



ADAM MICKIEWICZ UNIVERSITY IN POZNAŃ
Scholarly Communication Research Group

Opening the blackbox of predatory publishing



Prof. Emanuel Kulczycki, PhD

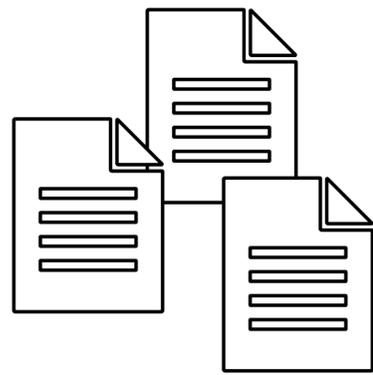
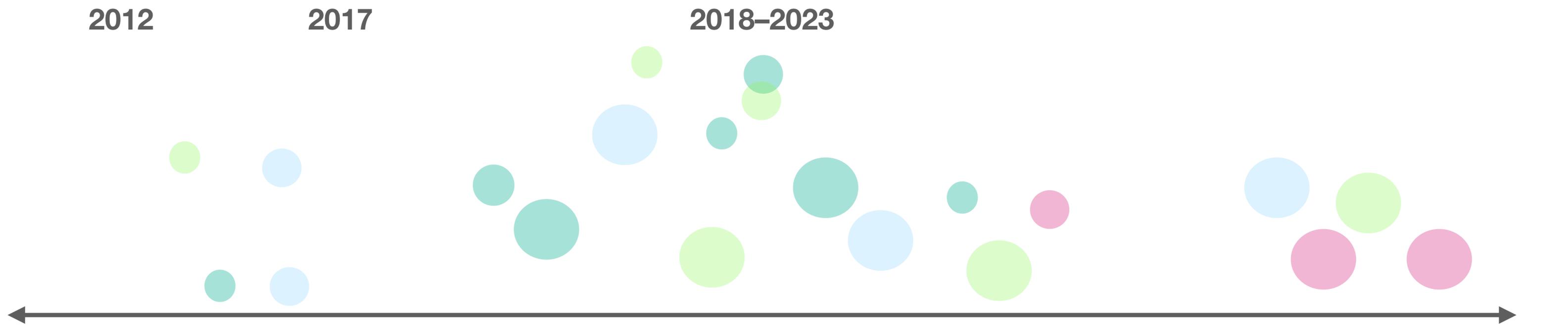
Scholarly Communication Research Group

- I am an Associate Professor and the head of Scholarly Communication Research Group, AMU.
- Chair of the European Network for Research Evaluation in the Social Sciences and the Humanities (COST Action 2016–2020).
- Co-founder of the Helsinki Initiative on Multilingualism in Scholarly Communication.

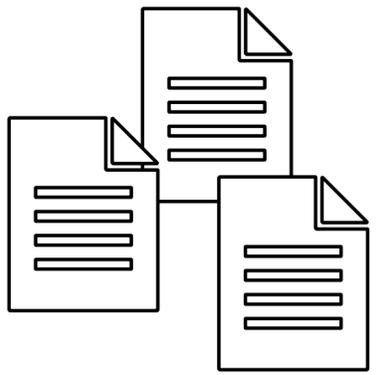


Why is the concept of „predatory journals/publishers” both useful and harmful?

