatory:
  - inclined or intended to **injure or exploit** others for personal gain or **profit** (Merriam-Webster)
- A predatory publisher can then be described as
  - a publisher who **intends to injure or exploit** others for personal gain or **profit**.
-

- Consider this:
- “Does **exploiting the divide between libraries** (that typically pay for subscriptions) **and scholars** (who typically use the subscriptions) in order to make **extraordinary high profits** constitute predatory conduct?”
- or this:
- “Does **continuing to raise prices at several times the rate of inflation**, even as those increases cause direct injury to libraries by robbing them of budget flexibility or even make it impossible for them to continue to provide resources – does that constitute **predatory publishing**?”



Questionable publishers – many names:

- ~~Predatory publishers – (Beall)~~
- Illegitimate publishers – no law regulating academic publishing
- Deceptive publishers
- Unethical publishers
- In DOAJ we call them:
- **Questionable publishers**

Our definition:

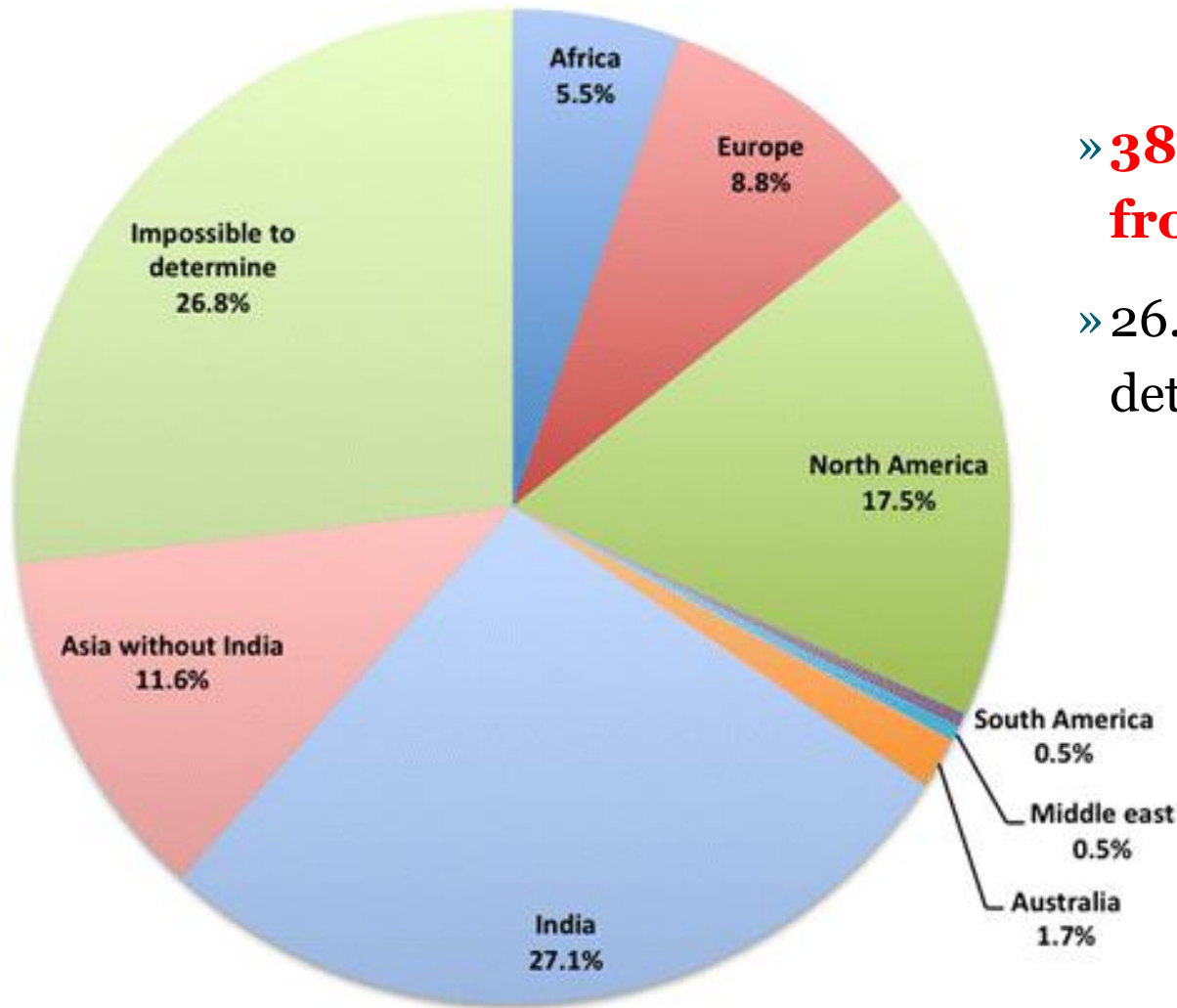
Questionable publishers is  
publishers, who are **not living up** to  
reasonable standards in terms of  
**content, services, transparency** and  
**business behavior.**

