Federation of Finnish Learned Societies

# Grey-zone between legitimate and predatory scholarly publishing

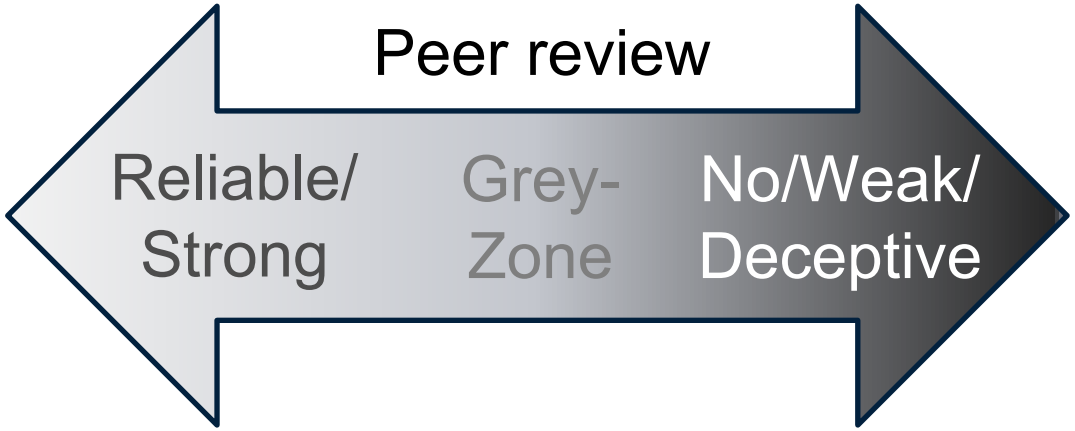
Janne Pölönen (TSV) &
Gunnar Sivertsen (NIFU)

## STI 2021 Conference

Parallel Session A.2: Questionable publishing across countries

# Ambiguity in identification of peer-reviewed journals and book publishers

- “We use the term ‘grey zone’ to refer to the range of outlets and outputs, the peer review status of which is ambiguous” (Pölönen, Engels & Guns, 2019)



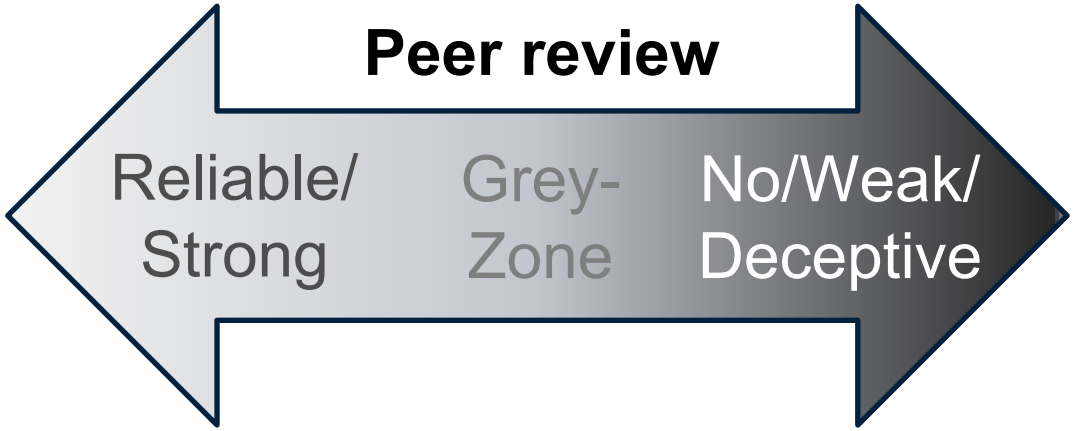
Pölönen, J., Engels, T., & Guns, R. (2019). Ambiguity in identification of peer-reviewed publications in the Finnish and Flemish performance-based research funding systems. *Science and Public Policy*. https://doi.org/10.1093/scipol/scz041

