RESCUE

WORKSHOP SUMMARY REPORT

LIBRARIES VS. PREDATORS: FROM THEORY TO PRACTICE

Report written by Tereza Šímová, Kristýna Zychová and Kristýna Paulová

April 23, 2024
Central Library of the Slovak Academy of Sciences,
Klemensova 19, Bratislava & Online
Over 100 participants

Outline

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www.stoppredatorypractice.com

Introduction

The rapidly evolving publishing landscape, particularly with the rise of Open Access (OA), has brought significant ethical challenges. Predatory practices, which exploit the OA model for profit without providing the rigorous editorial and publishing standards expected in scholarly communication, have become a pressing concern. In response to these issues, a dedicated workshop was organised to empower librarians in Slovakia and the Czech Republic with the knowledge and tools needed to tackle these unethical practices effectively.

This workshop, held under the auspices of the Roadmap to Improve Ethics in Science and Curb Predatory Publishing (RESCUE), was collaboratively organised by the Institute of Philosophy of the Czech Academy of Sciences, the Central Library of the Slovak Academy of Sciences, the Slovak Library Association, and the Association of Libraries of Czech Universities. The event aimed to foster cooperation among librarians from both countries, share good practices and discuss the region's local specificities regarding predatory issues.

In a hybrid format, the workshop facilitated a blend of theoretical insights and practical, hands-on learning. The morning session focused on delivering theoretical knowledge through expert presentations, whereas the afternoon was devoted to an interactive workshop focused on communicating information about predators among the scientific community, primarily through the methodological analysis of teaching exercises.

This report summarises the workshop proceedings, outlines the discussions, and presents the outcomes and recommendations for future actions. By doing so, it aims to provide a comprehensive overview that reflects the workshop's content and serves as a resource for furthering the fight against predatory practices in scholarly communication in Slovakia and the Czech Republic.

Morning Session: Theoretical Insights

Participants were welcomed by Michal Sliacky, Director of the Central Library of the Slovak Academy of Sciences, who also moderated the event.

The Dark Side of Open Publishing: An Introduction to Predatory Practices

Speaker: Kristýna Zychová, Czech University of Life Sciences, Association of Libraries of Czech Universities [<u>presentation is available here, in Czech only</u>]

This presentation explored the troubling aspects of OA publishing, mainly focusing on the emergence and evolution of predatory practices within academic publishing. Initially, the presentation traced the history of scholarly communication, from personal correspondences to the first scholarly journals in 1665 and the subsequent shift to digital formats and OA in the 1990s, spurred by the Internet and dissatisfaction with journal subscription costs. The future of predatory practices with the advancement of AI and technology was briefly mentioned, suggesting that while these tools might eliminate issues like grammatical errors, they could also refine predatory tactics. Further, the presentation also introduced the concept of "predatory publishing", a term coined by Jeffrey Beall in 2010 to describe exploitative publishers who misuse the author-pays model to profit without providing standard academic services like peer review. Despite its early utility, Beall's List faced criticism for its lack of transparency and institutional support, eventually leading to its discontinuation. The discussion also highlighted other terms such as "deceptive," "non-credible," and "questionable" practices used to describe similar unethical behaviours in publishing. Significant emphasis was placed on the impact of predatory practices, which compromise research quality and integrity and misdirect research funding and academic careers and affect evidence-based policies. The types of predatory practices were detailed, including publishers who forego rigorous peer review and conferences that profit from registration fees without contributing qualitatively to the scientific community.

Past and Present of Publishing Ethics

Speaker: Zuzana Stožická, Slovak Center of Scientific and Technical Information [presentation is available here, in Slovak only]

Zuzana Stožická, a distinguished expert on Open Science (OS) from Slovakia, has significantly contributed to the field of scientific communication, mainly through her role at the Contact Office for OS at the Centre for Scientific and Technical Information of the Slovak Republic (CVTI SR). Since 2017, she has been involved in initiatives like the Slovakia National Strategy for OS (2021-2028) to enhance scientific integrity and accessibility.