# The numbers

- Questionable publishers is a problem!!
  - But how big a problem is it??
  - Shen & Björk (2014): 8.000 journals/420.000 papers
  - Crawford (2014): 3275 (active) journals/121.000
  - But it is still a problem!!
- 
- Shen & Björk: <https://bmcmmedicine.biomedcentral.com/articles/10.1186/s12916-015-0469-2>
  - Crawford: <https://walt.lishost.org/2017/04/the-problems-with-shenbjorks-420000/>

# Main Results

## country of publishers

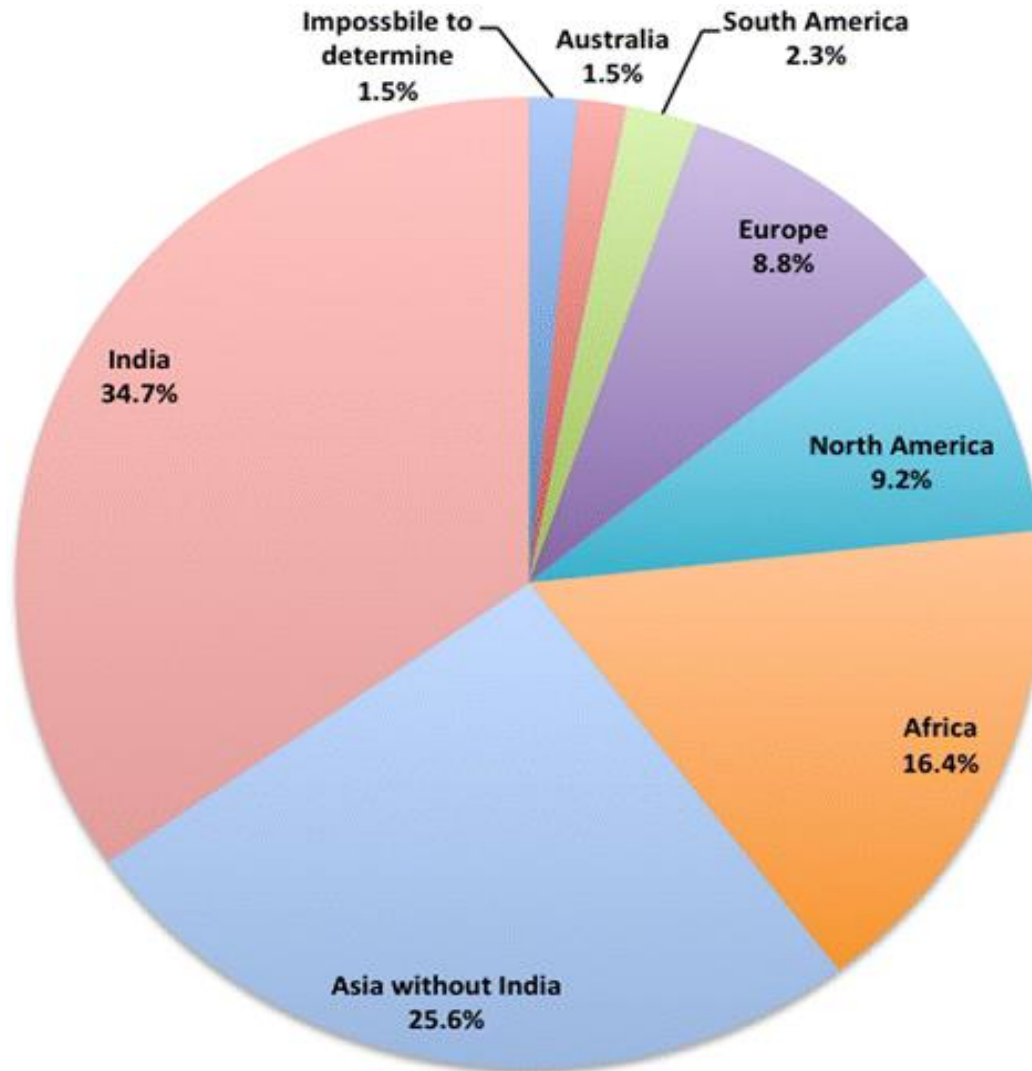


» **38.7% -Asia (27.1% from India)**

» 26.8% -Impossible to determine

from Shen & Björk)

