Episciences: a platform for publishing diamond open access overlay journals[1]

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Abstract

Purpose. Episciences is a platform for publishing overlay diamond open access scientific journals. It hosts and supports 43 overlay journals from several disciplines—mainly mathematics, informatics, applied mathematics, social sciences, and humanities—and, for this purpose, utilises open science infrastructures.
Approach. The content of the publications is hosted on open repositories (such as HAL, arXiv, Zenodo, bioRxiv, and medRxiv), data repositories for datasets and Software Heritage for software. This allows Episciences to benefit from the FAIR principles supported by these infrastructures while also adding value and services. The platform offers a complete publishing solution for researchers enabling them to peer-review and publish articles, datasets, and software. All these components may also be linked to each other to promote the FAIR principles and the reproducibility of science.
Findings. Relying on existing infrastructures enables cost-efficient publishing. Led by academics, the platform is supported by French academic funding from th (Ministry of Higher Education and Research, CNRS, Inria, and INRAE.
Originality. The platform engages with scientific communities, through scientific committees. It provides solutions for copy-editing, communication, and advice on the best practic-

[1] The paper was originally presented at the OPERAS conference that was held in Zadar in April 2024.

es in open science publishing. Episciences is also open to new projects and collaborations at both European and international levels. The platform is available on the OpenAIRE catalogue of services and the EOSC marketplace. Relying on open infrastructures, the overlay model, and a dedicated support and editorial team, Episciences increases the transparency of the editorial workflow and enables researchers to regain control of their publishing methods and processes.

KEYWORDS: diamond open access, overlay journals, overlay platform, academic publishing, scientific journals

Introduction

Launched in 2013, Episciences is a platform for publishing overlay diamond open access scientific journals, open to all countries and languages. Supported by French academic funding, Episciences publishes overlay journals and, for this purpose, uses open science infrastructures. The content of the publications is hosted on open repositories. This enables Episciences to benefit from the FAIR principles supported by these infrastructures while also adding value and services. To date, the platform offers a complete publishing solution for researchers who can peer-review and publish articles, as well as datasets and software. The publication workflow supported by Episciences differs from that typically offered by non-overlay journals. The workflow supported by preprint servers and data repositories can be compared to a conversion flow with milestones, or reusing the metaphor of Jean-Claude Guédon, to "crystals of knowledge" (Stern, Guédon and Jensen 2015). Episciences can be considered as publishing hub, allowing academic communities to self-organise, publish, review and curate content hosted in several different open infrastructures. Each new linked component (dataset, software, open peer review, etc.) adds value to the previous one and to the entire publication workflow.
A brief history of the platform will demonstrate how deeply anchored Episciences is in the academic community (1). Next, we would like to highlight how Episciences is creating an innovative diamond open access publishing solution based on the overlay model (2) and how the technical and editorial services offered have evolved in recent years, to meet the users' needs as closely as possible (3).

1. A project for the benefit of the scientific community

The origin of the project was an original idea of a French mathematician, Jean-Pierre Demailly (1957-2022). Then professor at the Institut Fourier, he devised in 2002-2003 a way for the scientific community to reclaim scientific publishing. The aim of the project was to break away from large private publishers, who were capturing an increasing share of scientific publications and charging substantial fees for publication and access to these publications. Demailly aimed to set up a mechanism for the online

evaluation of scientific pre-publications, then allow open consultation of both the article's content and its evaluation on a single platform. To achieve this, he planned to rely on recognised open archives in mathematics, primarily arXiv and mp-arc (Mathematical Physics Preprint Archive). He estimated the project would take about ten years to complete.