During her presentation titled "Past and Present of Publishing Ethics", Zuzana explored the evolution of publishing ethics from the advent of print in the 15th century through the digital revolution at the end of the 20th century. She highlighted how technological advancements have shifted the dynamics of scientific communication and emphasised the foundational principles of research integrity: honesty, reliability, transparency, care, respect, and accountability. Zuzana stressed the importance of addressing integrity issues responsibly and comprehensively to prevent the sensationalisation of science communication. She advocated removing barriers that promote power imbalances and predatory practices within the publishing industry. Her recommendations underscored the need for an OS environment that fosters efficiency, fairness, transparency, and reproducibility, which is crucial for maintaining high standards of research integrity. Through her insights, Zuzana provided practical guidance for librarians and academics to navigate and enhance the ethical landscape of scientific communication.

Global Perspective, Regional and Disciplinary Differences in Predatory Publishing

Speaker: Tereza Šímová, Institute of Philosophy Czech Academy of Science [presentation is available here, in Czech only]

Tereza Šímová's presentation at the workshop provided a comprehensive global perspective on the regional and disciplinary differences in predatory publishing. Tereza crafted three fictional narratives of researchers from India, the USA, and South Africa to illustrate the diverse challenges and approaches to understanding and combating predatory practices. These stories served as powerful illustrations of how predatory practices can impact the careers and decision-making of researchers in different contexts. For instance, Anika Patel from India faces dilemmas about whether to publish OA due to fluctuating governmental recognition of gold OA journals, reflecting the insecurity surrounding predatory journals' credibility. Similarly, Prof. Charles Johnson discovers his name has been misused by a predatory journal, a common predicament for scholars in the USA, where many predatory journals falsely claim local affiliations. Lastly, Nia Suluhu from South Africa grapples with international career prospects hampered by her publication record in journals considered predatory by foreign standards. Her presentation underscored the importance of global cooperation and shared standards to effectively address the challenges posed by predatory publishing, thus ensuring the integrity of scholarly communication worldwide.

Fictional stories from India, USA and South Africa

The stories and animations are fictional, they serve only to illustrate the presentation. Animations and stories were created using OpenAI, ChatGPT [OpenAI (2023) ChatGPT (April 24 Version). Available at: https://chat.openai.com (Accessed: 24 April 2024)]

The Role of Libraries in the Fight Against Predatory Practices
Speaker: Kristýna Paulová, Czech University of Life Sciences, Association of Libraries of Czech Universities [<u>presentation is available here, in Czech only</u>]

Kristýna Paulová focused on describing various possibilities of how libraries as institutions can prevent predatory practices or limit their impact on the scientific community. In addition to the already traditional role of libraries as providers of information about predatory practices, libraries can also take on other roles. For example, provide analysis of the publication process and co-creator of methodological, conceptual or strategic documents at the institutional and national levels. However, the role of libraries as those who educate their users and inform them about predators, warn about and advise on how to recognise and avoid predatory practices still resonates the most among the workshop participants. Kristýna also drew attention to the dangers of this role, such as labelling specific journals or publishers as predatory, which carries the risk of lawsuits. Kristýna then formulated recommendations that could lead libraries to the best possible results in the fight against predatory practices. Workshop participants could also share the barriers preventing them from better fulfilling their role as librarians. Most often, it was a missing national or institutional policy that would better define the institution's attitude towards predatory practices, insufficient staffing, and a lack of deep knowledge about the topic.

Afternoon Session: Interactive Workshop

Led by: Kristýna Paulová, Kristýna Zychová and Tereza Šímová

The afternoon session was dedicated to an interactive workshop focusing on our teaching module on predatory practices. The session was mainly designed to train librarians, enabling them to use the teaching module within their institutions effectively. This "train the trainer" approach is crucial for spreading knowledge and skills necessary for identifying and combating predatory practices in academic publishing. The presentation from the workshop is available here, in Czech only.

During this session, we showcased a set of five independent exercises, each thoughtfully developed to address different facets of predatory practices and to make teaching about predatory practices more effective.

- **Evocation and Expectation:** This exercise is recommended as the starting point of any teaching module. It helps set the session's tone, allowing participants to articulate their initial thoughts and expectations. Participants can clear preconceived notions and focus on the new information presented during the workshop by engaging in this exercise.
- **Consider the Importance:** Positioned after discussions on OA, this exercise serves as an introduction to evaluating the trustworthiness of journals. It primes participants for a deeper discussion on predatory journals by encouraging them to consider the importance of reliability and integrity in academic publications.
- **Recognize a Predator**: Directly linked to the characteristics of predatory journals, this exercise challenges participants to apply their knowledge in identifying potential predatory practices. It is a critical exercise that enhances the participants' ability to scrutinise various journals and effectively distinguish between legitimate and predatory ones.