# Main Results country of authors



» **60.3% - Asia (34.7% from India)**

» 16.4% - Africa

from Shen & Björk)

- Why are researchers publishing in questionable journals?
  - Ignorance – lack of attention to the faith of the paper
  - Aggressive marketing cheats researchers
  - Publish or Perish – get something on my C.V. – subito! – pays off!
  - Research Assessment – decision makers counting beans!
  - Exclusion

# Reducing the attraction

- Research managers/funders/decision makers:
  - Research assessment based on actual assessment of the research!!
  - OA-publishing mandates
  - Lists of accredited publishing channels!?
- Professors/PI/research managers:
  - Make **Publishing Literacy** an integral part of (training in) Research Integrity

# How to spot Questionable Publishers/Journals



# The 5 minute check

- Competent web-site?
  - Mass e-mails asking for editors and submissions?
  - In the DOAJ? – if not: worrying
  - Usage statistics?
  - Stable in the discipline?
  - Misspelled journal titles?
  - Journal launch dates – many at the same time?
  - Empty shells- no/few articles?
- 
- Check list from Gavia Library (the library loon) -<http://gavialib.com/2012/04/assessing-the-scaminess-of-a-purported-open-access-publisher/> – april 2012

# The 5 minute check

- Regularly publishing?
- Many “Edited volumes”?
- Quality of writing, copyediting and typesetting?
- Archiving arrangement?
- Editorial Board – identifiable?
- Other financial support – only relying on APCs?
- Relevant Advertising?
- Running many/expensive conferences?

# How we spot them!

- . How does DOAJ detect questionable journals?
- . Our approach is based on:
  - . the Principles of Transparency and Best Practice in Scholarly Publishing

- COPE, OASPA, WAME & DOAJ:

## **Principles of Transparency and Best Practice in Scholarly Publishing**

### **Introduction**

The Committee on Publication Ethics, the Directory of Open Access Journals, the Open Access Scholarly Publishers Association, and the World Association of Medical Editors are scholarly organizations that have seen an increase in the number of membership applications from both legitimate and non-legitimate publishers and journals. Our organizations have collaborated in an effort to identify principles of transparency and best practice that set apart legitimate journals and publishers from non-legitimate ones and to clarify that these principles form part of the criteria on which membership applications will be evaluated.

These criteria are largely derived from those developed by the Directory of Open Access Journals. Note that additional membership criteria may also be used by each of the scholarly organizations. The organizations intend to share information in order to develop lists of legitimate journals and publishers. We do not intend to develop or publish a list of publishers or journals that failed to demonstrate they met the criteria for transparency and best practice.

This is a work in progress and we welcome feedback on the general principles and the specific criteria. Background on the organizations is below.

- <https://doaj.org/bestpractice>

# The Principles

1. **Peer review process**
2. **Governing Body**
3. **Editorial team/contact**
4. **Author fees**
5. **Copyright**
6. **Identification of and dealing with allegations of research misconduct**
7. **Ownership and management**
8. **Web site.**
9. **Name of journal**
10. **Conflicts of interest**
11. **Access**
12. **Revenue sources**
13. **Advertising**
14. **Publishing schedule**
15. **Archiving**
16. **Direct marketing**

# The application form

- The new application form:
- <http://doaj.org/application/new>

## DOAJ Journal Application Form

All the information provided will help our Editorial Team with their assessment, to help them make an informed decision based on the information that you provide.

If you know a journal that should be in DOAJ, please contact the publisher and ask them to complete this form.

BEFORE YOU START, please remember that **all** the content of the journal you are applying about **must** be available **immediately** upon publication.

### Basic Journal Information

1) Journal Title \*

2) URL \*

3) Alternative Title

4) Journal ISSN (print version) \*

Only provide the print ISSN if your journal has one, otherwise leave this field blank. Write the ISSN with the hyphen "-" e.g. 1234-4321.

