

WORDS BEYOND THE PANDEMIC: A HUNDRED-SIDED CRISIS

Coord.: José Reis
A collective work by CES

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Centro de Estudos Sociais
Universidade de Coimbra



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SCIENTIFIC PUBLICATION

Tiago Santos Pereira

Having emerged as the main means of scientific communication since the 17th century, promoting the dissemination of knowledge and ensuring the credibility of results through peer review, scientific publication today faces significant challenges. Journal publishing, traditionally led by scientific societies and institutions, has become a lucrative business, dominated by a limited set of private publishers. By charging scientists to access, in the traditional model, or to publish, in the open access model, publishers have their revenue guaranteed by the academic institutions that produce the content of these very same publishers. The debate around open access was important to challenge the system in place, but despite its altering the terms of the business, the power relation remained the same, and inequalities were possibly further intensified. With costs of access being transferred to the publication of articles, countries and institutions with greater funds have a greater chance to publish and, hence, reinforce their prominent role in the production of knowledge and its potential impacts. On the other hand, the dominant assessment system, based on the impact of journals rather than individual publications and valuing quantity, works as an incentive to increase publication, thus guaranteeing profit. With this growing “market”, new publishing houses and journals also emerge, predatorily, attracting researchers with promises of easy and fast publication and decreasing scientific rigour and quality. With the increase in supply and demand, the

number of scientific publications continues to follow the same trend, which limits their capacity to represent an area of open scientific debate and social impact that they once promoted.

The scientific publication system should no longer be dominated by the publishing system or by the continuous increase of publications, and scientists should strive for a model of publication and evaluation that contributes to the main goals of knowledge dissemination, of high quality and social impact, diversified and accessible. That is exactly what the current COVID-19 pandemic has demonstrated, by promoting new ways of publishing and openly disseminating data and publications, as well as by showing the importance of ethical practices and the difficulty in regulating them simply by traditional means of publication. The alternative, therefore, has to cover two avenues. On the one hand, institutional incentives should no longer encourage the unlimited increase in publications, but rather value quality, the social impact of research, and open discussion. On the other hand, public funding should ensure support for editorial initiatives – both of an innovative and traditional nature, as was the case with the repositories or open science – led by scientists, without the goal of profit, with diversified objectives and audiences, and aimed at ensuring that competition in publishing is determined not by the market but by science as a public good.