

Dreaming about the future publishing system...

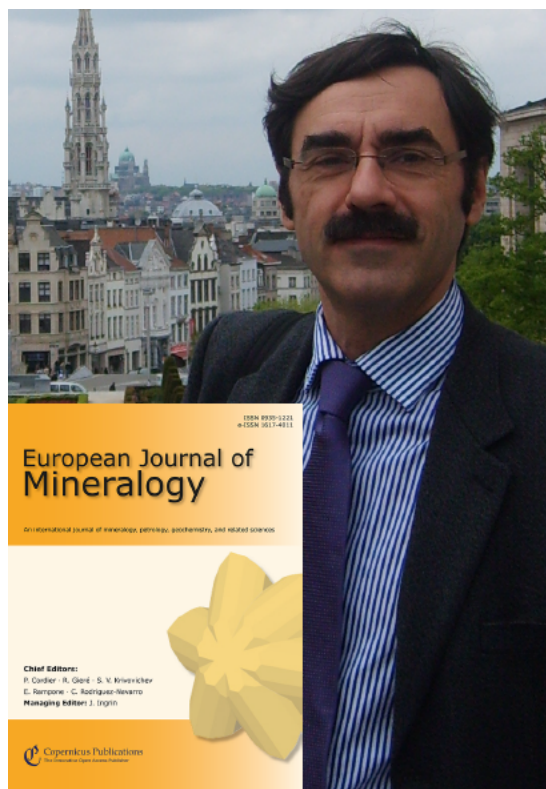
We are still in a transition period, with all its uncertainties and the normal apprehension linked to change. Let us imagine that we have reached a steady state with a single economic publishing system accepted by all. Which one would you prefer?

- 1) The past system where researchers do not have to pay to publish and have access to published work, with the condition that they are at a sufficiently wealthy institution, which is able to pay for the access licenses.
- 2) The diamond open access system where researchers do not pay themselves for publishing cost (and remain unaware of the costs and resource consumption), but someone else does, and everybody has access to all publications, past and present.
- 3) The gold open access system where researchers pay the cost of their publications (being fully aware of the costs associated to every single publication), and everybody has access to all publications, past and present.

The first economic system is certainly not the most open, inclusive and fair system. It was also proven to be an unsustainable system with strong economic limitations. As we have seen, constant and uncontrollable inflation of publication costs, led to severe financial problem for many research institutions and libraries.

The second one, the diamond system may appear at first as the most attractive and the fairest one. However, it moves back to the past approach where publishing costs (direct and indirect) are hidden from authors. Some claimed that the bankruptcy of the past system was, in part, due to the fact that researchers were never involved in the financial decisions and were ignorant about them and their consequences. Authors are the main actors in the publishing system and should not remain passive and unaware of the financial questions. It is like residents of a building who do not need to pay the bill for heating costs. Some may even keep the windows open in the winter, especially if they do not even know how much it costs. The hidden costs inherent in the 'diamond' system may repeat some mistakes of the past. Through subsidies, agreements between publishers and institutions, or any other funding systems, the real cost of publications will remain unknown and potentially out of control, which affects the whole research community financially.

The gold open access system offers the possibility for authors to know how much it cost to have their article published in any journal. Personally, I have a preference for this model, as it is most transparent and empowering to authors. As authors have to pay directly the cost of their publications, they are confronted with the consequences of their decisions. Even in the gold open access model, we must remain vigilant. If institutions and libraries propose to sign direct agreements with publishers, shortcutting the researcher's involvement, the role of researchers will again be diminished. Such agreements are complex and it is nearly impossible



to estimate individual costs and to regulate global costs. This is probably not the most transparent way to use public funding (i.e. taxpayers' money).

I anticipate your objection: "but, the researchers will have to pay from their research credits...". Not necessarily, if the institutions decide to systematically reimburse the cost of APCs to the researchers. It is a pretty easy decision to take for them. This system has the potential to offer many advantages, for both researchers and institutions. It would need another editorial to fully explore them.

As researchers who publish, we must care about the costs of articles. We need to have an informed understanding of the role we play with the choices we make. Every time we choose to submit an article to a specific journal, we are making a stand on the publishing model that we support.

The gold open system, as we know it, may not be the economic model for publishing that will be finally generalized in the future. I do not even know if the European Journal of Mineralogy (EJM) will remain a gold open access journal forever. Notwithstanding, currently it is the fairest and most sustainable system we can propose. It offers transparency and the tools the research community and institutions need to regulate the economic dimension of the publishing system.

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