5) Journal ISSN (online version) \*

Write the EISSN with the hyphen "-" e.g. 1234-4321.

6) Publisher \*

### Quality and Transparency of the Editorial Process

34) What is the URL for the Editorial Board page? \*

The journal must have either an editor or an editorial board with at least 5 clearly identifiable members and affiliation information. We may ask for affiliation information and email addresses as part of our checks.

35) Please select the review process for papers \*

36) Enter the URL where this information can be found \*

This field is optional if you have selected "None" above.

37) What is the URL for the journal's Aims & Scope \*

Capture a Rectangul

# We are asking about...

- The editorial board
- The peer review process
- Archiving/preservation
- Plagiarism
- Openness
  - Licensing and copyright
  - Re-use rights
- Charges
- ... and much, much more

# Editorial “quality”

- **QUALITY AND TRANSPARENCY OF THE EDITORIAL PROCESS**
- The journal must have an editor or an editorial board, all members must be easily identified
- Specification of the review process
  - Editorial review, Peer review., Blind peer review, Double blind peer review, Open Peer Review, Other
- Statements about aims & scope clearly visible
- Instructions to authors shall be available and easily located
- Screening for plagiarism?
- Time from submission to publication



## Quality and Transparency of the Editorial Process

34) What is the URL for the Editorial Board page? \*

The journal must have either an editor or an editorial board with at least 5 clearly identifiable members including affiliation information and email addresses.

35) Please select the review process for papers \*

36) Enter the URL where this information can be found \*

This field is optional if you have selected "None" above.

Specify what kind of review process is applied: Editorial review, Peer Review, Blind Peer Review, Double Blind Peer Review, Open Peer Review

- Openness, Reuse& Remixing rights, Licensing, Copyrights and Permissions!

## How Open is the Journal?

Please remember that **all** the content of the journal you are applying about **must** be available **immediately** upon publication.

42) What is the URL for the journal's Open Access statement? \*

# Reuse/remix

45) Does the journal allow reuse and remixing of its content, in accordance with a CC license? \*

- ☐ CC-BY
- ☐ CC-BY-NC
- ☐ CC-BY-NC-ND
- ☐ CC-BY-ND
- ☐ CC-BY-SA
- ☐ No
- ☒ Other

For more information go to  
<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/>

46) Which of the following does the content require? (Tick all that apply.)

- ☐ Attribution
- ☐ No Commercial Usage
- ☐ No Derivatives
- ☐ Share Alike

47) Enter the URL on your site where your license terms are stated

47) Enter the URL on your site  
where your license terms are  
stated

48) Does the journal allow readers  
to 'read, download, copy,  
distribute, print, search, or link to  
the full texts' of its articles? \*

☐ Yes

☐ No

From the [Budapest Open Access Initiative's definition of Open Access](#)

## Copyright and Permissions

50) Does the journal allow the author(s) to hold the copyright without restrictions? \*

☐ Yes

☐ No

☒ Other

51) Enter the URL where this information can be found \*

52) Will the journal allow the author(s) to retain publishing rights without restrictions? \*

☐ Yes

☐ No

☐ Other

- Archiving is important – too many OA-journals do not have an archiving arrangement

23) What digital archiving policy does the journal use? \*

- ☐ No policy in place
- ☐ LOCKSS
- ☐ CLOCKSS
- ☐ Portico
- ☐ PMC/Europe PMC/PMC Canada
- ☐ A national library
- ☐ Other

Select all that apply. Institutional archives and publishers' own online archives are not valid

24) Enter the URL where this information can be found \*

This field is optional if you have only selected "No policy in place" above

25) Does the journal allow anyone to crawl the full-text of the journal? \*

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No

# Plagiarism etc

39) Does the journal have a policy  
of screening for plagiarism? \*

- ☒ Yes  
☐ No

If "No" proceed to question below

40) Enter the URL where this  
information can be found \*

41) What is the average number of  
weeks between submission and  
publication? \*

# Charges

13) Does the journal have article processing charges (APCs)? \*

- ☒ Yes  
☐ No

If "No" proceed to question below

14) Amount \*

15) Currency \*

16) Does the journal have article submission charges? \*

- ☐ Yes  
☒ No

If "No" proceed to question below

21) Does the journal have a waiver policy (for developing country authors etc)? \*

