EDITORIAL NOTES

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OPEN: OPEN ACCESS AND THE ACADEMIC FIELD

This issue of the Journal of Peer Production begins with a celebration of peer-reviewed Open Access (OA) journals. We approached a number of OA journal editors – see RFC Special section on open-access publishing for JoPP #13 – and requested that they respond to a questionnaire where they could reflect on their practice (see Ten questions to OA editors). We also suggested they select an editorial, manifesto or article which we could showcase in this issue. We were delighted by the enthusiasm with which our colleagues responded and we thank them for their time and effort.

The journals ranged from professionally funded and staffed ventures to wholly volunteer DIY projects. However, all shared a similar concern with the state of our field. The facts of the matter have been repeated often, to the point of exhaustion: academic publishing is a grotesquely egregious instance of monopolistic exploitation of labour. Jefferson D. Pooley, in his article 'Open media scholarship: The case for open access in media studies' (originally published in the *International Journal of Communication*), summarises the situation:

> Knowledge sharing is a means to make more and better knowledge, to be sure, but it is also an end in itself. We rightly recoil from proprietary knowledge cultures, such as those in industry, which hoard ideas as competitive advantage. [...] The galling bit is that all those profits are nothing but our labor. Scholars, in an honorable tradition, donate intellectual work and lend expertise to review and edit one another. Springer Nature, Wiley, and the other oligopolists bundle that labor and then sell it back to us—to our universities—for budget-crushing prices.

The absurdity reaches new heights with the introduction of so-called 'Gold' and 'Green' Open Access, where authors are charged thousands of dollars in order to make their work freely available with the desired publication badge. Not only that, but it turns out that some of the 'Big Five' academic publishers are truly bad corporate actors, combining their 34% profit margins (based on forcing libraries to buy 'bundles' of journals) with shady or frankly illegal practices such as organizing arms trade fairs; creating and selling fake journals to pharmaceutical companies to produce pharma-friendly content; and selling access to articles they don't own, including articles licensed for non-commercial use.[1] This prompted scholars in the mathematics community to launch the Cost of Knowledge pledge in 2012, by which they pledge never to publish, and/or review and/or edit for the worst offender, Elsevier.[2]

To be fair, the time and effort put in to improve the quality of an argument by reviewers and editors of excellent paywalled journals like Sage's *Organization Studies* is commendable – papers are sent out for revision once, twice, three times, until the article has 'reached its full potential'. There is something admirable about the peer review process, when it is done right. But not only is this process often frustratingly long, it is problematic because of the invisibility of the work of reviewers. Readers only see the end result and have no idea as to the role played in this scientific and creative process by

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reviewers who each make a distinctive and unique contribution: who knows how the article would have read if it had been reviewed by someone else?

The *Journal of Peer Production*'s peer review process was explicitly developed to acknowledge reviewers and speed up the peer review process. We elected to publish not only reviews (reviewers can choose to remain anonymous) but the original submissions. Our approach was also informed by Whitworth and Friedman's (2009) criticism of academic publishing as a form of competitive economics in which 'scarcity reflects demand, so high journal rejection rates become quality indicators'. This self-reinforcing system where journals that reject more attract more results in a situation where 'avoiding faults becomes more important than new ideas. Wrongly accepting a paper with a fault gives reputation consequences, while wrongly rejecting a useful paper leaves no evidence'. To this end, we introduced 'signals', numeric values attributed by reviewers after the revised paper has been submitted. It is then up to authors to decide whether they are happy with publishing a paper with the given signals. Letting authors decide whether to publish enables the journal to release a wider variety of submissions at a faster pace, whilst protecting its scientific reputation. Whilst this approach is worthwhile and innovative, its impact on the field is of course limited.