Jean-Pierre Demailly began discussions with Greg Kuperberg, Professor of Mathematics and Chair of the Mathematics Department at arXiv, and with Franck Laloë, the French physicist who was behind the creation of the French national open archive HAL in 2001 (HAL 2025), and later Director of the Centre for Direct Scientific Communication (*Centre pour la Communication Scientifique Directe*, CCSD) (CCSD 2025a). He brought together several internationally renowned mathematicians to support his project, including Timothy Gowers from England, and Terence Tao from Australia. In 2012, these two leading figures joined the Mathematics scientific committee of Episciences, which had just been established by Jean-Pierre Demailly to evaluate mathematical works previously deposited in open archives.

Thanks to institutional support, initially from the CCSD and the Institut Fourier, and combined with the involvement of internationally recognised mathematicians, Episciences was launched in April 2013 (Gowers, 2013; Van Noorden, 2013). The following year, the National Institute for Research in Digital Science and Technology (*Institut national de recherche en informatique et en automatique*, now *Institut national de recherche en sciences et technologies du numérique,* Inria*)* became a trustee of the CCSD and joined the project.[2] Episciences now benefits from a technical infrastructure operated by the CCSD and provides dedicated support for journals that join the platform. Since the beginning, hosting and support for journals have been provided free of charge.

The first journals to appear were in computer science and applied mathematics: *Journal of Data Mining and Digital Humanities* (JDMDH) and *Discrete Mathematics and Theoretical Computer Science* (DMTCS).[3] The former was created ex nihilo by Inria. The latter has existed since 1997 and chose to migrate to Episciences (Berthaud *et al.* 2014; Riverieux *et al.* 2014).

Twelve years after its launch,[4] the platform now has 43 publications covering a range of disciplines, mainly mathematics, computer science and applied mathematics, as well as the humanities and social sciences. More recently, Episciences has expanded to include new disciplines such as physics, biomechanics and health sciences.[5]

2 2014: CCSD becomes a combined service unit (UMS3668) with CNRS, INRIA and Lyon University". https://www.ccsd.cnrs.fr/en/highlights/

3 JDMDH. https://jdmdh.episciences.org/; DMTCS. https://dmtcs.episciences.org/

4 The platform celebrated its tenth anniversary in 2023. See the event website: https://episciences2023.sciencesconf.org/

5 Journals catalogue. https://www.episciences.org/journals/

Figure 1. *Example of an article published in Transformations: A DARIAH Journal*[6]

Now developed by the CCSD with support from the French Ministry of Higher Education and Research, the CNRS, Inria and the National Research Institute for Agriculture, Food and the Environment (*Institut national de recherche pour l'agriculture, l'alimentation et l'environnement*, INRAE), Episciences is one of the three technological and service platforms of the HAL+ research infrastructure, along with HAL and Sciencesconf (CCSD, 2025b).

The platform's governance consists of the CSSD Steering Committee, a Strategic Orientation Board, and three scientific disciplinary committees. The scientific disciplinary committees, in Mathematics, Informatics and Applied Mathematics and Social Sciences and Humanities, are responsible for the scientific reviews of the journal applying to join the platform. They are also responsible for promoting the overlay model among their peers.

In twelve years, the Episciences team has stabilised and now consists of nine people: the platform manager (CNRS-CCSD), an editorial development manager, an international development and promotion officer, two developers (INRAE-CCSD and CNRS-CCSD), and four staff members responsible for editorial and documentary support: one from the Institut Fourier, Scientific and Technical Information Department, and three from Inria, Scientific Publishing Division of the Scientific Information and Publishing Department.

2. An innovative Diamond Open Access publishing model based on the overlay principle

2.1. How the overlay model works

Episciences is a platform specifically designed from the ground up for publishing overlay journals. Providing a different approach with the overlay model, Episciences contributes to the bibliodiversity among other academic diamond open access initiatives. A core and unique aspect of overlay journals is that their publications are hosted on preprint servers. Overlay journals do not host their own content, instead they are designed as a layer of services, on top of open repositories, leveraging the content hosted and published by these open infrastructures. In this way, Episciences offers a model aligned with the Publish, Review, Curate (PRC) model.