- ☒ Yes  
☐ No

22) Enter the URL where this information can be found \*



## How does DOAJ detect questionable journals?

- Low publishing quality
  - Journal name, website, fees, peer review, publisher, ownership, volume of articles, advertisements, prominent soliciting for editors, ambiguous company address, many journals and few articles
- Low scientific quality
  - focus, format, self-citations, plagiarism
- Malpractice
  - false claims, hidden costs, spamming authors, wrong information,

- Inappropriate marketing practices
  - Spam emails
- Journal titles with “International”, “American” or “European”
- Very broad scope, multidisciplinary
- Fake impact factors
- Advertise very quick publishing
- Advertise a relative low publication fee
- No or little quality control of articles
- Low-standard peer review process or even don't have peer review at all

- It is the **complete** assessment of the journal/publisher that forms the final picture.
- A minor set of shortcomings isn't enough "evidence" to label someone a Questionable Publisher.
- Shortcomings often based on lack of knowledge!
- We are in it to help honest publishers do a better job!!

# Blacklists?

## Beall's list:

- Maintained by one (1) person, a serials librarian,
- with remarkable ignorance about just serials,
- who explicitly dislike OA and
- operates as prosecutor, judge and jury in one person

# About Blacklists

- Not only are blacklists incomplete by definition
- They are highly susceptible to legal challenge and vulnerable to personal bias.
- Scholars should be able to decide for themselves what is a good venue from which to communicate their work
- (Cameron Neylon: <https://cameronneylon.net/blog/blacklists-are-technically-infeasible-practically-unreliable-and-unethical-period/>)

- The Blacklist approach:
  - Stigmatize publishers/journals
- The DOAJ approach:
  - assist publishers to improve and become more transparent, and keep Questionable Publishers out!

# Whitelists



- An increasing number of Governments and Research Funders are developing Lists of Accredited Publishing Channels as a basis for
  - Research evaluation
  - Rewards systems and promotion
  - Resource allocation
- In case Open Access Policies or Mandates are in place many look to DOAJ for good Open Access Journals

## Promoting OA journals in National Whitelists

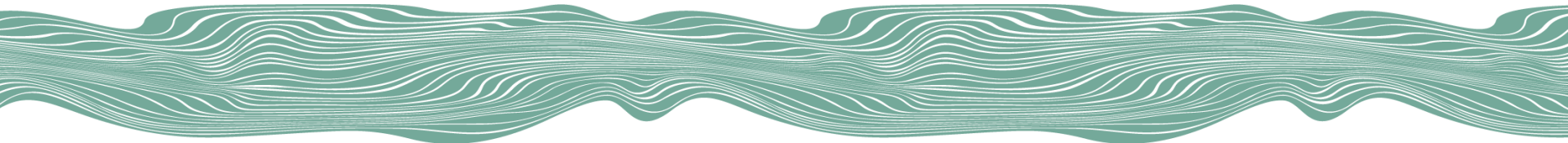
- Examples:
- The Science Europe Recommendations:
  - DOAJ recognized in line with Web of Science and Scopus
- The Nordic Research Councils collaborate on a whitelist and supports DOAJ
- Indonesia and other countries
- Many universities have DOAJ listing as a criteria for supporting APC payments for their researchers



Vetenskapsrådet

# THE NORDIC LIST

**An international collaborative tool for publication  
analysis with relevance for  
open access**



# Collaboration with DOAJ

- In March 2017 a collaboration was started between DOAJ and the Nordic List consortium
- The consortium would like to use DOAJ as a partner in evaluating open access policies of publications channels
- This is an attempt to increase the effectiveness of the Nordic collaboration and also to be able to highlight good practice in publishing