- **Travelling Without Predators:** This exercise relates to predatory conferences, highlighting their characteristics and potential risks. It guides participants through evaluating the legitimacy of conferences, thus preventing them from falling prey to such predatory setups.
- **Reflection:** This exercise is recommended for the conclusion of the teaching session, as it encourages participants to reflect on the information and skills they have acquired. It provides an opportunity for introspection on implementing these learnings in their professional settings to safeguard their institutions and colleagues from predatory practices.

The interactive nature of these exercises ensured that participants left the workshop equipped with theoretical knowledge and practical tools and strategies. These are immediately applicable in their roles as librarians, further extending the workshop's impact beyond its immediate audience.

In the latter part of the afternoon session, the workshop transitioned into an open discussion focusing on the nuances of predatory practices, particularly those relevant to local contexts in Slovakia and the Czech Republic. Participants engaged in a lively debate about publishers like MDPI and other journals that inhabit a grey area. Although institutions such as the Slovak and Czech Academy of Sciences advise against publishing in these journals, the reality often differs, with many academics still choosing to publish their work through these channels. This discrepancy underscores the complexity of the issue and the need for clear guidance and education on the topic. Furthermore, the discussion highlighted the crucial role of pedagogical skills in teaching about predatory practices. It was noted that librarians, often at the forefront of instructing peers and researchers about these issues, typically lack formal pedagogical training. This gap emphasises the importance of such workshops providing content knowledge and focusing on teaching methodologies to effectively disseminate this knowledge within their institutions.

Local and EU funding policies and research assessments significantly influence academic publishing choices in Slovakia and the Czech Republic. The pressure to publish in high-impact journals, driven by funding criteria that often prioritise quantity and visibility of publications, can inadvertently push researchers towards questionable publishers that promise quick publication times and high visibility. This situation is compounded by both countries' historical and cultural contexts, where academic communities are transitioning from post-communist academic norms to more globalised standards. This shift has left gaps in understanding and adapting to international publishing ethics, making researchers more susceptible to predatory practices. These dynamics underscore the need for robust, locally tailored training and policies that enhance awareness and resilience against unethical publishing practices.

Participant Feedback Summary

Feedback from participants was highly positive (4.75 from 5 possible points), particularly praising the interactive and expert-led presentations. Key highlights included the practical teaching model, animated characters depicting global scenarios, and insightful discussions on the role of libraries in combating predatory practices. The website stoppredatorypractice.com was noted for its valuable content for academic libraries, and the hands-on afternoon workshop was commended for its clarity and applicability.

Attendees suggested improvements mainly around the technical setup of the meeting, recommending enhancements to the sound system. Overall, the workshop successfully provided participants with essential strategies to recognise and combat predatory practices, strengthening the academic integrity within the Czech and Slovak library communities.

Key Outcomes

The workshop successfully highlighted the evolving challenges of predatory publishing, enhancing participants' understanding through collaborative discussions and practical exercises. The outcomes of the workshop are as follows:

Established Cooperation for Future Projects: One of the most significant outcomes of the workshop was the establishment of cooperation among academies of science and librarians from Slovakia and the Czech Republic. This collaboration paves the way for future projects and events that will continue to address and combat predatory practices.

Enhanced Understanding of Predatory Practices: Through theoretical insights and interactive exercises, participants gained a deeper understanding of the mechanisms and consequences of predatory publishing. This knowledge is crucial for librarians guiding researchers in their respective institutions.

I**dentification of Local Specifics:** The discussion highlighted specific challenges faced in the local contexts of Slovakia and the Czech Republic. Participants noted the prevalence of grey-area journals like MDPI and discussed how the pressures of research assessment criteria influence journal choice, often pushing researchers towards these questionable publishers. Recognising the complexities of these dynamics is essential for crafting targeted strategies to address and mitigate such issues' impact effectively. As a key outcome, the workshop underscored the urgent need to integrate pedagogical skills into library training programs. This integration aims to enhance the effectiveness of librarians in educating and guiding researchers about predatory practices. Developing awareness campaigns and sharing information about predatory journals were crucial steps to increase transparency and protect the integrity of scholarly communication in both countries.

Recommendations

This section outlines targeted recommendations for the Czech Republic and Slovakia, developed in response to the challenges of predatory publishing highlighted during our workshop. By implementing these strategies, we seek to enhance research integrity and promote a culture of ethical publishing across both nations.