The publishing workflow begins with a preprint uploaded online by its authors. Once the document is available online, contributors will simply use the identifier and version number from the preprint server to initiate a submission on the journal's website. The review process is then operated by the board, with appointed editors and invited reviewers. The review process may lead to publishing an open peer review report, depending on the habits of the journal, its community, or the wishes of the reviewers and authors. If open peer review is not selected by the journal, the only other available option is single blind peer review. The authors cannot be anonymous, for the preprint must be made available online before starting the review process.

Several versions may be submitted to the journal, each time with a new public submission on the preprint server. This process allows the reader to trace the history of a document from the preprint to the published version.

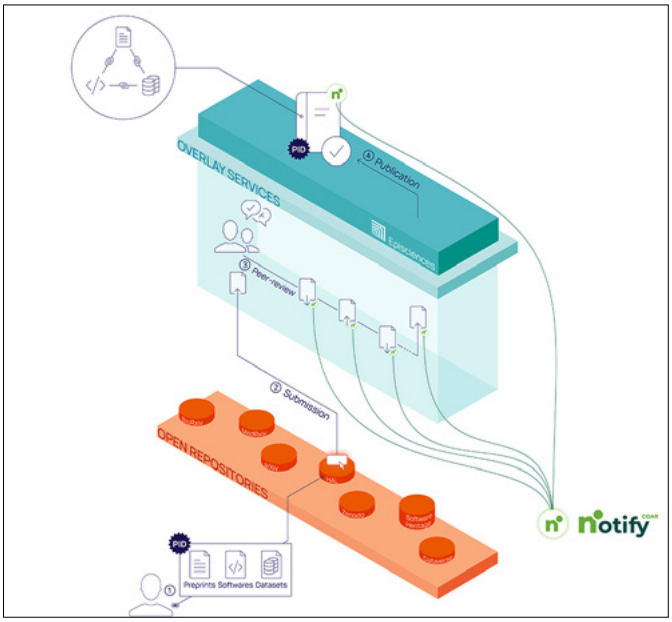

Figure 2. *A publishing workflow on top of open infrastructures* (credits: Marion Gaigeot and Agnès Magron, CCSD, CC-BY 4.0)

When an Episciences journal rejects a reviewed preprint, nothing is mentioned online. The authors are free to revise and resubmit to a different journal. Accepted articles are subject to a copy-editing phase, the final version is published on the website of the journal and a persistent identifier—a Digital Object Identifier, DOI—is added (Figure 2).
Only one specific version endorsed by the journal is published with a DOI. Nevertheless, the authors are free to submit revised versions of their published article on the preprint server. Eventually, they might also consider submitting the revised version to the journal again, so that the editors may update the published version for the benefits of the readers and authors. One of the advantages of this model is that it automatically creates a "record of versions" instead of only a "version of record". The metadata of the latest published version, always references the previous versions available on the preprint servers, all the versions are linked together.

2.2. Advantages of the overlay model

Besides the record of versions, Episciences' overlay model offers several advantages.
One of the most important aspects is not technical. It enables journal boards to operate journals independently, by reintroducing an academic publishing model in which researchers own the title of their journal. Episciences is an academic publishing platform, not a publisher. Therefore, researchers own their journals, just as authors retain the rights to their publications. This is especially true since the content is not actually hosted by the platform.
Not hosting the content also offers a cost-efficient publishing model, by leveraging preprint servers and their long-term preservation policies. Even if the Episciences platform were to disappear, the content published by the journals would remain online, accessible, and could be updated by the researchers. The metadata of the publications would also remain available, as it is harvested by several open science infrastructures, in addition to the preprint servers themselves.
The overlay model, based on open archives, is by design, compliant with open access mandates. Every submitted version is open access from the very beginning of the publication workflow. Another advantage of early preprint submissions is that authors can time stamp and protect their findings. In contrast to traditional journals, preprints can be cited throughout the publishing process, without waiting for the final published version. The platform builds on the green open access model, to create a diamond open access model, achieving immediate full open access, without any embargo or paywall. Episciences' model is also compliant with the Rights Retention Strategy (cOAlition S, 2025): authors submit their documents online with a Creative Commons licence (usually CC-BY) and journals have a non-exclusive distribution right.