# Whitelists and blacklists of scholarly publishing channels

- Questionable or predatory publishing takes advantage of the APC-based OA publishing model at the expense of scientific quality
- Whitelists are supposed to list properly peer-reviewed journals with expert editorial boards, while blacklists aim to indicate journals failing the standards of academic rigor

**WHITELISTS**

- DOAJ
- Web of Science
- Scopus
- National lists
  - Denmark
  - Finland
  - Norway




**BLACKLISTS**

- Cabells Predatory reports (76 criteria)
- ~~Beall's list~~

- DOAJ removed (editorial misconduct)

Nelhans, G. & Bodin, T. Methodological considerations for identifying questionable publishing in a national context: The case of Swedish Higher Education Institutions. Quantitative Science Studies 2020; 1 (2): 505–524. https://doi.org/10.1162/qss_a_00033

Krawczyk, F. & Kulczycki, E. How is open access accused of being predatory? The impact of Beall's lists of predatory journals on academic publishing. Journal of Academic Librarianship 2021; 47 (2): 102271. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.acalib.2020.102271

# Intermediate solution: China's Early Warning List of International Journals (Trial)

- In the end of 2020, the Chinese Academy of Sciences published Early Warning List of International Journals including 65 journals.
- Each journal is placed to one of three warning levels (low, medium or high) to highlight journals with risk characteristics and potential quality issues.
  - Critieria include number of articles in the journal, degree of internationalization of authors, rejection rate, paper processing fee (APC), journal transcendence index, self-citation rate, retraction information, etc.

| Publisher | Journals |
|---|---|
| MDPI | 22 |
| IEEE | 1 |
| Hindawi | 4 |
| Spandidos | 5 |
| Other major | 16 |
| Other | 17 |

C. Petrou, Guest Post – An Early Look at the Impact of the Chinese Academy of Sciences Journals Warning List. The Scholarly Kitchen. https://scholarlykitchen.sspnet.org/2021/04/14/guest-post-an-early-look-at-the-impact-of-the-chinese-academy-of-sciences-journals-warning-list/

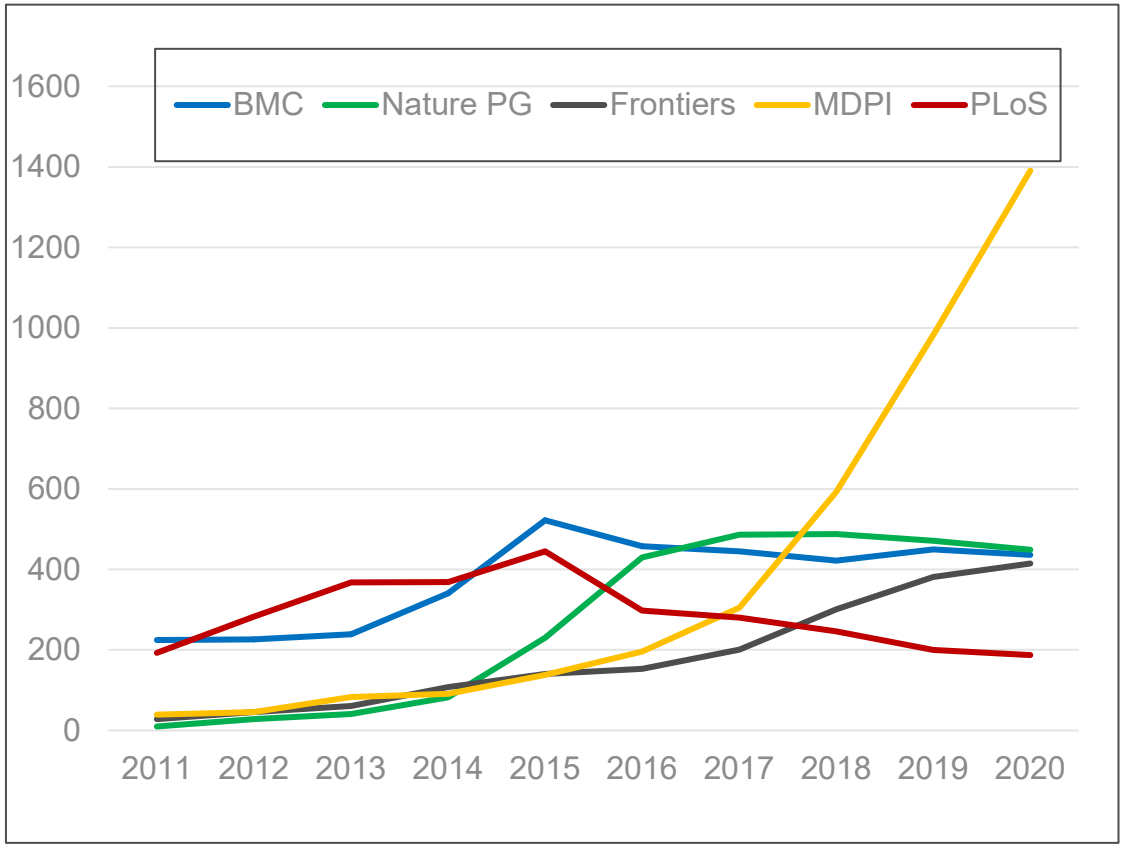
# Research assessment and funding systems relying on whitelists and blacklists should be concerned