Quality spectrum of scholarly journals

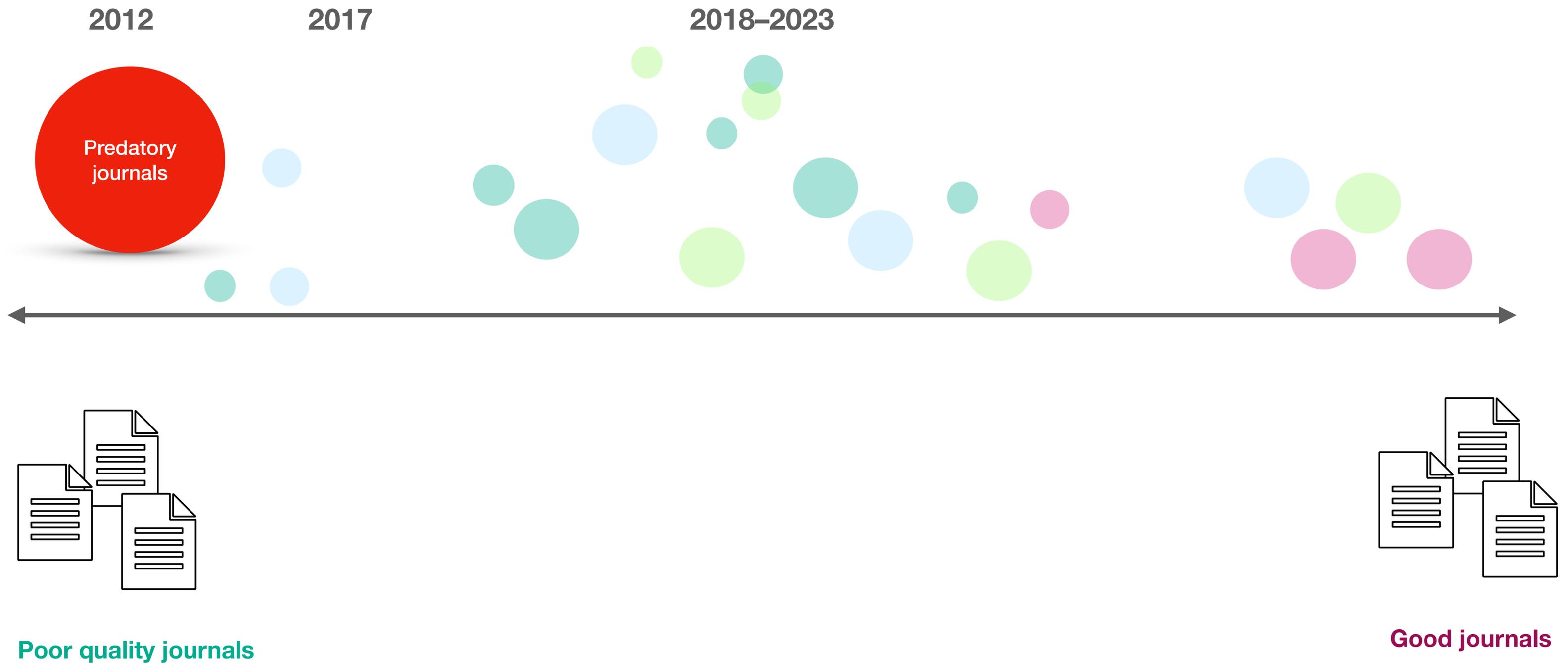


Poor quality journals

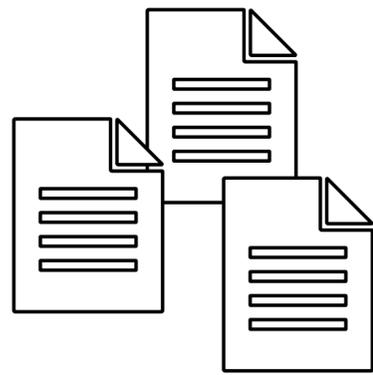
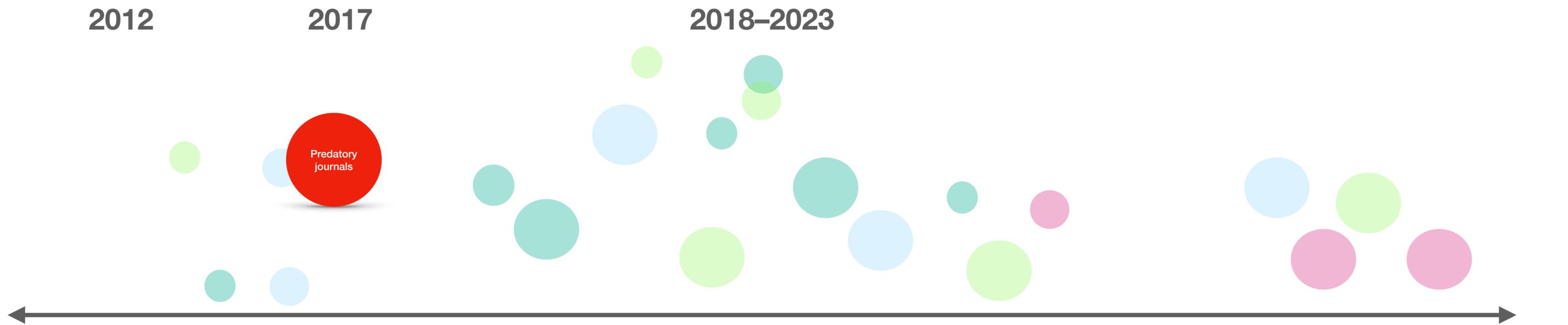


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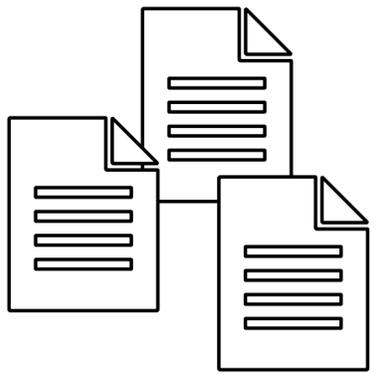
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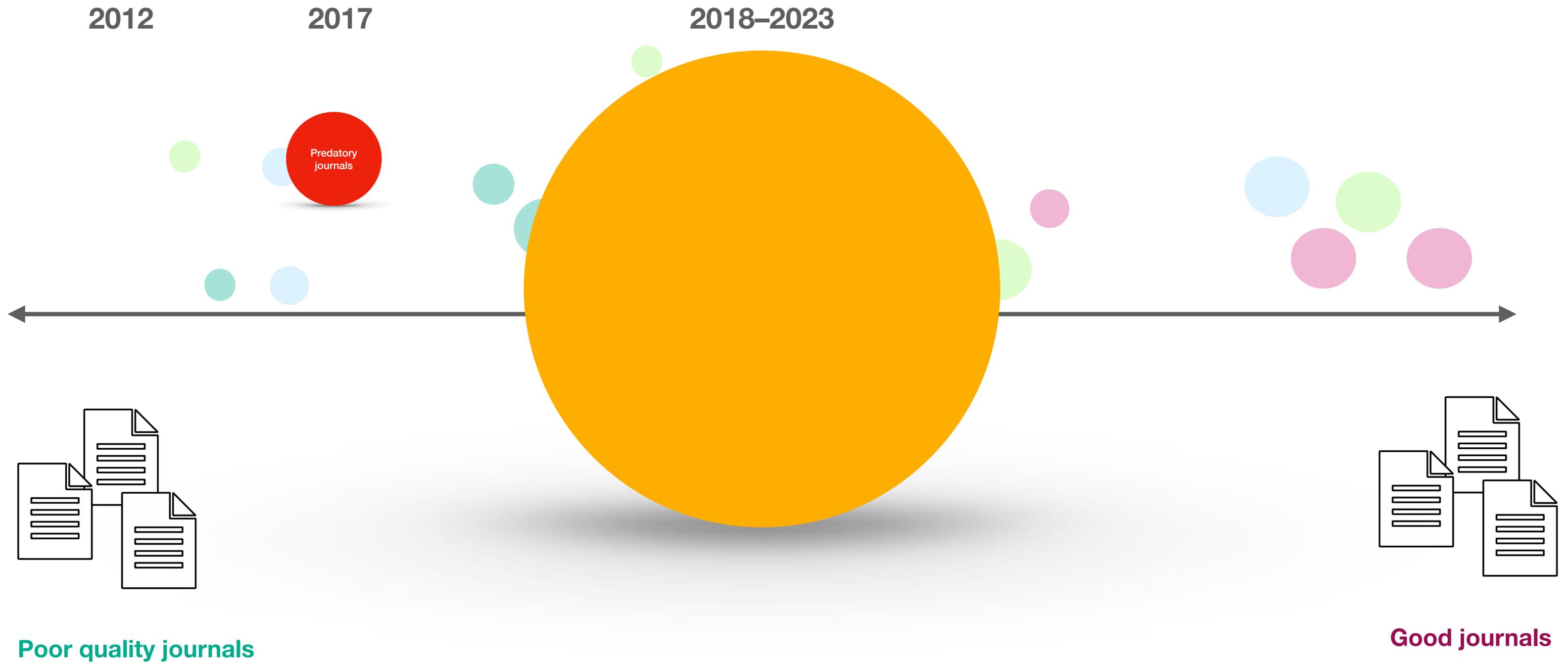