3. Technical and editorial services

Episciences has been designed with researchers in mind. Its goal is to provide a comprehensive platform enabling the academic community to operate diamond open access journals. The core services were initially the submission and peer review system, but over time, the software has

evolved to offer all the tools to needed to run modern overlay journals. The platform provides its software components as open-source software[6] and its metadata under a Creative Commons licences, CC0 licence (Creative Commons 2025). The first preprint servers supported by Episciences were arXiv and HAL, but more recently Zenodo, bioRxiv and medRxiv have been added. The goal is to open the platform to institutional repositories to foster collaboration and encourage researchers to publish in overlay journals using their repository of choice. Any data repository powered by the Dataverse software can also be used to submit datasets. The Journal of Data- and Knowledge-integrated Simulation Science (JoDaKISS)[7], a journal launched in 2025, is focused on the scientific evaluation and curation of datasets and software.

Episciences is also interconnected with open science infrastructures managed and supported by OpenAIRE[8]. OpenAIRE is a non-profit organisation supporting Open Science through a diverse set of public services. Thanks to the OpenAIRE Nexus[9] project, Episciences has been integrated into the OpenAIRE Catalogue of services and connected to many services promoted by this Open Science Infrastructure. The support of OpenAIRE and its services has enabled Episciences to offer a platform for publishing diamond open access journals to the OpenAIRE users, while also enhancing the FAIRness of the entire platform. For example, OpenAIRE Graph is used to automatically find and add new ORCID identifiers for authors, new funding information for published articles, and to discover datasets linked to its publications. We have also used services such as OpenCitations to discover which articles cite our publications. Episciences has established a complete workflow based on these services to continuously enrich its publication metadata and FAIRness. All information gathered by the platform is available via a REST API and an OAI-PMH endpoint. All the produced metadata is available under a CC0 licence.

Episciences is also a use case contributor to the COAR Notify protocol[10] and one of the first platforms to implement it. The COAR Notify protocol is proposed by the Confederation of Open Access Repositories (COAR). It has been developed to increase interoperability across repositories and other services, such as overlay journals. Episcience uses the protocol to exchange information with the HAL open repository. For example, it allows authors to submit a preprint to HAL, and at the same time propose it to an overlay journal (Magron 2023). For this purpose, a new software library has been created with funding from the French National Fund for Open Science (FNSO) in the framework of the HALOWIN project[11]. The library[12] is a free software used by both Episciences and HAL. Implementing the protocol and offering this workflow is an effective way to promote the submission of preprints and the use of overlay journals on the HAL open archive. Our ambition, for the future, is to use

6 See Software Heritage Archive: https://archive.softwareheritage.org/swh:1:dir:309043823a5dd0f53bd0b05b19c94f68e2a389f7;origin=https://github.com/CCSDForge/episciences;visit=swh:1:snp:4a3c0b105e08da2f8348cbfe1145c0270f5fc80f;anchor=swh:1:rev:dd7b51889f2d2ec5e1a25c1fbd935adaf14662f6

7 JoDaKISS: https://jodakiss.episciences.org/

8 OpenAIRE: https://www.openaire.eu/about

9 OpenAIRE-Nexus Scholarly Communication Services for EOSC users: https://doi.org/10.3030/101017452

10 COAR Notify: https://notify.coar-repositories.org/

11 "HALOWIN. HAL Open Workflows and Interoperability", Ouvrir la science: https://www.ouvrirlascience.fr/hal-open-workflows-and-interoperability-2/

