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Peer review in Croatian Open Access scholarly and professional journals: a cross-disciplinary survey

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Objective

The peer-review process in Croatian OA journals was investigated in order to identify journal practices.



Materials and methods

Online questionnaire was sent by email to journal editors from the Hrcak repository of Croatian OA journals. We collected the data on discipline, acceptance rate, peer review type, guidelines for peer reviewers, number of reviewers in the editorial systems, duration of peer review process, ethical issues, and editorial freedom and integrity. The data was collected during February 2017.



Literature

Hebrang Grgić, Ivana. Scholarly Journals at the Periphery: the case of Croatia. Learned publishing. 27, 1(2014) : 15-20

Hrcak: portal of Croatian Scientific journals. Available at: www.hrcak.hr

Stojanovski, Jadranka. Do Croatian open access journals support ethical research? Content analysis of instructions to authors. Biochemia medica. 25, 1(2015) : 12-21

Results

Acceptance rate

Average number of submitted manuscripts per year is 31 for SSH and 103 for STM. In average, 10 manuscripts per year are rejected on the editorial level for SSH and 41 for STM. Journals from the fields of SSH publish 14 papers per year (acceptance rate 45%) and from the fields of STM 36 papers (acceptance rate 35%) (Chart 1).

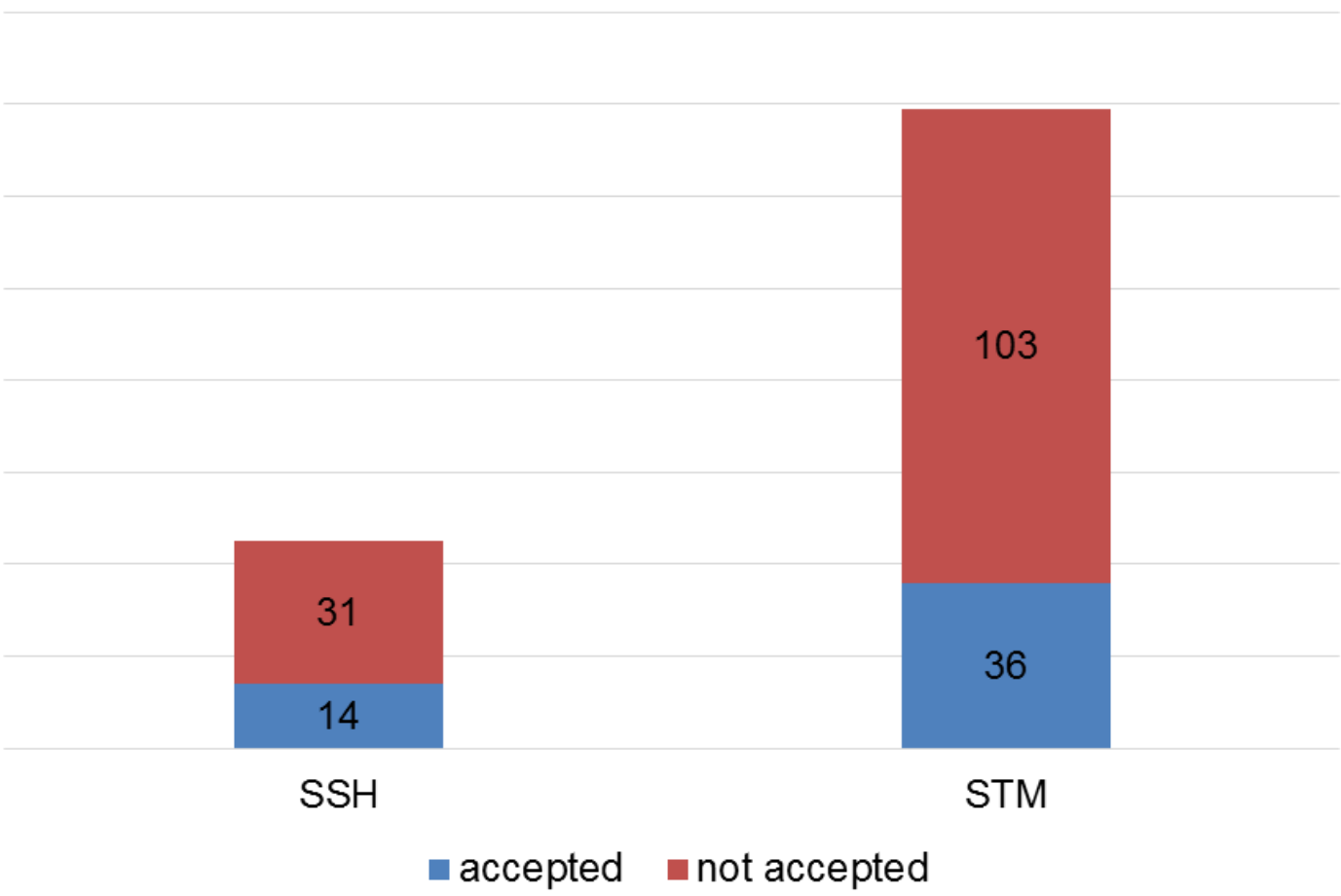


Chart 1. Accepted and rejected manuscripts per year

Timeliness

Table 1 shows mean numbers of days (and standard error) from submission to editor's decision to publication. The total mean number of days is similar for both fields – 147 for SSH and 139 for STM. The longest period in the SSH fields is from editor's decision to publication of article and in STM fields the longest period is from peer reviewers' acceptance to editor's decision.

Mean number of days from...	SSH (SE)	STM (SE)
...submission to the peer reviewers' acceptance	17 (2)	11 (1)
... peer reviewers' acceptance to the last peer review submitted	46 (3)	59 (5)
... the last peer review submitted to the editor's decision on acceptance or rejection	16 (2)	13 (1)
... editor's decision to publication	68 (5)	56 (8)