Systemic initiatives such as Plan S and DORA aim to compel publicly-funded research to be openly accessible. In their previously unpublished article Plan S and the economics of scientific journal publishing, Karine Nyborg *et al.* argue that this will not change the fundamental dynamics of the field in which article quality is proxied by journal status:

> Given the extremely large amount of research that exists, users cannot browse everything. They are left to rely on indicators of others' assessments when deciding which papers to read: citations, journal quality, personal knowledge of the author, information from colleagues, and so on. One cannot, of course,

simply rely on authors' claims about the excellence of their own research: while the author knows the content of the paper, he or she is not impartial. Similarly, since no-one is an expert in all fields, readers also need to rely on others' assessments concerning the quality of the research. For these reasons, there is a strong demand for quality indicators in research – which would prevail even if one decided, as postulated in the DORA declaration, to disregard the role such indicators play in hiring or funding decisions. The (informal) journal hierarchy can be regarded as a response to this.

Open access rubs up against the iron law of academic promotion. Since nothing challenges the journal hierarchy which derives from the information deficit caused by an over-abundance of literature, in the current system promotion boards only reward publications in highly-ranked paywalled outlets. Until new metrics are introduced, those university workers who are impelled by their habitus to pursue validation and success in their field will need to (at least partly) conform.

The interpenetration of price-gouging publishers and universities goes beyond exorbitant fees and solving information deficits. To stay with the example of Elsevier, this company uses its Scopus citation research database to propose a metrics system called SciVal to universities. Small and medium-sized players in the field thus embark in a partnership with SciVal in the hope that SciValled staff will be more productive and that this will boost their position in the university rankings. Major players in the field such as the University of California, who have longstanding reputational capital and strong research outputs, can afford to sever ties with Elsevier.[3] In other words petitioning libraries is not enough: many universities are part of a network of business arrangements of which scientific publishing only forms a small part.

The articles selected by the OA editors and their responses to our questionnaire contain a wealth of

proposals addressing paywalling. We highlight two that we found particularly interesting:

Thomas Roulet (*M@n@gement*) emphasises the role of professional associations as these entities are often well-endowed, and powerful: 'if top journals move to OA (and a large number of top journals are supported by an association that could finance such an endeavour) then it can trigger a movement'. This is known as *journal flipping*: converting a journal from closed to open access (Solomon et al., 2016). As Pooley puts it (op. cit., this issue), 'submitting to a low-prestige OA title is an act of quixotic self-sacrifice, whereas flipping a journal gets at the main thing propping up a publication's status: the ongoing labour and attention scholars invest.'

But what if submitting to OA journals was valued; what if it became a core metric?

Ekaterina Chertkovskaya (*ephemera*) argues that it is necessary for universities to recognise scholarly efforts in good quality open access independent journals. Further, she writes that 'Perhaps a collective call with several concrete ideas around these issues could be formulated together by scholars, librarians, students, open access journals and the broader public'. We believe these two ideas should be brought together. The demand, which should be made at every opportunity, that OA be included in university staff evaluations as a core 'social benefit' metric will need to be supported by a wide range of organisations and individuals who can make the case that social value is as important as research prestige, and that the two are not mutually exclusive.

We invite our fellow editors and researchers, other stakeholders and interested parties to debate and advance these and other proposals. This discussion could take place on the *Journal of Peer Production*'s public and archived mailing list [4] or in any other suitable venue.

OPEN: PEER REVIEWED ARTICLES

The peer reviewed articles in this issue explore openness beyond open access.

In 'A topological space for design, participation and production: Tracking spaces of transformation' Sandra Álvaro Sánchez draws on Serres' concept of spaces of transformation and applies it to analysis of hackerspaces and shared machine shops. Alvaro examines the topology of the network formed by hackerspace and shared machine shop nodes to understand the transformative capacity of these spaces both locally and globally.

Should everything be open? 'Openness, inclusion and self-affirmation: Indigenous knowledge in open knowledge projects' tackles the challenges of establishing a Wikipedia and Wikimedia content in the Atikamekw Nehirowisiw language. Nathalie Casemajor, Christian Coocoo, and Karine Gentelet analyse the complex web of relationships and interactions that exist between knowledge practices, ecosystems and infrastructures.

Anja-Lisa Hirscher and Ramia Mazé's 'Stuff matters in participation: Infrastructuring a co-sewing café' brings together the fields of peer production, participatory design and social practice theory to devise a framework for the analysis of a co-sewing café. The result is a design approach to a study of use and participation that has wider implications for analysis of production spaces like Makerspaces and Fablabs.