12 COAR Notification Manager https://archive.softwareheritage.org/swh:1:dir:7d97130ca56711c28b2fadfac6cc4549b51318cf;origin=https://github.com/CottageLabs/coar-notifications;visit=swh:1:snp:afd0bd6afb73810c2d48b9c119001488f77a24e6;anchor=swh:1:rev:6a4e9decf99f54881de566e88ed59e8e0c1389aa

the protocol to facilitate the interactions between Episciences and other compatible open infrastructures. The COAR Notify protocol is a unique opportunity to offer next generation services to users of preprint or dataset servers, for example by connecting with peer-review services such as overlay journals.

Recent additions to the platform feature improved links between publications, datasets and software (Magron 2023)[13]. Any data-repository can be used to reference datasets used by the publications. This is an efficient way to acknowledge the value of the work achieved by the researchers on datasets and to the importance of the datasets themselves for reproducibility. For software, Episciences uses Software Heritage to archive and cite research codes used or referenced by publications (Di Cosmo 2022). This integration has been achieved within the framework of the FAIRCORE4EOSC[14] project.

Another recent addition is a tool to manage and extract the bibliographical references of the published articles[15]. Most of the work is automated and based on the GROBID software, which processes PDF files to extract relevant information (Romary and Lopez 2015). This effort is aligned with the Initiative for Open Citations[16]. As we are building services on top of the tools provided by OpenCitations, it is important to share our citations in the same way as any other metadata.

The Episciences team also works closely with the journals' technical and scientific committees. This proximity allows to develop a technical offer and to tailor editorial services as closely as possible to the needs of users. Among the current projects, two in particular are being developed with users. These are the project to overhaul the public interfaces of the journals' websites and the development of an editorial service.

The web interface of the journals has changed very little since it was created in 2013. Admittedly, several technical changes have been made over time in response to user feedback. However, the visual aspect has never undergone any in-depth development. The significant increase in the number of journals in recent years, from 14 by the end of 2019 to 25 by the end of 2022 (Figure 3), has created a need to redesign the platform's interfaces (point 12 of

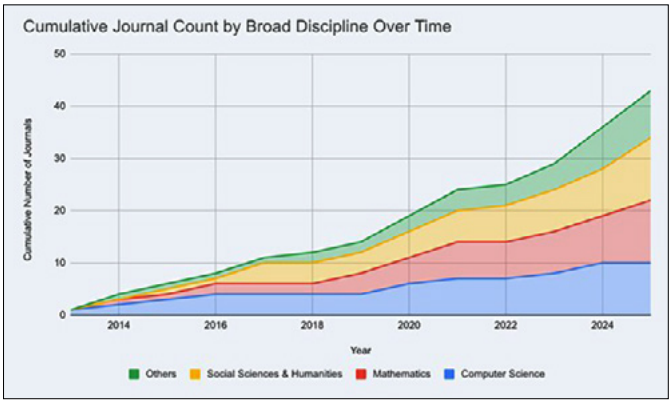

Figure 3. *Number of Episciences journals per year and breakdown by discipline* (credits: the authors, CC-BY 4.0)

13 "Linking publications/data/software", Episciences - Documentation: https://doc.episciences.org/software/

14 FAIRCORE4EOSC project. https://faircore4eosc.eu/

15 "Managing bibliographical references", Episciences - Documentation: https://doc.episciences.org/citations/

16 Initiative for Open Citations. https://i4oc.org/

the 2023 Action Plan) (CCSD 2023).

For this major project, Atelier Universel's was engaged. It is the team of designers, who are responsible for the new look and feel of HAL, which has been unveiled for its 20th anniversary in 2021 and have extensive experience in the field of scientific publishing. The User Experience design (UXD) methodology proposed required the involvement of the journal editors. The Episciences meeting held in Lyon for the occasion of the platform's tenth anniversary provided an opportunity to get to meet the users and to strengthen the link with them. As a result, several editorial board members from different journals are participating in one or another phase of the project with great interest and enthusiasm. Two small-group workshops will be held to gather information about users' needs, which can vary greatly from one discipline to another (and from one journal to another). Individual interviews on specific points complete the process. At each stage, users are asked to help ensure that the final product meets not only their needs but also their expectations.