Table 1. Timeliness of publishing

Peer reviewers

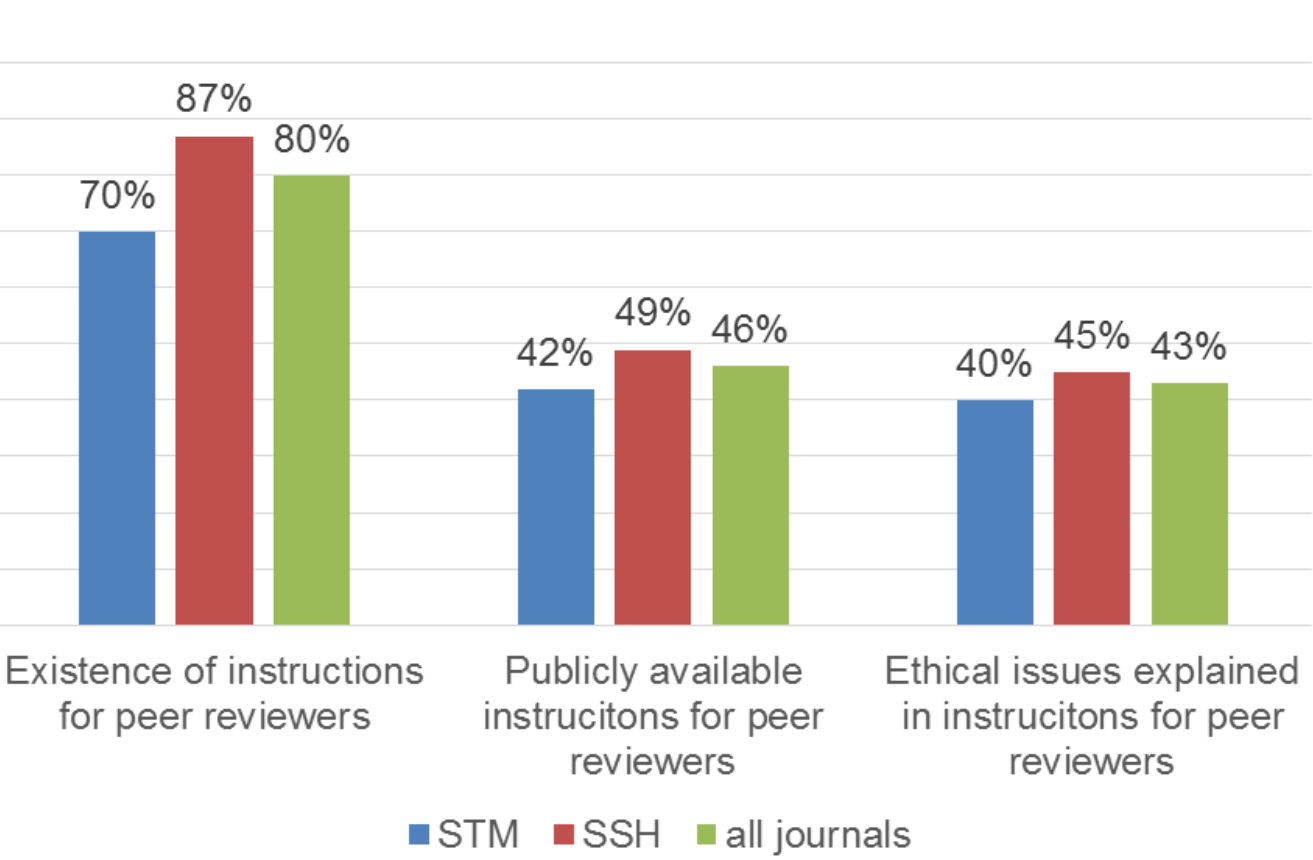


Chart 2. Availability and content of instruction for peer reviewers

There is significant difference in the type of peer review, 87% SSH journals employ double blind peer review, comparing with 47% in STM journals. Instructions for peer reviewers are provided by 31% STM and 41% SSH journals. Other journals provide only structured forms for the reviewers. Less than half of the journals include ethical issues like plagiarism, expression of concern or confidentiality in the instructions for reviewers (Chart 2). Editors are in general very satisfied with the quality of the submitted reviews (Chart 3). It takes in average 80 days to make decision about the acceptance of manuscript and another 62 days to publish the accepted paper. 86% of the STM and 80% of the SSH editors believe they have editorial freedom and integrity, and 11% and 14% respectively believe they do not.