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- Prior to the discussion on predatory publishing, numerous papers aimed to show the weakness of the peer review process in certain journals or conferences. One of the most famous of these was Alan Sokal's hoax paper aimed at parodying postmodern jargon published in prestigious humanistic journals. **But these debates did not connect „peer review” with business models of the publishers.**



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- Nevertheless, it was the actions of **Jefferey Beall** and the lists of journals and publishers he created that brought the term "predatory journals" into common usage.
- **Jeffrey Beall:** predatory journals are scammers that deceive scholars to publish in them and do not follow basic publishing standards, such as peer review.



What is a predatory journal / publisher?

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In this way, we produce an easy to use tools to valorize everything.



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Predatory journals and predatory publishers

Easy to use labels to describe complex practices in scholarly communication.

However, these practices often result from unequal power relations between central and semi-peripheral countries and institutions.



The real predators are not where the labels point. They are the publisher oligopolies with their aggressive business models that exploit scientists.

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- It is a tool for conceptualizing a set of undesirable journals (by science, policy makers, scientific institutions) and provides a dichotomous view of the world: if a journal is not predatory, it is a good journal. What is not valid.
- It is a heuristic to show researchers which specific journals and what types of journals they should avoid.

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- "Predation" focuses too much on the business model but fails to analyze the practices of megapublishers.
- The discussion on predatory journals and predatory publishers focus on "containers" (channels), but the articles published in them are treated as predatory too (=worthless).

Two frequently suggested ways to defend against predatory publishing



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Raising awareness among scholars

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Promoting “quality, not quantity” culture

The definition of quality is often mediated by the relationship to "central countries and institutions." In the periphery, simply publishing in English may be legitimized as "quality" rather than „quantity”. This can feed the phenomenon of predation.



We won't defeat predatory journals by making a list of them

Many such journals are on government-approved lists and indexed in mainstream bibliographic databases, says Emanuel Kulczycki

April 4, 2023

Emanuel Kulczycki

<https://www.timeshighereducation.com/blog/we-wont-defeat-predatory-journals-making-list-them>

**Results of our
empirical studies on
questionable academia**

The impact of Beall's lists

2021

- The overgeneralization of the flaws of some open access journals to the entire open access movement has led to unjustified prejudices among the academic community toward open access.
- Many studies combined predatory publishing with open access using similar strategies as Beall.