The project is ongoing and in its final phase. One of the final stages will be to adapt the content of the sites (presentation of the journal, drafting of an ethics charter where one does not exist, updating of the publication policy, etc.) to integrate them seamlessly into the new interfaces, but also to make the operation of the journals public and transparent. In this respect, the new sites will meet the editorial criteria required by several indexing databases, particularly DOAJ, which will allow all the journals on the platform to be added in this open access reference tool (DOAJ 2025).

In addition to indexing in international and disciplinary reference databases, editorial teams are increasingly seeking for long-term solutions for editing. The analysis of the different needs of editorial teams was formalised in the presentation of the Édisciences project, which aims to facilitate the editorial preparation of articles and to produce structured publications in accordance with editorial quality standards (FAIR principles).

Édisciences is one of the winners of the third call for projects launched by the French National Fund for Open Science in 2023 (Ouvrir la science 2023). The project was carried out with three partner journals: *Recherches en didactique des mathématiques* (RDM)[17], *Cahiers Scientifiques du Transport/Scientific Papers in Transportation* (CST)[18] and *Journal of Theoretical, Computational and Applied Mechanics* (JTCAM)[19], thus meeting the needs of three of the platform's main disciplinary areas: mathematics, humanities and computer sciences, and applied mathematics through mechanics.

In practice, the project is divided into two parts. The first part involves of designing two generic templates, one in LaTeX for journals with a large number of mathematical formulae, and one in InDesign for other journals (mainly in the humanities and social sciences journals). These layouts are adapted to the graphic charter of the journals so that the publication can be easily identified, while maintaining the coherence with the Episciences platform. The second part concerns the editorial work on the texts. According to needs and preferences of each publication, specifications are drawn up so that publishing professionals can be engaged in to prepare the text, proofread, style and layout. This stage includes the establishing a proofreading protocol specific to each

17 RDM. https://rdm.episciences.org/

18 CST. https://cst.episciences.org/

19 JTCAM. https://jtcam.episciences.org/

publication, in accordance with disciplinary standards, the page layout procedure, and providing support in the use of Episciences for all those involved in the editorial process.

These few examples show that Episciences' services are constantly being enriched in response to user requests. This co-design approach with users enables us to have a platform with a high level of technical expertise, while remaining attentive to the needs of the communities.

4. Conclusion

Over the course of a bit more than twelve years of history, Episciences has evolved into a full featured platform for publishing diamond open access overlay journals. Its focus is on establishing partnerships and developing innovative publishing solutions based on open infrastructures. New solutions for peer-review of publications, datasets and software will soon be developed and proposed to the community within the framework of the nEpHAL+ project.[20] This project, funded by the French National Fund for Open Science, will include several partners such as Inria, Software Heritage and DARIAH, which launched its overlay journal, Transformations, on the Episciences platform in 2024.[21] The NepHAL+ project will also serve as the basis to an updated version of the Episciences platform, with a new UI/UX for the back-office used to manage the journals.

Momentum building around diamond open access journals, driven by a desire for more equitable, inclusive and accessible academic publishing. The model has gained support in recent years from both governments and academic communities. It is endorsed by UNESCO and many international stakeholders, with the 3rd Global Diamond Open Access Alliance announced in February 2026. Episciences intends to seize this opportunity and contribute to the diamond open access model with overlay journals.