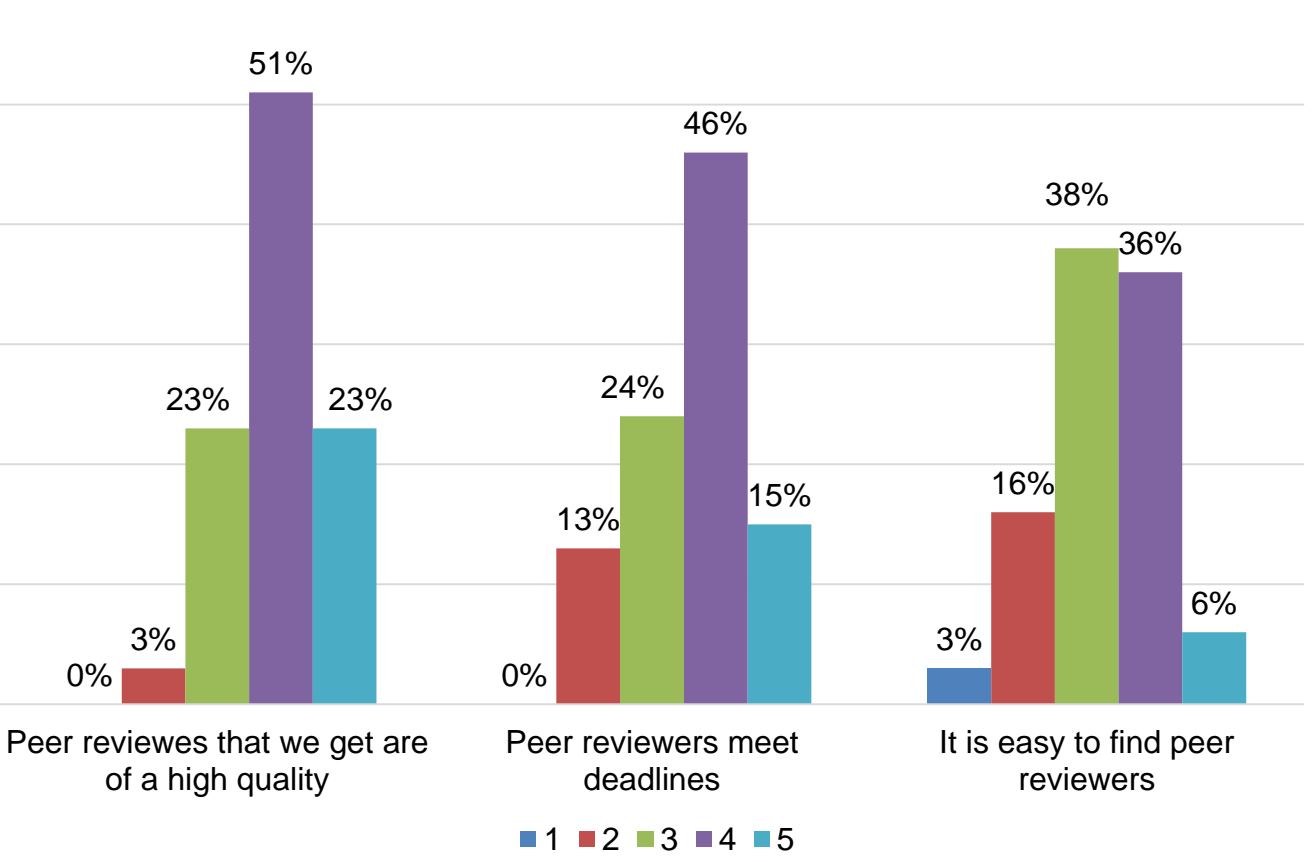


Chart 3. Some facts about peer review process in Croatian journals (1 – never; 2 – rarely; 3 – sometimes; 4 – often; 5 – very often)

Peer review process

The peer review process is easier and more transparent if peer reviewers declare possible conflict of interest (Chart 4), if peer reviewers have access to other reviews (Chart 5) and if instructions for peer reviewers are available (Chart 2).