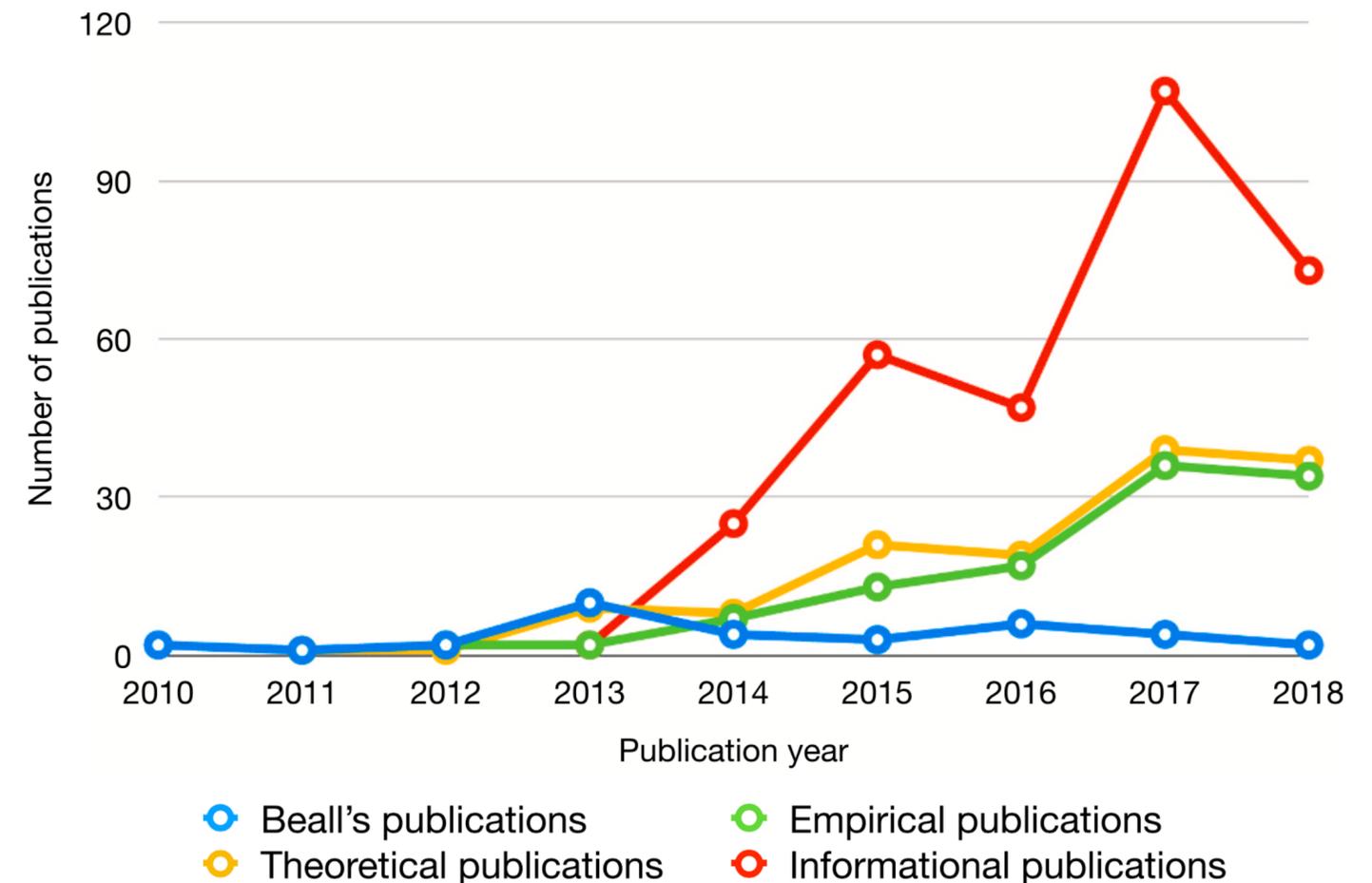


Fig. 2. Publications on predatory publishing ($n = 593$) classified into categories.

Dr. Fraud sting operation

2017

- In 2017, we published the results of a sting operation commonly known as ‘Dr. Fraud’.
- We had created a fictional researcher, Dr. Anna O. Szust (in Polish ‘Oszust’ means a ‘fraud’) and on her behalf, had applied to the editorial boards of 360 journals, of which 48 accepted her and four made her editor in chief.



Predatory journals recruit fake editor

- Despite the disclosure, Dr. Fraud continues to 'be used' not only as a journal editor but also as a member of the international advisory boards of many conferences - even several years after the publication of the sting operation results.

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Citation patterns between JIF journals and questionable journals

