

Towards a change in the paradigm of scientific publishing

Last 27th of March, the Society of Spanish Researchers in the United Kingdom (SRUK/CERU) gathered at Imperial College London a panel of lead-experts to discuss on the past, present and future of science publication. An event included in the cycle of roundtables and seminars organized by SRUK and sponsored by Ramon Areces Foundation and the Office for Cultural and Scientific Affairs of the Embassy of Spain in the United Kingdom; in partnership with The Imperial College Spanish Society and The Queens Gate Hotel.

Lorenzo Melchor, President of the SRUK, introduced the debate highlighting the current importance of publishing research in a quality and reputable journal and the impact factor in scientific quality evaluation. Dr. Melchor highlighted the current relevance of this debate in the light of recent changes taking place in the world of publishing and disseminating scientific results. Three panellists were invited to discuss these issues and their implications.

Cameron Neylon, the advocacy director for the Public Library of Science (PLoS) shared his thoughts about the bigger picture of communication and the importance of ideas reaching the wider world, different countries, different languages and different communities apart from the scientific, instead of being locked behind paying walls. Dr Neylon challenged the fact that the actual incentive of research is developed on the traditional way of publishing, and the need for changing this incentive system to allow for open access. Among many advantages of 'open publications', Neylon highlighted the possibility of translating scientific papers publications from English into other languages without incurring additional royalty payments. Furthermore he dared to ensure that today "where we publish now means so much more than it has in the past, and worth considering a lot more"

Eva Amsen, the Outreach Director for Faculty of 1000 Research, an open access and open peer-review journal was the second panellist. Dr Amsen presented the dynamism of publishing in F1000 journal, in which data backing up the research findings is also included, allowing for reproducibility. "Research F1000 is even more open, if possible, than the PLoS journals". In the system followed by F1000 Research publications are reviewed after being published ensuring transparency, reviewers and reviews always visible and accessible. Amsen firmly believes in a transparent peer-review process to benefit all parts involved, authors, reviewers and readers.

Our third speaker visited us from Spain; Juan Arechaga is a Professor of Cellular Biology at the University of the Basque Country and Editor in Chief of The International Journal of Developmental Biology. Professor Arechaga defended the more traditional way of publishing, alerting of the very low representation of Spanish journals (<1%) in the JCR/Science edition (or journals edited by Spaniards). As consequence, the best Spanish science is being published in non-Spanish journals. Arechaga spoke about the 'Dark side' of the open access



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movement increasing the number of low quality publications, also known as “predatory journals”. The Spanish professor went further defining PLoS ONE as the “Tyrannosaurus Rex of predator publishers”, based on the more than 20,000 articles published in 2012, and numbers dramatically increasing.

The audience raised interesting points through live discussions in the room, in twitter and through the streamed online: the profitability of open access compared to the traditional publication, or who should pay for publishing started the debate. Both Amsen and Neylon wanted to make clear that the authors do not pay, but the institutions that support them. This increases the chances of access to scientific magazines in developing countries, as well as publishing, since magazines have no trouble eliminating the costs if the institutions negotiate with them. Peer review received considerable attention, since many academics were in the audience. In general it is requested to be a transparent process, but also received enough criticism from Cameron Neylon who said that "peer review does not determine the significance of an article" "I have rarely seen science that could really benefit from the peer-reviewing process". The debate highlighted the lack of agreement among experts in scientific publishing about how to control the dissemination of results. Instead, yes, there were some points to agree: the little benefit of English for dissemination of results; or the power of metrics used to rank journals (impact factors) that are currently shaping too much the future of science and scientists.

Science publishing is one of the hottest topics in the scientific community. New trends in this area are challenging traditional editorial models providing alternatives to how science is communicated, discussed and reviewed. The scientific community is in a crossroad having to decide what option would offer better grounds for science to thrive.