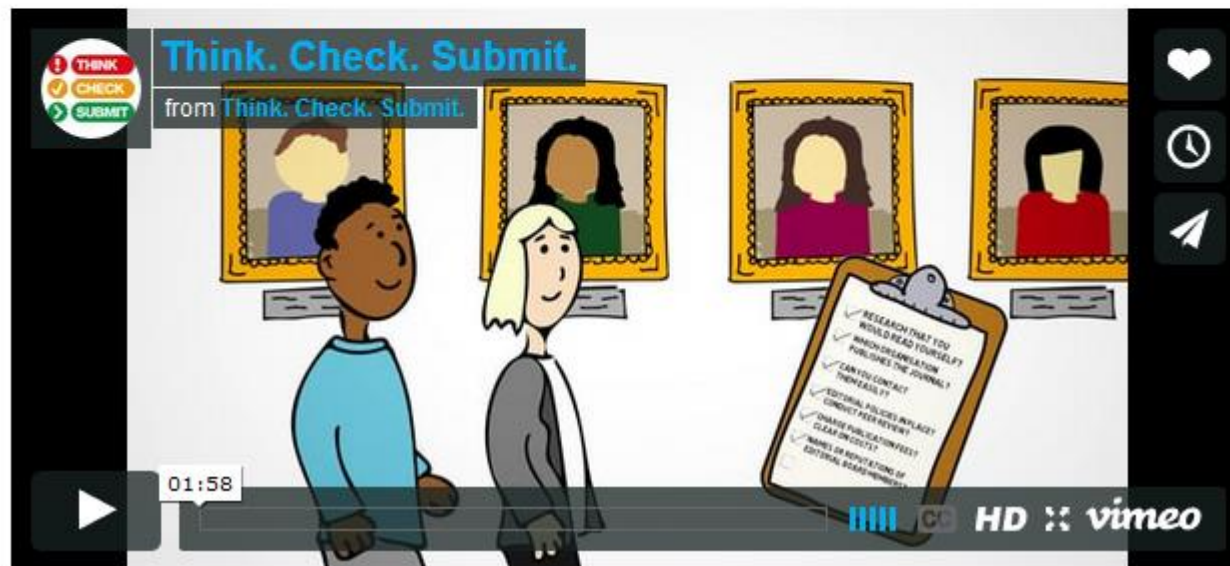


More help to researchers  
to avoid Questionable  
Publishers

It's easy: encourage them  
to think!!!



Choose the right journal for your research



**Think. Check. Submit.** is a campaign to help researchers identify trusted journals for their research. It is a simple checklist researchers can use to assess the credentials of a journal or publisher.





**Choose the right journal for your research**



**Are you submitting your research to a trusted journal?  
Is it the right journal for your work?**

- More research is being published worldwide.
- New journals are launched each week.
- Stories of publisher malpractice and deception are also on the rise.
- It can be challenging to find up-to-date guidance when choosing where to publish.

**How can you be sure the journal you are considering is the right journal for your research?**



**Choose the right journal for your research**



**Reference this list for your chosen journal to check if it is trusted.**

- Do you or your colleagues know the journal?
  - Have you read any articles in the journal before?
  - Is it easy to discover the latest papers in the journal?

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- Can you easily identify and contact the publisher?
  - Is the publisher name clearly displayed on the journal website?
  - Can you contact the publisher by telephone, email, and post?

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- Is the journal clear about the type of peer review it uses?

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- Are articles indexed in services that you use?

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- Is it clear what fees will be charged?
  - Does the journal site explain what these fees are for and when they will be charged?

---





**Choose the right journal for your research**



- Do you recognise the editorial board?
    - Have you heard of the editorial board members?
    - Do the editorial board mention the journal on their own websites?
- 
- Is the publisher a member of a recognized industry initiative?
    - Do they belong to the Committee on Publication Ethics (COPE) ?
    - If the journal is open access, is it listed in the Directory of Open Access Journals (DOAJ) ?
    - If the journal is open access, does the publisher belong to the Open Access Scholarly Publishers' Association (OASPA) ?
    - Is the journal hosted on one of INASP's Journals Online platforms (for journals published in Bangladesh, Nepal, Sri Lanka, Central America and Mongolia) or on African Journals Online (AJOL, for African journals)?
    - Is the publisher a member of another trade association?
-



**If you can answer 'yes' to most or all of the questions on the list.**

Complete the check list and submit your article only if you are happy you can answer 'yes' to most or all of the questions.

- You need to be confident your chosen journal will have a suitable profile among your peers to enhance your reputation and your chance of gaining citations.
- Publishing in the right journal for your research will raise your professional profile, and help you progress in your career.
- Your paper should be indexed or archived and be easily discoverable.
- You should expect a professional publishing experience where your work is reviewed and edited.
- Only then should you submit your article.



