



EDITORIAL NOTE

Editors of Brazilian journals - a hard life that is getting harder!

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Perhaps no researcher in Brazil would disagree with the statement that science is taking a hard beating in this country. Examples are numerous: the recent (and very questionable) fusion of the ministries of Science and Communication, the (extra) limitation of funding and fellowships at all levels, the bureaucracy regarding importation of basic products and equipment for scientific purposes (slightly mitigated in recent years but still problematic), and the overall wrecking of universities and scientific institutions as a direct result of the general lack of investments. All this happening despite constant warnings and protests of scientific societies and organizations. No wonder that the overall harshness of the economic situation would trickle down to scientific journals.

As it is well known, the governmental funding is essential for Brazilian periodicals (e.g., Oliveira Filho et al. 2005). When, back in 2006, CAPES (Coordination for the Improvement of Higher Education Personnel - a foundation within the Ministry of Education) signed an agreement with CNPq (Brazilian National Council for Scientific and Technological Development - the main scientific funding agency of Brazil), offering to double the funding of periodicals, authors and editors got excited. Although rules to get these grants got tougher year after year and despite the fact that the amount was never quite enough to allow editors to publish all good articles they were receiving (particularly considering the ever-growing submission rates), the system was working. This (and other initiatives) resulted in an overall growth of the visibility of Brazilian scientists (e.g., Packer 2011), even if not without problems (Meneghini et al. 2008), particularly when evaluation metrics “imported” from abroad that might not be directly applicable to the Brazilian (and South American) reality are employed (e.g., Mueller 1999, Kellner and Ponciano 2008, Rego 2014).

About two years ago, however, CAPES did have problems paying its share of the agreement, including the grants that had been already approved. Furthermore, in 2016, without the previous support of CAPES and with the Brazilian economic crisis deepening, CNPq conceded much less funding than in previous years. In order to try to accommodate as much journals as possible, this agency appears to have used the “Solomonic solution” by cutting in half (or less) the amount they used to support periodicals. This practice exposed an administrative problem that has been lightly discussed along the years, but was never really addressed: the short duration of grants. At the end of each year, editors must apply to the CNPq in order to get a new grant without knowing how much they will get. But papers are being accepted and prepared for future publication, as it is an ongoing process.

There is little doubt that continuous funding is very important for any scientific activity, but when it comes to scientific publications, it is just paramount! It seems almost unnecessary to stress that a volume of a

scientific journal is not an item that can be produced in a short period of time. Even with the sophistication of the online systems that have somehow fastened and reduced costs of the whole publication process (e.g., Noorden 2013) - what, by the way, not necessarily implies in an increment in terms of quality -, journals publish a great number of articles that have been approved and partially processed the year before.

What can editors do when, at the end of the year, they are told that funding will be cut to less than half of what originally expected? What to do with all the manuscripts that were accepted - but not yet published - now that funds are gone? Even in the rare (and nowadays unlikely) cases when editors get more resources than they had planned, how shall they proceed knowing that they need new (and high impact!) articles that have to be produced and published within a year? And, for all, how to handle fair criteria to serve as basis for acceptance and rejection of manuscripts if the number of articles fluctuate substantially from one year to another as result of availability of resources? I think that it is not necessary to point out the stressful situation of editors having to deal with the anger and frustration of authors and suppliers - not to mention their own.

Although there seems no immediate relief regarding resources, there is a small initiative that could be implemented by funding agencies at essentially no or little cost: extending the duration of grants. Ideally, funding of a scientific journal should be for five years, but three years would be already a welcome improvement. The yearly amount allocated to a particular journal could be made available at the beginning of each year, allowing editors some planning.

I fully understand the present difficulties of funding agencies that are fighting very hard to foster scientific activities in these economically and politically turbulent times. Their work is absolutely necessary and fully appreciated. However, it should be noted that Brazilian scientists are making great efforts to mitigate the problems not only resulting from the present adverse situation, but also due to the additional complications caused by the continuous worldwide increasing demands for publication as the consequence of the so-called “bakery effect” (Kellner and Ponciano 2008). Issues such as scientific integrity (e.g., Vasconcelos et al. 2015) and the need of internationalization (e.g., Madeira and Marrenco 2016), for example, are high on the present scientific agenda. The same happens with editors, working very hard to attract relevant manuscripts for their journals, including the publication of special issues (e.g., Cordeiro and Schuck 2015), raising the need for early preparation. As a matter of fairness to authors and editors, the extension of funding for longer periods might not be that much to ask for.

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