

Interactive comment on “Open Access: Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats. An Editorial” by Geoffrey Bodenhausen

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In her review of my “editorial”, Daniella Goldfarb expressed her wish to know more about the outrageous hybrid charges of € 60 000 that I claimed to have paid in 2014. Assuming that her curiosity is shared by others, I have done some homework on a confined rainy Sunday. I have broken down our extravagant payments according to journal. In many instances, I found the original invoices of 2014-15, including no less than four reminders in a case that I challenged in vain. For other papers, I have taken the current APC rates for hybrid open access (December 2020) as indicated on the websites of Wiley, Elsevier, PNAS, RSC, ACS, etc. After conversion into Euros at current rates, and after adding 20% VAT applicable in France, I could reconstruct the following expenses for the 16 papers of which I was a co-author in 2014. Of course,

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this is a personal and rather arbitrary compilation. Many readers and authors who have contributed to ‘Magnetic Resonance’ will recognize familiar titles:

Dalton Transac. 2112 € ; Chem. Phys. Lett. 3156 € ; J. Phys. Chem. B 5100 € ; Chem. Eur. J. 3000 € ; PNAS 2550 € ; Angew. Chem. 3500 € ; ChemMedChem 2500 € ; J. Magn. Reson. 3420 € ; Chem. Phys. Lett. 2279 € ; J. Phys. Chem. Lett. 5100 € ; Magn. Reson. Chem. 3348 € ; Chem. Eur. J. 3000 € ; Angew. Chem. 3500 € ; ChemPhysChem 2500 € ; Phys. Chem. Chem. Phys. 2112 € ; RSC Advances 0 € .

This adds up to 47 177 € for the year 2014. I must apologize to the readers of ‘Magnetic Resonance’: the estimate of 60 000 € given in my editorial was inflated by 27%, which I’m tempted to attribute in part to the sense of hyperbole of our charming accountant. The reason I chose to pay these outrageous hybrid Open Access charges was the following rule: “For ERC Frontier Research Grants funded under FP7 for which the Grant Agreement contains Special Clause 39 ERC it is mandatory to enable open access.” To be truthful, I could never determine whether Special Clause 39 applied to our work or not, my ERC grant being merely “advanced”, which is presumably less critical than “at the frontier”. In the subsequent 5 years of my ERC grant (2015-2019), I decided to ignore this clause, and stopped paying article page charges (APCs). So far, the ERC has not complained.

Of the 15 hybrid (“gold OA”) papers that we published in 2014, the total number of pages of is 90 (not counting the OA paper in RSC Advances), for which we paid 524 € per page or 3145 € per paper. By comparison, ‘Magnetic Resonance’ publishes papers for a mere 80 € per page if the paper is formatted in Word, reduced to 75 € per page if submitted in LaTeX. Furthermore, these article page charges can be waived, but we have only received two requests for the first 35 submissions.

While retrieving mails from early days, I found some entertaining messages. To the ‘Journal of Magnetic Resonance’, I wrote in September 2012: “I enclose a copy of an

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invoice for € 1185,88 for some proofs that were handled in an exceptionally sloppy manner by your office. Even the third set of proofs contained several errors. I estimate that the additional expenses incurred by my co-workers and myself, due to your practice of employing cheap and inexperienced co-workers, exceed the sum of € 1500. Shall I send you an invoice on my EPFL letter heading, or shall we agree to cancel the two invoices against each other ?". To my surprise, Elsevier decided to drop its invoice.

More recently, in 2019, I wrote to 'Progress in NMR Spectroscopy': "In recent months, Elsevier has turned out to be incapable of 'rolling out' decent products. A recent paper submitted (on Geoffrey's invitation) by Luchinat et al. to PNMRS required over 659 corrections for a paper of only 26 pages, and no less than 4 consecutive sets of proofs. Another paper submitted to PNMRS by Andrew Pell on Gareth Morris' invitation contained no less than 1,734 errors in the first proof. When we complained, [Elsevier] replied that these errors must be ascribed to the "tools" that Elsevier uses." There is no indication that Elsevier is willing to improve these tools. So far, I have not heard of any similar complaints by authors who have contributed to MR.

Finally, I found a heart-warming announcement on the website of the RSC "In their first year, articles published OA with us are downloaded 97% more often than non-OA work." This is my take-home message for authors who hesitate to choose 'Magnetic Resonance'!

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