

Interactive comment on “Joint Editorial

“On the future of journal publications in hydrology” by G. Blöschl et al.

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This contribution is a preface appearing at the same time in five international scientific hydrological journals (Hydrology and Earth System Sciences, Water Resources Research, Journal of Hydrology, Hydrology Research, Hydrological Sciences Journal). It reports of a meeting of the Editors in Chief of those journals during the IAHS Assembly in 2013 in Gothenburg Sweden. Erwin Zehe asked me to read this preface and to comment on it. At first, I thought I was asked to give a review, but after some time it came clear to me that it does not make any sense to review a piece of text which already has been printed in some of the mentioned journals and after all, which is no scientific text. It is, however a kind of minutes from that meeting. Therefore, instead of trying to

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review meeting minutes, I just present here some of my thoughts and concerns about the development of publication activities in hydrology (which are very similar to many other scientific fields) over the last decade(s). And in such, this little preface can have an important effect: it may trigger a urgently needed broad discussion about our publication culture. I.e., the scientific community (now termed “we”) needs to reflect on how to value research results and how to achieve efficient and fair scientific communication.

The fact (numbers) given in this preface is the total number of submitted publications (~5000) and the number of accepted papers (~2000) in 2013. This is rather interesting, because now we know that the average acceptance in hydrology rate is roughly 40 %. It would have been even more interesting to see such figures more in detail, e.g. separate for each journal, country of submission, or even topics/ scientific fields of hydrology. WE NEED MORE DETAILED DATA ON THE DEVELOPMENT OF PUBLICATIONS IN HYDROLOGY.

On page 4211, line 27, the authors also confess that the increase in submissions also has downsides. Everybody who is routinely conducting reviews or who is organizing the review process (ass. editors, editors in chief etc.) can only agree to this statement. However, at the same page, line 21, the authors claim that hydrology has witnessed a substantial increase in productivity – based on the increased number of submissions and publications. I have a feeling (but cannot prove it, because I have no crisp numbers at hand) that this statement is too simple. Productivity in science must not be calculated by submissions/time/space/human! WE NEED TO DISCUSS ABOUT BETTER MEASURES OF SCIENTIFIC SUCCESS AND PROGRESS.

Besides several good ideas in this preface, e.g. on the appreciation of data, I miss the discussion or at least mentioning of several other topics with the development of publication “culture” in hydrology, e.g.:

* How would an “ideal journal” look like? I feel that the open access is a real progress – for the readers. But it is hardly a progress for the authors. Submitting a paper has

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become expensive through the introduction of open-access journals. Nowadays, scientists from poor countries or poor institutions can read papers through open access journals, but they can hardly afford to submit into those journals. WE NEED TO DISCUSS THE POSSIBILITY OF INTRODUCING CHEAP OPEN ACCESS JOURNALS. We have to realize that a commercialized culture of publishing scientific results (including such multi-national companies as Thomson Scientific) is not necessarily for the good of science! I do not pledge here for non-professional publication platforms, but the currently existing mechanisms are far from being optimal for the researchers.

* How much publications are digestible? I have the feeling (but –again - cannot prove it, because I have no crisp numbers at hand) that the publication “culture” is overheated since many years: more submissions and articles than potential readers. Where does this lead to? The quality of the reviews may decline. Or even some journals will publish without conducting real reviews (this seems to be the strategy of many of these recently new born open access journals in various corners of the globe). Or, some serious journals have to close down their activity, because the publication company could not find appropriate editors in chief anymore. I have heard at least from one such case. DOES IT MAKE SENSE TO INTRODUCE A KIND OF SELF REGULATING MECHANISM TO REDUCE THE NUMBER OF PUBLICATIONS? Regulations do often not properly work, but a discussion might already provoke some action: what do you think about regulations, such as: minutes of project meetings should not be blown up to scientific papers? One author might be allowed to only submit one paper /year/journal? A master thesis should not produce more than one paper (or none)? A PhD thesis should not produce more than two papers? You find these ideas strange? As you may remember, progress often starts with strange ideas.

* Are there better ways to value and appreciate scientific success compared to the present status? How long do we still accept to look at the numbers of publications, the number of citations, the Hirsch-coefficient etc. and regard this as a kind of unbiased measure? WE SHOULD LOOK TO ORGANISATIONSS (SUCH AS THE GERMAN

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SCIENCE SOCIETY, DFG), WHO NOW FOLLOW DIFFERENT CONCEPTS. E.g., for submitting a research proposal to DFG, DFG now does accept literature lists form an applicant containing maximum 10 publications. The idea behind is: look ‘what one has done’ and not ‘how much’ has been produced. An too comprehensive listing may mislead our views.

Concluding my - maybe strange - thoughts, written down at Saturday evening after the week at the EGU Assembly, (of course at home, because there is no time for such activities in the normal working live of scientists) I am still – or even more than before – convinced that we need a free and deep discussion about our publication culture. In that regard, this preface was a nice piece of initial discussion. Thank you, dear editors, for that. And thank you, for all your efforts and responsible activities during all those years as editors in chief of these well-known journals. It is not your fault that the system is overheated. But we all have to realize it and to act.

Cheers, Axel

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