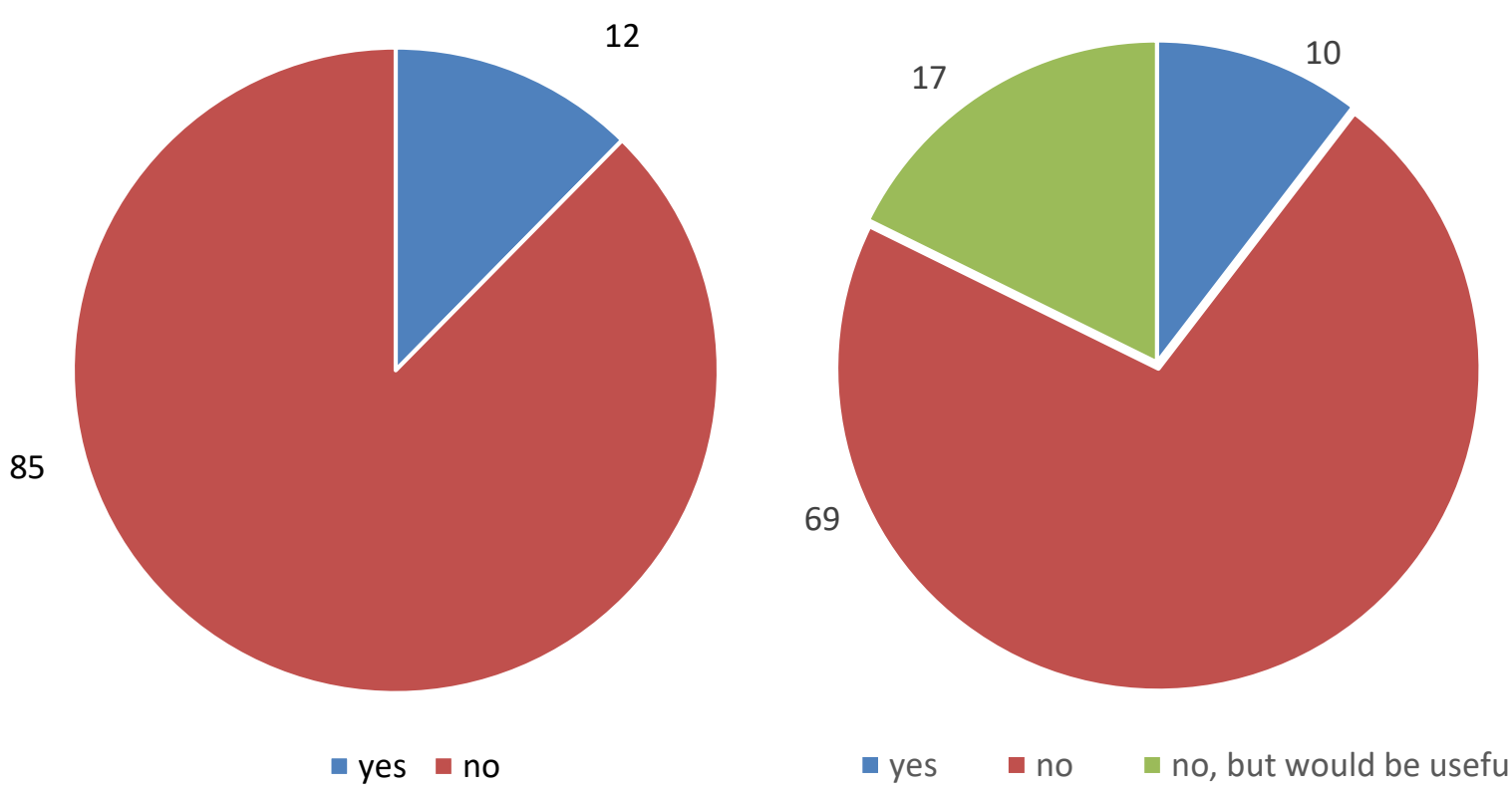


Chart 4. Peer reviewers have to declare conflict of interest

Chart 5. Do peer reviewers have access to other peer reviews?

Open peer review

None of the included journal employ open peer review. We define open peer review as a process where peer review reports are publicly available, but peer reviewers can choose to remain anonymous. The survey shows that editors are not familiar with the concept of open peer review. They do not believe that open peer review would be beneficial, but significant portion do believe that open peer review can contribute to the reputation of the reviewers (Chart 6).