2021 & 2022

65 Blacklisted journals

Cited paper

2012–2018



Journals listed
in Beall's or Cabell's lists

WoS journals

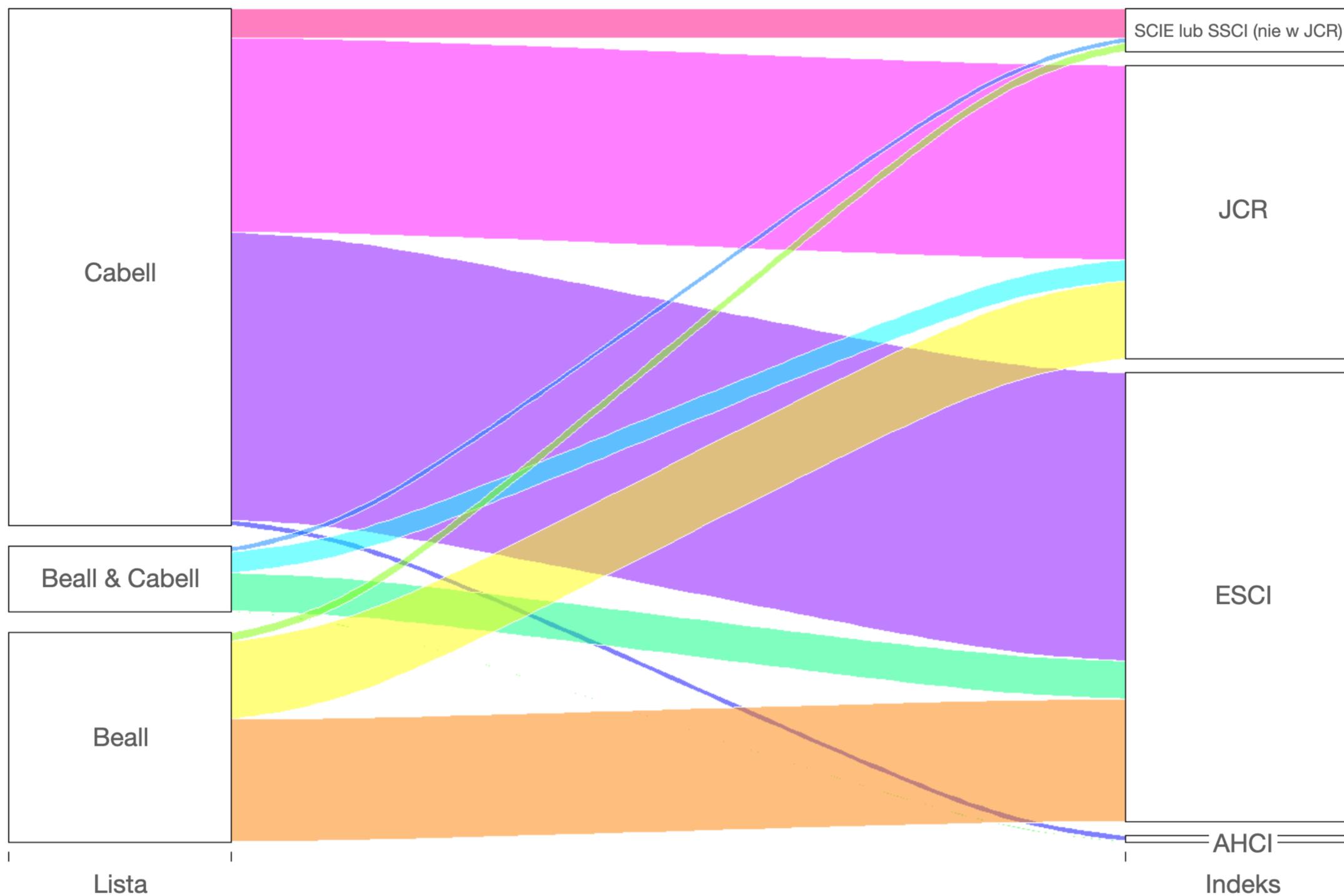
Citing paper

2012–2019



Journals indexed
in Web of Science

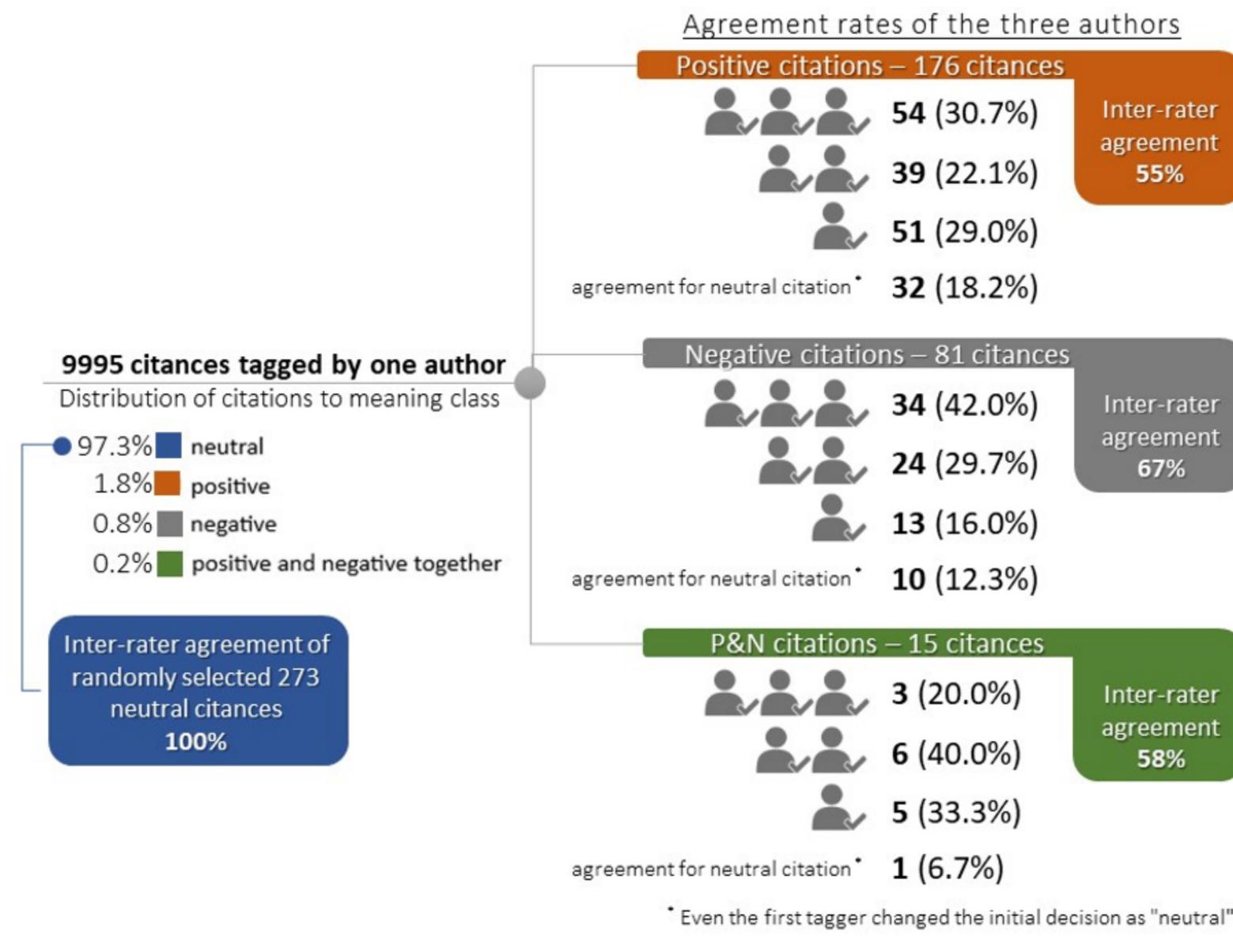
- The study aim was two-fold: to analyse the **visibility of blacklisted journals** and to understand **citation contexts**.
- On average, **13% of papers published** by a blacklisted journal were cited by WoS journals and 37% of the citations came from the impact-factor journals.



37% of citations of predatory journal articles came from Impact Factor journals

This study is followed by the content-based analysis of citations of the blacklisted papers to evaluate the citations in terms of their content (meaning, purpose, shape, array).