- Whitelists include most of the 65 journals highlighted with potential quality risk
  - In Finland 1 journal, and in Denmark 4 journals, are on level 2 (leading)
  - In Finland 4 journals are on level 0, and in Norway 2 journals are level 0 and 2 are level X
- Practically all 65 journals are not included in Cabells' Predatory reports or DOAJ list of removed journals

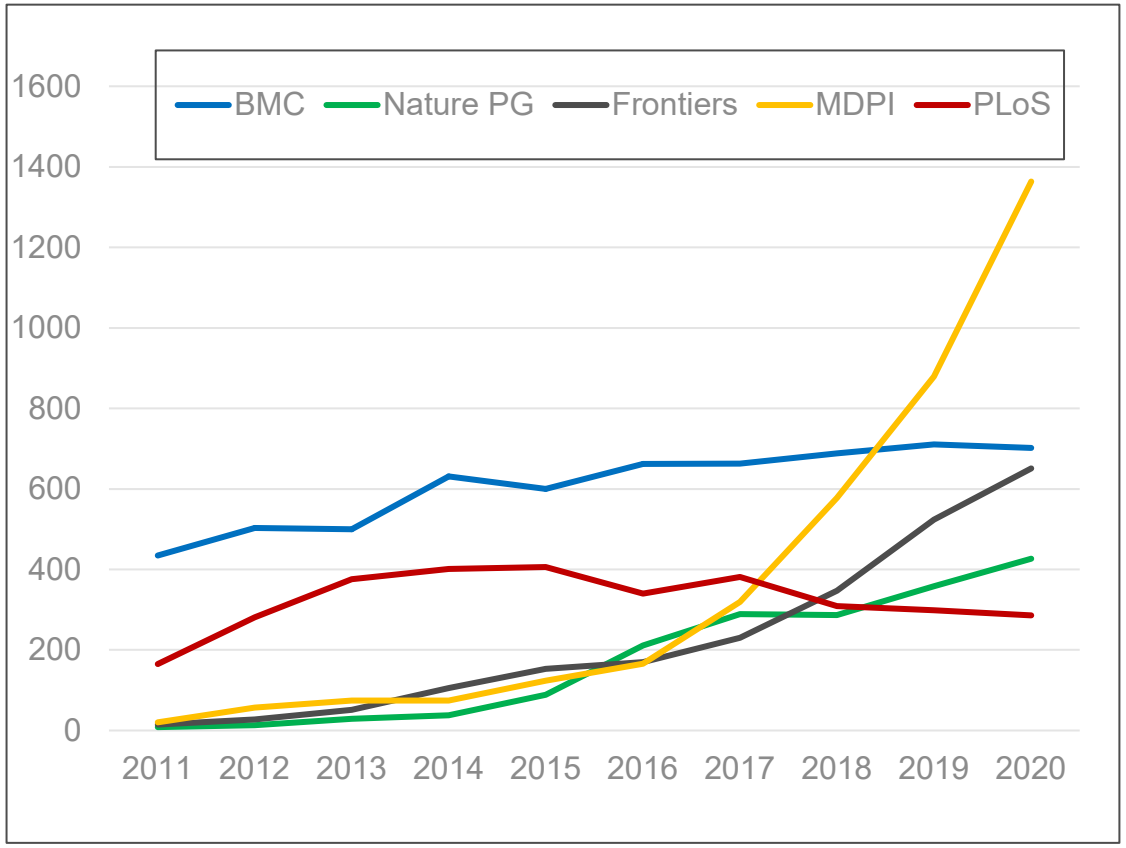
| List | Includes | Excludes | % incl. |
|---|---|---|---|
| **Whitelists** | | | |
| DOAJ | 40 | 25 | 62 % |
| Web od Science | 62 | 3 | 95 % |
| Scopus | 57 | 8 | 88 % |
| Denmark (level 1-2) | 40 | 25 | 62 % |
| Finland (level 1-2) | 59 | 6 | 91 % |
| Norway (level 1) | 58 | 7 | 89 % |
| **Blacklists** | | | |
| Cabells | 1 | 64 | 2 % |
| DOAJ removed | 0 | 65 | 0 % |