Choose the right journal for your research



**Contributing organizations:**

- [Asian Council of Science Editors \(ACSE\)](#)

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- [Association of Learned & Professional Society Publishers \(ALPSP\)](#)

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- [Committee on Publication Ethics \(COPE\)](#)

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- [Directory of Open Access Journals \(DOAJ\)](#)

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- [INASP](#)

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- [ISSN International Centre](#)

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- [Ligue des Bibliothèques Européennes de Recherche – Association of European Research Libraries \(LIBER\)](#)

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- [Open Access Scholarly Publishers Association \(OASPA\)](#)

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- [SPARC Europe](#)

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- [International Association of STM Publishers \(STM\)](#)

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- [UKSG](#)

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**THINK**



**CHECK**



**SUBMIT**

Choose the right journal for your research

## LANGUAGE

- |                                |                     |                     |
|--------------------------------|---------------------|---------------------|
| • <u>Arabic</u>                | • <u>Hindi</u>      | • <u>Romanian</u>   |
| • <u>Catalan</u>               | • <u>Indonesian</u> | • <u>Russian</u>    |
| • <u>Chinese (Simplified)</u>  | • <u>Italian</u>    | • <u>Slovak</u>     |
| • <u>Chinese (Traditional)</u> | • <u>Japanese</u>   | • <u>Spanish</u>    |
| • <u>Czech</u>                 | • <u>Kazakh</u>     | • <u>Ukrainian</u>  |
| • <u>Farsi</u>                 | • <u>Korean</u>     | • <u>Tamil</u>      |
| • <u>French</u>                | • <u>Lithuanian</u> | • <u>Thai</u>       |
| • <u>German</u>                | • <u>Mongolian</u>  | • <u>Vietnamese</u> |
| • <u>Greek</u>                 | • <u>Portuguese</u> |                     |

<http://thinkchecksubmit.org/>

and of course:

Check DOAJ – if the journals is not  
listed, then:

Take Care!!

## DOAJ – some numbers (Jan 2018)

- Number of Journals in DOAJ: 11.023
- Number of Articles linked in DOAJ: 2.867.844
- Number of Countries represented: 123
- Rejection Rate: 47%
- Number of Publishers (Journals) inadmissible for 1 year or more: 316 (3123)
- List of journals removed:  
[https://docs.google.com/spreadsheets/d/183mRBRqs2jOyP0qZWXN8dUd02D4vL0Mov\\_kgYF8HORM/edit#gid=0](https://docs.google.com/spreadsheets/d/183mRBRqs2jOyP0qZWXN8dUd02D4vL0Mov_kgYF8HORM/edit#gid=0)
- Number of new Applications /Month: >300

# How we work!

- DOAJ Core team:
  - Managing Director
  - Operations Manager
  - Project and Communications Manager
  - Editor-in-Chief
  - Senior Managing Editor
  - 6 Managing Editors
  - PLUS

# Volunteers and Ambassadors

- 50+ **Voluntary** Editors/Associate Editors working unpaid a few hours/week – distributed in editorial groups managing 20+ languages
- 20 **Ambassadors** recruited to
  - Promote DOAJ
  - Handle applications of journals to be listed in DOAJ
  - Promote best publishing practice and
  - Help identifying and spotting questionable and unethical publishers
- Ambassadors are
  - based in China, India, Russia, Egypt, Ethiopia, Burkina Faso, Algeria, South Africa and Mexico, Indonesia & Korea – covering Asia, Middle East, Africa and Latin America