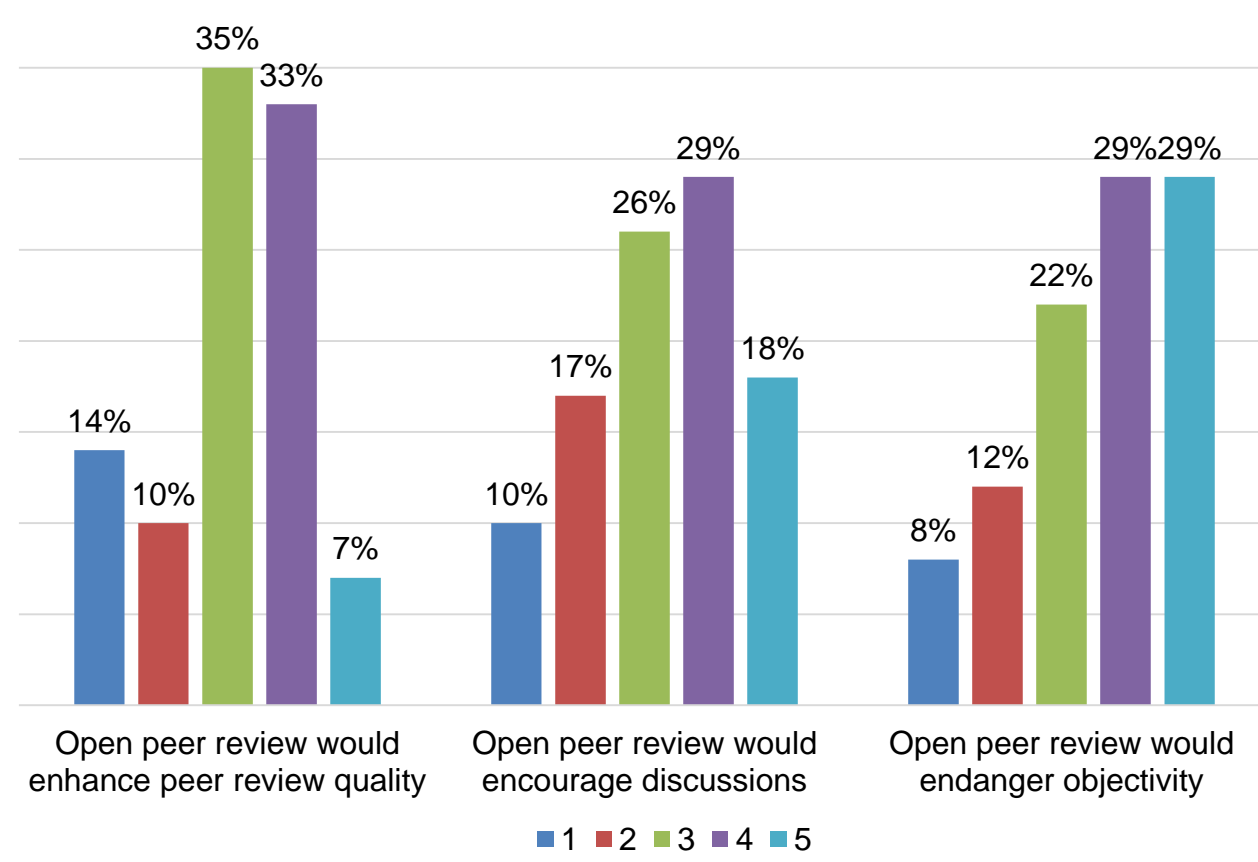


Chart 6. Reflections on open peer review (1 – strongly disagree; 2 – partly disagree; 3 – neither agree nor disagree; 4 – partly agree; 5 – strongly agree)

Peer reviewers' comments are very useful for authors and editors.

Open peer review would endanger objectivity.

Open peer review on a global level is not a good approach.

In Croatian academic community open peer review is not acceptable.

Editors' remarks on open peer review

Open peer review would not encourage discussion.

I am not sure that open peer review would enhance peer review quality

It would be useful for peer review process if authors could evaluate peer reviewers.

In some narrow fields it is very difficult to find a peer reviewers, especially for the journals that publish in Croatian language.

It is important that education about peer review become part of high school curricula.

Open peer review could help in evaluating peer reviewers' scientific work

There are many disadvantages of open peer review, e.g. it could have negative influence on authors whose work is evaluated.

Conclusions

Peer review in Croatian OA journals lacks transparency and globally accepted standards. Majority of journals use double blind peer review and have the high level of editorial freedom and integrity. According to editors of Croatian OA journals, reviews are of a high quality. Small number of journals ask their reviewers to declare conflict of interest. There is a need to raise awareness of the importance of the transparent guidelines for the reviewers and it is also important to educate editors on some concepts of the editorial processes, including ethical issues.