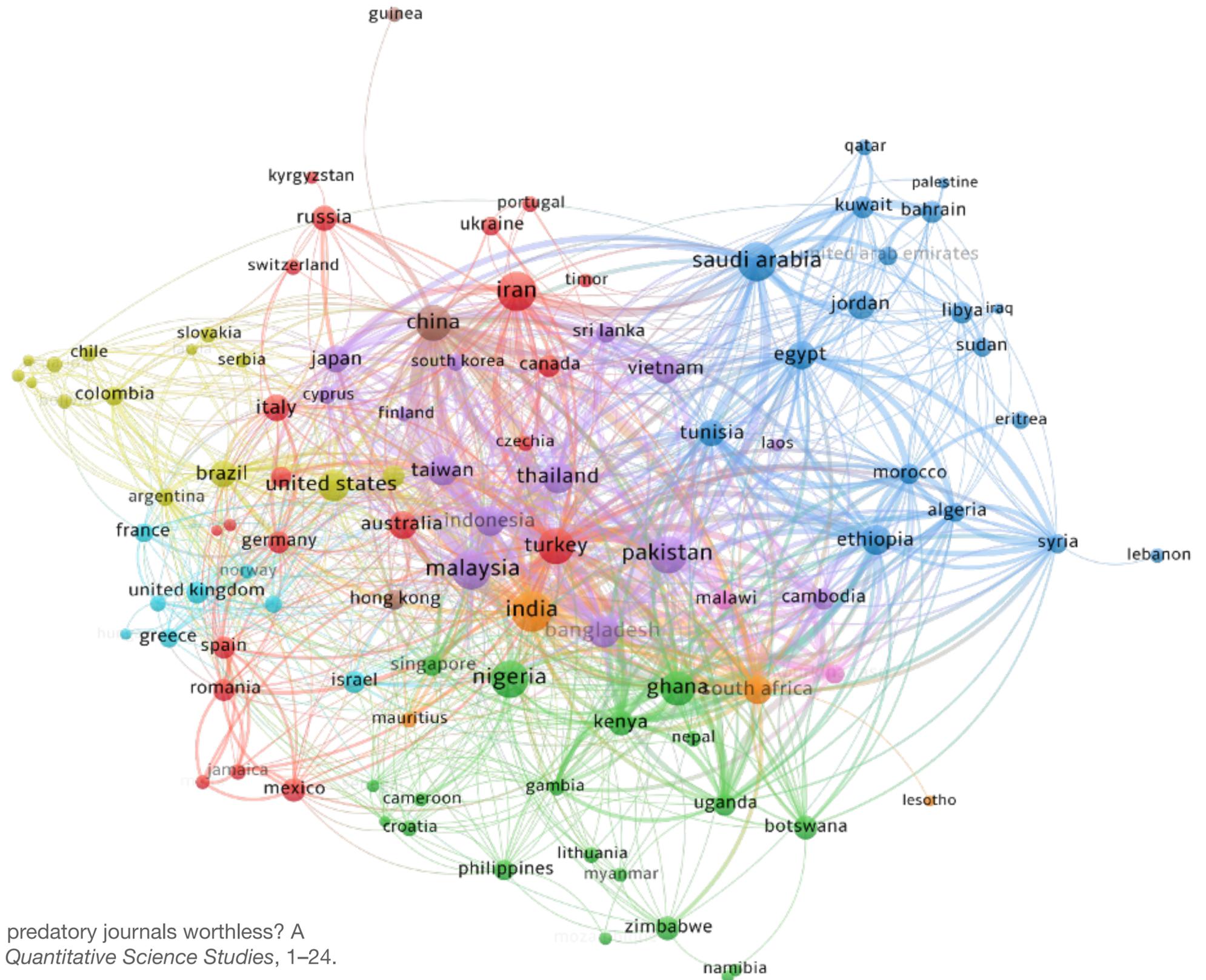
We believe this is the best way to assess whether papers published by blacklisted journal and cited by WoS indexed journals are valuable for scientific community.



The share of positive and negative citations is lower than of «legitimate» literature.

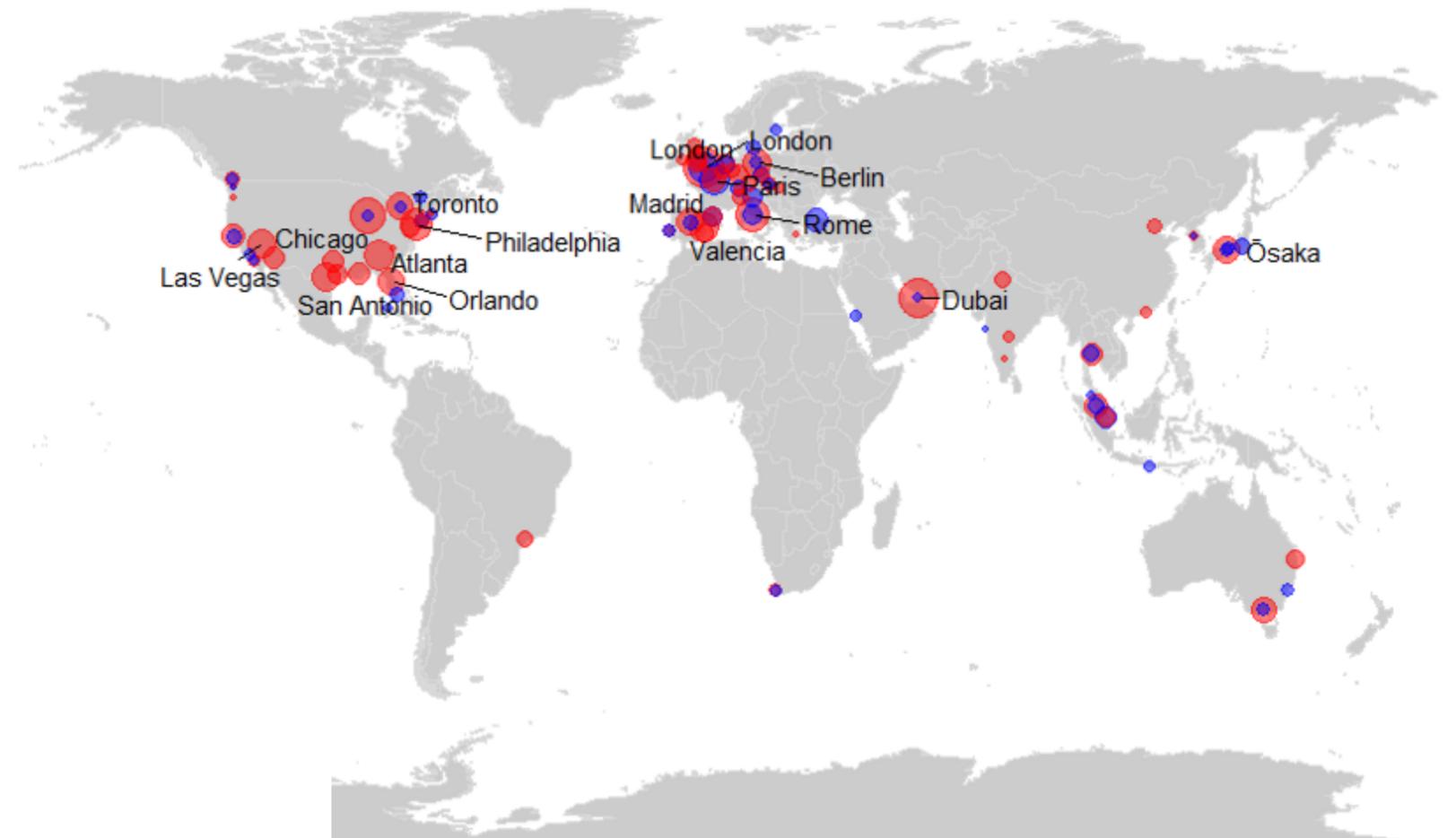
Authors cite publications from questionable journals to make comparisons or to show the current status of a topic in a particular region.