Implement National Workshops and Training Programs: Establish regular training programs and workshops across libraries in both countries, focusing on training the trainer sessions and detecting and avoiding predatory practices. These should include practical sessions specific to the regional challenges local researchers face.

Strengthen Cross-Border Library Cooperation: Encourage stronger cooperation between the Czech Republic and Slovakia libraries to share resources, strategies, and information on combating predatory practices. This can include joint digital platforms for sharing information and regular cross-border meetings.

Integrate Pedagogical Skills into Librarian Training: Recognize the lack of pedagogical training as a gap in the current education of librarians. Academic institutions and library associations should work together to integrate effective teaching methodologies into the curriculum of library sciences or provide pedagogic training as life-long education.

Facilitate Cross-Institutional Discussions and Awareness Campaigns: Organize cross-institutional discussions involving universities, research institutions, and libraries to raise awareness about predatory practices. For example, creating forums and platforms where libraries, academic institutions, and research bodies can continuously exchange insights and updates on combating predatory practices. Campaigns could focus on educating researchers about the importance of publishing ethics and the risks associated with predatory journals.

Advocate for Reforms in Research Evaluation: Lobby for policy reforms at the national and institutional levels to modify how research outputs are evaluated, moving away from a 'publish or perish' model. Encourage evaluation criteria that reward research quality and integrity over quantity. Ensure that local policies align with broader European frameworks and regulations, particularly those that influence OA and publishing standards.

Active Participation of Libraries as Change Agents: Another key outcome highlighted was the need to focus on the active participation of libraries as key players capable of influencing and supporting change within the academic publishing landscape. Libraries are uniquely positioned to lead efforts in educating researchers, curating resources, and implementing institutional policies that promote ethical publishing practices. The role of libraries should be emphasised and supported, recognising their potential to drive significant improvements in maintaining the integrity of scholarly communication.

Explore AI Tools for Identifying Predatory Practices: Encourage the exploration of AI to detect predatory publishing. Institutions should assess how AI can analyse publishing trends and identify predatory behaviours while staying aware of how predators might use such technologies. Maintaining an informed understanding of AI's potential benefits and risks in scholarly publishing is essential.

Conclusion and Acknowledgements

The "Libraries vs. Predators: From Theory to Practice" workshop successfully bridged the gap between theoretical knowledge and practical application, equipping librarians from Slovakia and the Czech Republic with essential strategies to combat predatory publishing. We extend our heartfelt thanks to the local organisers, notably the Central Library of the Slovak Academy of Sciences and the Slovak Library Association, as well as our colleagues from the RESCUE consortium for their inspiration and the InterAcademy Partnership for their support.

Photos from the event

Invitation (in Slovak only)

Prihláste sa na
bit.ly/predatoriUKSAV

Pridajte sa k nám na akciu:

KNIŽNICE PROTI PREDÁTOROM: OD TEÓRIE K PRAXI

23. apríla 2024, 9:30-15:00

Ústredná knižnica Slovenskej akadémie vied & Online

Pridajte sa k nám a preskúmajte, ako môžu knižnice čeliť výzvam predátorských publikačných praktík.

Program

Teoretická časť 9:30 - 11:30 [osobne na mieste & online]

- **Temná stránka publikovania s otvoreným prístupom: Úvod do predátorských praktík**
  Kristýna Zychová, ČZU, AKVŠ
- **Publikačná etika včera a dnes**
  Zuzana Stožická, CVTI SR
- **Globálna perspektíva, regionálne a disciplinárne rozdiely v predátorskom publikovaní**
  Tereza Šímová, FLÚ, ČZU, AKVŠ
- **Úloha knižníc v boji proti predátorským praktikám**
  Kristýna Paulová, ČZU, AKVŠ

Workshop 13:00 - 15:00 [osobne na mieste]

Interaktívny workshop je určený pre knihovníkov, ktorí chcú rozvíjať svoje zručnosti a získať informácie potrebné na identifikáciu predátorských konferencií, časopisov a vydavateľov. Na stretnutí bude predstavený kompletný vzdelávací modul, ktorý je okamžite použiteľný a ponúka širokú škálu cvičení založených na skutočných prípadoch. Tieto materiály sú navrhnuté tak, aby poskytli praktické zručnosti na rozpoznávanie neetických praktík a sú ľahko prenosné do vzdelávacích programov pre iných knihovníkov. Workshop má obmedzenú kapacitu.

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