The overlay model met the expectations of several journal teams, but efforts in the coming years must focus on obtaining more diverse and innovative funding sources for the journals and the platform itself. Even if the model is cost-efficient and the technical burden is distributed, the journals require support services, and the software needs updates to support new features and community needs. The goal is to be able to support journals wishing transition to academic publishing with a diamond open access model, or to support journals that would like to start with an overlay model. In 2025, Episciences was selected by the Global Sustainability Coalition for Open Science Services (SCOSS 2025), a network of influential organisations committed to securing Open Science infrastructures. As of end of 2025, more than 30 sponsors are supporting the platform in addition to its historical founding supporters: CNRS, Inria and INRAE. To support this strategy of diversifying its funding and increasing transparency, Episciences has created a new role in the team with an international development and promotion officer. The platform has decided to join the Transparency to Sustain Open Science Infrastructure (TSOSI 2025) initiative; this aligns with our commitment to transparency and provides a way to acknowledge our sponsors. SCOSS and

[20] "nEpHAL+. next Episciences for HAL+", Ouvrir la science: https://www.ouvrirlascience.fr/nephal/

[21] *Transformations: A DARIAH Journal* is a multilingual journal created in 2024 by the European research infrastructure DARIAH ERIC: https://transformations.episciences.org/

our sponsors help us support our goals; we have started to develop a special effort on outreach and engagement towards the academic communities. It will help Episciences connect with more repositories, in order to sustain a more decentralised publications system where the content is hosted as close as possible to authors and their institutions, allowing them to increase scientific sovereignty. This will also be an opportunity to ensure that Episciences and the overlay journals meet the needs of the academic community and confirm their place in the bibliodiversity of diamond open access.

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Sažetak

Episciences: platforma za objavljivanje probirnih časopisa u dijamantnom otvorenom pristupu

Cilj. Episciences je platforma za objavljivanje probirnih (*overlay*) dijamantnih časopisa u otvorenom pristupu. Podržava objavljivanje 43 časopisa iz nekoliko disciplina, uglavnom iz matematike, informatike, primijenjene matematike, društvenih znanosti i humanističkih znanosti—i u tu svrhu koristi infrastrukturu otvorene znanosti.
Pristup. Sadržaj publikacija nalazi se u otvorenim repozitorijima (kao što su HAL, arXiv, Zenodo, bioRxiv i medRxiv), u podatkovnim repozitorijima za skupove podataka i u digitalnom arhivu za softver Software Heritage. To Episciences platformi omogućuje oslanjanje na FAIR načela koja podržavaju spomenute infrastrukture, a istovremeno dodaje vrijednost i usluge. Platforma nudi cjelovito rješenje za objavljivanje za istraživače, omogućujući im recenziranje i objavljivanje članaka, skupova podataka i softvera. Sve se te komponente mogu i međusobno povezati kako bi se promicala FAIR načela i poticala ponovljivost u znanosti.
Rezultati. Oslanjanje na postojeće infrastrukture omogućuje isplativo objavljivanje. Platforma, koju vodi akademsko osoblje, podržavaju francuski financijeri, agencije i ministarstva (Ministarstvo visokog obrazovanja i znanosti, CNRS, Inria i INRAE).
Originalnost. Platforma surađuje sa znanstvenim zajednicama putem znanstvenih odbora. Pruža rješenja za jezično uređivanje radova, komunikaciju i savjetovanje o najboljim praksama u objavljivanju u otvorenoj znanosti. Platforma Episciences otvorena je za nove projekte i suradnje na europskoj i međunarodnoj razini. Platforma je dostupna u katalogu usluga OpenAIRE i na EOSC marketplaceu. Oslanjajući se na otvorene infrastrukture, probirni (overlay) model objavljivanja i posvećeni tim za podršku i uredništvo, Episciences povećava transparentnost uredničkog procesa i omogućuje istraživačima vraćanje kontrole nad svojim metodama i procesima objavljivanja.

KLJUČNE RIJEČI: dijamantni otvoreni pristup, overlay platforma, probirni (overlay) časopisi, znanstveni časopisi, znanstveno izdavaštvo