# three-tier evaluation proces



**Associate Editors:** reviewing applications, communicate with publishers, recommend inclusion/rejection

**Editors:** allocating applications to Associate Editors, recommend inclusion/rejection

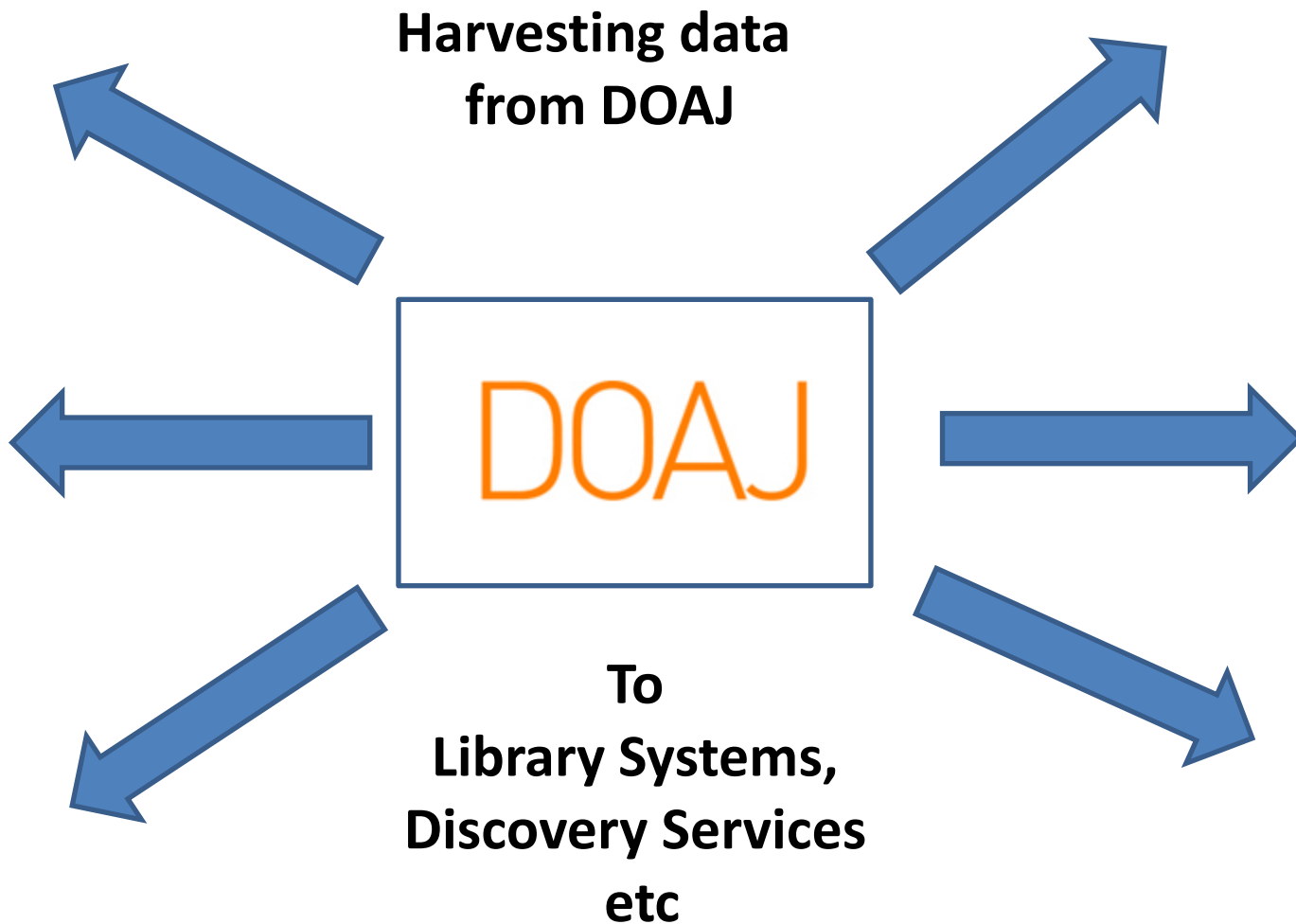
**Managing Editors:** allocate applications to Editors & decide on inclusion/rejection

# DOAJ – much more than a list of journals!

- A global list of peer-reviewed Open Access journals – all subjects and languages
  - journals undergo evaluation based on a set of criteria
  - 11.000 titles (January 2018)
- An aggregation of article level metadata
  - Publishers upload article metadata into DOAJ
  - 73% of the journals do so
  - Currently 2.867.000 records
- All DOAJ services and data are free for all to use, download and re-use

# DOAJ is aggregating article level metadata





# Collaboration!

- COPE, OASPA, WAME – the Principles of Transparency and Best Practice of Scholarly Publishing
- Keepers' Registry – certified archiving organizations
- (OJS) PUBLIC KNOWLEDGE PROJECT
- RESEARCH4LIFE – screening OA-journals
- ISSN
- OASPA, STM, ALPSP, LIBER etc:



- [www.thinkchecksubmit.org](http://www.thinkchecksubmit.org)

DOAJ depends entirely on donations



## Become a member or make a donation

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<https://doaj.org/membership>

- ALLEA Members supporting DOAJ:
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  - Several of the centres in the network of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences
  - The Royal Netherlands Academy of Arts and Sciences
  - Interested in supporting the work we do?
  - Contact [lars@doaj.org](mailto:lars@doaj.org)

Thanks to :,

All the Library Consortia, Universities, Research Funders and  
Publishers and our Sponsors for the financial support to DOAJ!  
And thank you for listening!