These citations can be explained by the fact that questionable journals are easily accessible to many non-Western researchers. **Much of the data on these countries is published only in such journals.**

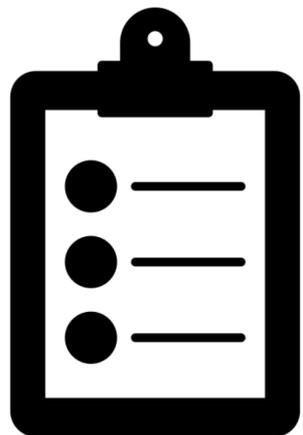


Questionable conferences: OMICS and WASET

- We analyze 1,232 conferences (the years 2015-2017) and 40,224 presenters, focusing on top-ranked institutions according to three global university ranking systems.
- Participants in OMICS events were primarily researchers from the US, India, UK, and China. WASET attracted more researchers from Turkey, India, and South Korea.
- We found that 11.0% of OMICS and 5.7% of WASET presenters were affiliated with institutions ranked in the top 100 in one of the three global rankings (AWRU, THE, QS).



Global survey



We collected 2,025 fully completed responses from authors of articles in predatory journals and conferences

Kulczycki, Emanuel, & Rotnicka, Sara. (2022, September 7). Consequences of Participating in Questionable Academia: A Global Survey of Authors of Journal Articles and Conference Presentations. 26th International Conference on Science, Technology and Innovation Indicators (STI 2022), Granada, Spain. <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.6960060>

Consequences of Participating in Questionable Academia: A Global Survey of Authors of Journal Articles and Conference Presentations¹

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Introduction

This study investigates how accusations directed at so-called predatory publishers (Beall, 2012; Sorokowski et al., 2017) and organisers of questionable conferences (Kulczycki et al., 2022) relate to the actual experiences of individual researchers who have chosen to work with such publishers and companies. The claims made in the literature on questionable academia highlight its negative impact on the reputation of science while omitting to mention whether such publication choices result in harms or benefits for the authors themselves. Considering the knowledge gap regarding the consequences of participation in questionable academia, we designed a survey as part of a project focused on the investigation of the role of evaluation regimes in coproducing questionable academia.

In this paper, we analyse 2,025 complete responses to a survey designed to investigate the consequences that directly affect researchers who have published their work in predatory journals or presented at conferences organised by companies considered to be predatory. Our study focuses either on formal consequences, such as job promotion or loss, as well as on research funding, and also on the positive or negative perception of this experience (i.e., publishing in a questionable outlet or participating in a questionable conference) by the academic community.

The term ‘predatory’ (publishing or conference) may be misleading, because it is not always the case that such journals or conferences are oriented towards financial profit (this is a key feature of being a predatory publication channel). We prefer to use the term ‘questionable’ to avoid attributing bad intentions a priori to both these conferences’ participants (or publications’ authors) and their organisers (publishers). Thus, when we refer to ‘questionable academia’ we mean the totality of practices and actors (i.e., researchers and companies) engaged in activities characterised as ‘questionable’ or ‘predatory’.

Empirical studies on questionable academia has so far focused mostly on the geographical distribution of participants in this practice – identifying authors mainly from Asia and Africa (Demir, 2018; Shen & Björk, 2015) – and the motivations of the authors, which most often

¹ This work was supported by the National Science Centre in Poland (Grant Number UMO-2017/26/E/HS2/00019).

Positive impact

- 471 researchers replied that the impact was **passing a performance assessment**
- 314 that the impact was **obtaining a degree**
- 270 that the impact was a **promotion** or a **job offer** received afterwards
- 90 researchers replied that the impact was obtaining a **financial award**.



Negative impact

- 269 researchers replied that the **paper was not taken into consideration** in their performance assessment
- 18 researchers replied that they were required to **return research funding**
- 14 researchers **were reprimanded**
- 9 researchers **were fired**
- 249 respondents **had not included** this publication/presentation in their **lists of accomplishments.**





**Mislocated
centers of
scholarly
communication**

Why have we introduced a new term?

We introduced the term **mislocated centre of scholarly communication** to describe the role some publication channels play in the (semi-)periphery. It is geopolitically sensitive and does not blame scholars or imply publishers' bad intentions.

Many journals are established and maintained to publish papers that count in research evaluation regimes.

They are counted because they are perceived to be linked to central countries and institutions.

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2021, VOL. 4, 1984641
<https://doi.org/10.1080/25729861.2021.1984641>

 Routledge
Taylor & Francis Group

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On the geopolitics of academic publishing: the mislocated centers of scholarly communication

Franciszek Krawczyk  and Emanuel Kulczycki 

Scholarly Communication Research Group, Adam Mickiewicz University in Poznań, Poznań, Poland

ABSTRACT
Knowledge production is an important factor in establishing the geopolitical position of countries. In the recent heated discussion on predatory publishing, the geopolitical dimension of this topic is often ignored or treated superficially. In this paper, we introduce the term "mislocated centres of scholarly communication" to help better understand the emergence of predatory journals, and journals that bear similarities to them, in geopolitical peripheries. Mislocated centers of scholarly communication are perceived in the peripheries as legitimized by the center but are in fact invisible or illegitimate in the center. Thus, we argue the importance of viewing these mislocated centers as the result of unequal power relations in academia. To support our argument, we summarize the research on the topic of predatory publishing and demonstrate that predatory journals are a geopolitical problem because the geopolitical peripheries of science are much more often harmed by them than the center. Unlike predatory journals, mislocated centers of scholarly communication are not necessarily fraudulent but rather they are geopolitical roles imposed on some journals by a dynamic between center and peripheries. Our approach could help to criticize this system without discriminating against peripheral scholars or journals.

