

Balancing Principles and Practices: Disciplinary Differences in Croatian Researchers' Perspectives on Open Access Publishing

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ABSTRACT

Researchers' open access publishing (OAP) attitudes and practices are shaped by a complex interplay of factors, including the characteristics of scientific disciplines and the overall settings in which authors and journals operate. They are influenced not only by the authors' awareness of the benefits of open access and financial aspects of publishing, but also by various micro-characteristic like requirements for academic promotion, institutional or governmental mandates, OA advocacy, and incentives for publishing in OA.

Currently, more than 65% of the total Croatian scientific output visible in the Web of Science Core Collection is published in open access. Croatia adheres to the recommendations and guidelines of the EU, with many public educational and scientific institutions participating in European projects addressing open science issues. The majority of Croatian scientific journals listed in the Directory of Open Access Journals (DOAJ) employ the diamond model of OA publishing.

Since our previous research revealed differences in OA practices across scientific disciplines (Macan et al., 2020), the aim of this research was to analyse the current attitudes of Croatian authors towards OA publishing and explore possible differences in OA publishing attitudes and practices between researchers in STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering and Medicine) and SSH (Social Sciences and Humanities).

The online questionnaire comprised 17 questions divided into four sections: academic status and main area of expertise, general attitudes towards OA, OA publishing models, criteria for choosing publication outlets, and attitudes towards pay-to-publish models. The questionnaire targeted researchers who primarily publish in journals. The survey yielded 1,041 responses from researchers affiliated with Croatian universities and research institutes, PhD students, postdoctoral researchers and librarians. Only fully completed questionnaires were included in the analysis, reducing the dataset to 763 responses.

The majority of respondents (75%) expressed support for OA publishing and

acknowledged its benefits in scientific research and education. SSH authors have a more favourable attitude toward OA publishing compared to STEM authors. Support for open access is associated with a greater number of papers published in local journals and a lower emphasis on the journal's scientific reputation.

When selecting a journal for publication, respondents were primarily motivated by the journal's prestige rather than its open access status. STEM researchers tend to prioritize journal reputation and impact, while SSH respondents value strict disciplinary orientation more than journals' bibliometric indicators. Publications from SSH, mainly published in local journals, dominated the Croatian OA output reported in this survey. Along with disciplinary differences in the requirements for academic promotion, this probably influenced the expressed attitudes.

Attitudes towards publishing in fully OA journals operating exclusively with the pay-to-publish model varied among respondents. The difference was statistically significant, with STEM respondents more inclined to submit their papers to pay-to-publish journals. Those with a positive attitude were motivated by the speed of peer review and publication process, while those with a negative attitude believed that gold OA journal publishers prioritize profit over the quality of published articles. SSH respondents were more opposed to paying publication fees, even if their institution or research funder covered them, because they do not support any financial barriers in publishing scientific results.

Balancing the diverse needs and practices of different scientific disciplines while ensuring equitable access to publishing opportunities seems to be the key challenge in scientific publishing. Continued state financial support for national journals, particularly those following the diamond OA model, complemented with improving the financial capabilities of STEM researchers to publish in international journals will be crucial in maintaining the current level of OA publishing in Croatia.

KEYWORDS

authors' attitudes; Croatia; open access publishing; publishing practices; research areas; scholarly communication

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