Kosmas Gavras critiques the limits of the definition of open source hardware. In 'Open Source beyond software: Re-invent open design on the common's ground' Gavras looks at open source hardware that is neither electronic or mechanical and proposes a new and more inclusive framework.

In 'Decentralising geographies of political action. Civic tech and place-based municipalism', originally submitted to our Varia section and edited by Peter Troxler, Omer Husain critically reviews the initiatives and practices of the Radical Municipalist movement in Spain. These passionate, motivated and diverse

communities working to enhance collaboration, mutual aid, solidarity and political engagement build on Murray Bookchin's contribution and can fruitfully interact with new technologies such as BlockChain.

OPEN: INVITED COMMENTS

'Nowhere' or 'Erewhon' are other names for Utopia, understood here as a more equal form of society. Our three invited comments describe recent developments in the process of developing the Commons, of bringing us closer to a world where work that is socially useful is better recognized and valued. Bringing Utopia to life requires a serious and sustained focus on concrete proposals. It's clear that information technology and social media megafirms have built their fortunes on the back of the free labour in F/OSS projects. They have sent resources back to projects in the shape of paying salaries to developers (who then become less autonomous) and in-kind support to events or hardware. Isn't it time they started giving back properly?

The dominant political-economic system seeks to render 'invisible' non-market forms of contributions, by ensuring that those who devote themselves to them do not consider them as 'work'. If, on the other hand, contributory activities were reimagined as forms of work, it would become possible to claim the benefit of a new form of reciprocity for commoners. In 'Common labour rights and right to work in the commons', legal scholar Lionel Maurel (who blogs under the name Calimaq) presents a range of French policy proposals and initiatives, including mechanisms to enable people who invest time and energy into contributions to the commons to convert these contributions into social benefits or 'social drawing rights'. If peer production and the commons are to be more than hobbies whose value is systematically captured by corporations, institutional mechanisms need to be put in place. Without concrete policy proposals, the commons will remain the purview of dilettantes who can afford to spend their free time, rather than a realistic option for the many.

The Open community health workshop brought together participants from Open Source, Citizen Science and Wikipedia. Using a comparative approach, the Report's collective authorship articulates common principles including how a shared understanding and assessment of open community health can be developed, as well as a taxonomy enabling a dialogue between communities that have developed disparate languages. 'Community health' refers to a community's resilience and ability to operate efficiently and sustainably throughout its life-cycle to fulfil its mission. This can be achieved by focusing on recruitment, retention, and engagement with an active community of people. The Report contributes a number of proposals intended to boost the practical and theoretical understanding of community health.

We finish on a high note with Angela Daly's reflexive account of the Good Data initiative (Daly *et al.*, 2019) and its relationship to peer production, 'Good data is (and as) peer production'. As ever-more information about people is generated, harvested, sold, analysed and used to make predictions about the subjects' future prospects, the question of who is involved at each of these stages, and to what degree, acquires greater acuity. 'Bad data' refers to hierarchical and domineering relationships where individuals and communities are exploited and unable to stop data about them being collected and used by governments and large for-profit corporations. Peer production principles such as transparency and self-management are clearly relevant here. Data's goodness is always related to the degree which it is created and used to increase the wellbeing of society and especially to increase the power of the most marginalized and disenfranchised. The Good Data Project also dovetails nicely with this issue's theme: it aspires to contribute to the 'hacking' of the university from within by working within institutional constraints to create fledgling alternatives, both through Good Data proposals aiming towards alternative, collaborative and socially just visions of the datafied

future, as well as by opting for a non-traditional open access publishing model.

ENDNOTES

[1] https://www.talyarkoni.org/blog/2016/12/12/why-i-still-wont-review-for-or-publish-with-elsevier-and-think-you-shouldnt-either/

[2] https://gowers.files.wordpress.com/2012/02/elsevierstatementfinal.pdf

[3] https://www.universityofcalifornia.edu/press-room/uc-terminates-subscriptions-worlds-largest-scientific-publisher-push-open-access-publicly

[4] https://lists.ourproject.org/cgi-bin/mailman/listinfo/jopp-public

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