# Largest commercial APC-based publishers indexed in DOAJ fastly increase their publication volumes (especially MDPI)

## FINLAND




## NORWAY






Federation of Finnish Learned Societies

# Whitelists and blaclists are not sufficient to address quality issues and concerns

- Formal and technical criteria are easy to fulfill
  - In Denmark and Finland, expert panels assessing formal level 1 criteria might disapprove questionable journals but there is no clear definition and there are also strategic considerations (funding/classification)
  - In Norway, level 1 is administrative decision, however now a level X is introduced to ask research community for expert feedback
- Possible solution could be a warning lists or recommendable journal lists based on expert-assessment
  - Not connected to funding or assessment

| RED LIGHT | YELLOW LIGHT |
|---|---|
| • Making false claims regarding:<br>  • impact factor<br>  • editorial personnel<br>  • editorial vetting and/or peer review<br>  • selectivity (in fact publishing any article for which the APC is paid)<br>  • affiliation with a society or other scholarly/scientific organization<br>  • affiliation with scientific/scholarly societies or organizations<br>  • inclusion in a specific index<br>• Taking previously published content from other journals and presenting it as new and original<br>• Publishing only research results that favor the interests of some group or organization<br>• Pervasive or systematic plagiarism | • Lack of transparency about APC charges<br>• Misleading journal title<br>• Excessively rapid publication turnaround<br>• False office addresses<br>• One editor is listed as edi-tor-in-chief for a large number of titles<br>• No editor-in-chief is identified<br>• One editorial board is listed for a large number of titles<br>• Publishing articles far outside of journal scope<br>• Excessively broad journal scope<br>• Publishing obvious pseudo-sci-ence<br>• Lack of a retraction policy and/or practice of “stealth retraction” |



Teixeira da Silva, J.A., Dunleavy, D.J., Moradzadeh, M. et al. A credit-like rating system to determine the legitimacy of scientific journals and publishers. Scientometrics (2021). https://doi.org/10.1007/s11192-021-04118-3

Anderson, R. (2019). Deceptive publishing. OSI Issue Brief 3. Open Scholarship Initiative. https://dx.doi.org/10.13021/osi2019.2419

Federation of Finnish Learned Societies

Thank you for your attention!

Questions or comments?