

## EDITORIALE

### LEADER

*di / by*

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#### PEER REVIEW AND TRANSPARENCY. THE CUBE AND THE RESEARCH.

Today, the management of a Scientific Journal, relying on a transparent peer-review process, poses a number of scarcely debated issues. To tackle these issues in an adequate way, within the academic and scientific community, we should take into account all the viewpoints at play and try to meet the needs of researchers, while guaranteeing a transparent vetting process. By their nature, researchers look well beyond the horizon, i.e. at the other side of the coin. However, the two sides of the coin have become insufficient to get a full understanding of the current evolution of scientific research and innovation. A cube, with six sides, may be the most suitable way to analyse the numerous facets of the problem. In addition to the above-mentioned aspects, the exponential development of the web era, the availability of increasingly richer and wider databases, the need to experiment more and more advanced vetting systems, responding to the current requirements of the knowledge community, have brought the publishing market to the fore. This market, which consists of a variety of players, may contaminate the research review system. The peer-review process has enabled the scientific community to ensure more transparency to research publications. Nonetheless, this process may give rise to a poorly scientific “market” and to a scarcely “democratic” system for the selection of publications. This is particularly true when the academic and research world makes “rewarding” choices, which are based on the quantitative data of publications, obtained from bibliographic databases that often give preference to the container rather than to the content. All this may favour the creation of a “commercial market” of publications (fortunately in a still low number of cases). In this regard, the *Washington Post* launched a cry of alarm on 27 Mar. 2015, reporting that *BioMed Central*, the British publisher, had to retract a certain number of scientific papers owing to irregularities in the peer-review process. The presence of “publishing agencies” was also mentioned. Through unclear mechanisms, these agencies promote scientific papers of doubtful origin, written by authors that are unknown or, even worse, cannot be identified through the e-mail addresses

associated with the *corresponding author*. Even in our Journal, we had some attempts of this kind, fortunately blocked after careful examination of the origins of the manuscripts and of the quoted universities. Finally, all this may have a non-negligible effect, i.e. the “levelling of research”, when important journals open fast tracks to publications whose content is shared, especially by the communication system. In some fields of research, which have become very popular, such as Climate Change and Global Warming, these practices may choke embryonic ideas and investigations whose viewpoints differ from the prevailing opinion of the IPCC, encouraged by some political sectors of western countries. The research community underestimates this aspect, passively witnessing progressive cuts in research funding and being subject to political decisions of strong social impact, ranging from the Kyoto Protocol in 1997 to the Paris Agreement in 2015.