KEYWORDS
Predatory journals;
mislocated centers of
scholarly communication;
center and peripheries;
scholarly communication;
geopolitics of science

PALAVRAS-CHAVE
Periódicos predatórios;
centros mal localizados de
comunicação acadêmica;
centro e periferias;
comunicação acadêmica;
geopolítica da ciência

PALABRAS CLAVE
Revistas depredadoras;
centros de comunicación
académica mal ubicados;
centro y periferias;
comunicación académica;
geopolítica de la ciencia

Sobre a geopolítica das publicações acadêmicas: os centros desubicados da comunicação científica

RESUMO
A produção de conhecimento é um fator importante para estabelecer a posição geopolítica dos países. Na recente discussão acalorada sobre a publicação predatória, a dimensão geopolítica deste tópico é frequentemente ignorada ou tratada superficialmente. Neste artigo, introduzimos o termo "centro mal localizado da comunicação acadêmica" para ajudar a compreender melhor a emergência de revistas e periódicos predatórios que têm semelhanças com eles nas periferias geopolíticas. Os centros mal localizados de comunicação acadêmica são vistos nas periferias como legitimados pelo centro, mas na realidade são invisíveis ou ilegítimos no centro. Assim, argumentamos sobre a importância de

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If a journal meets two criteria, it is considered a mislocated center

it is **illegitimate** or
invisible from the
perspective of
the center of knowledge
production



It is **legitimized** in the
(semi)periphery
due to its perceived
connection to the center.

Geopolitical landscape of scholarly communication

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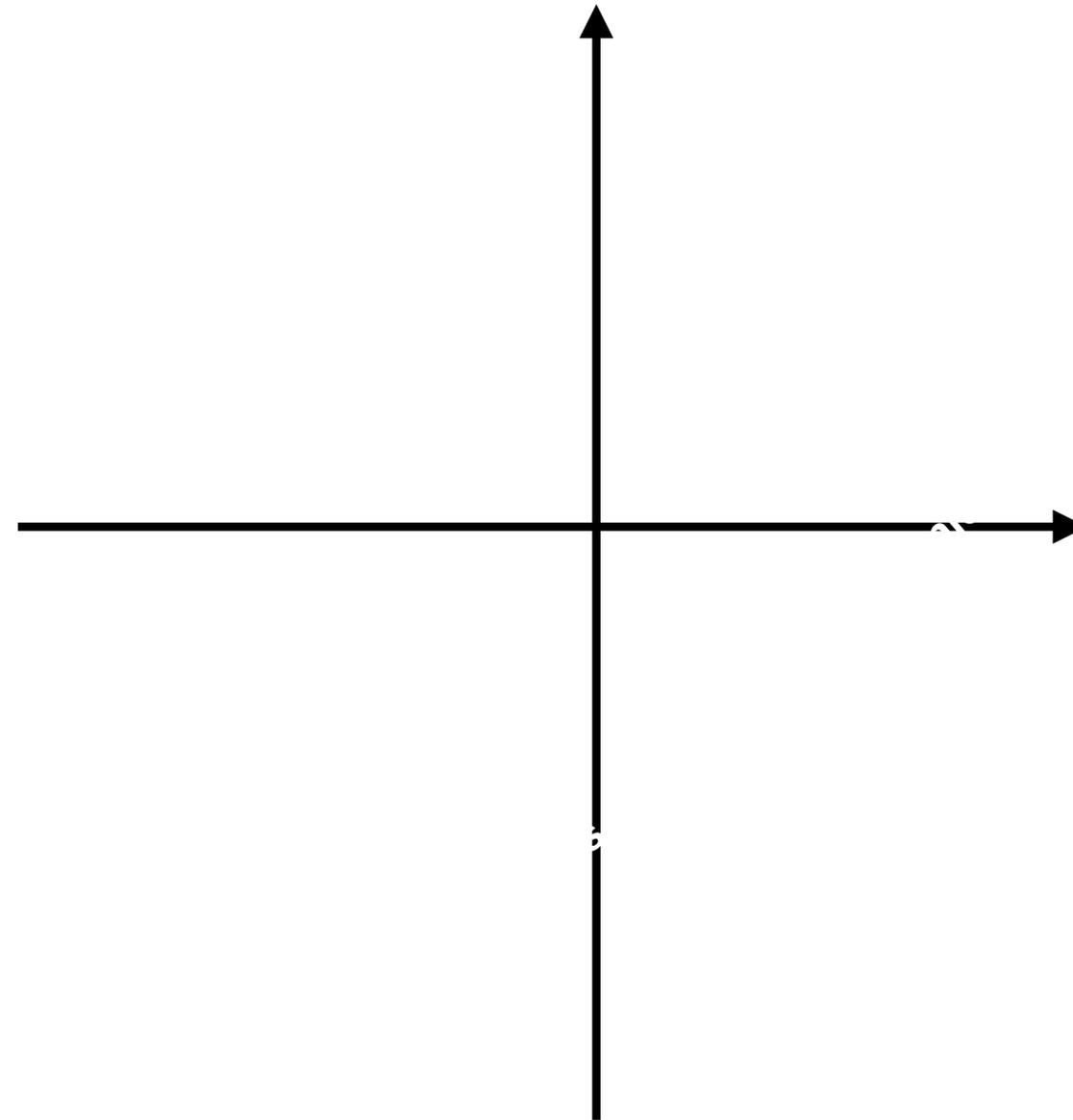
High visibility & legitimacy in the center



No visibility & no legitimacy in the center

Geopolitical landscape of scholarly communication

High visibility & legitimacy in the center



Perceived connection with the center gives no legitimization in the peripheries

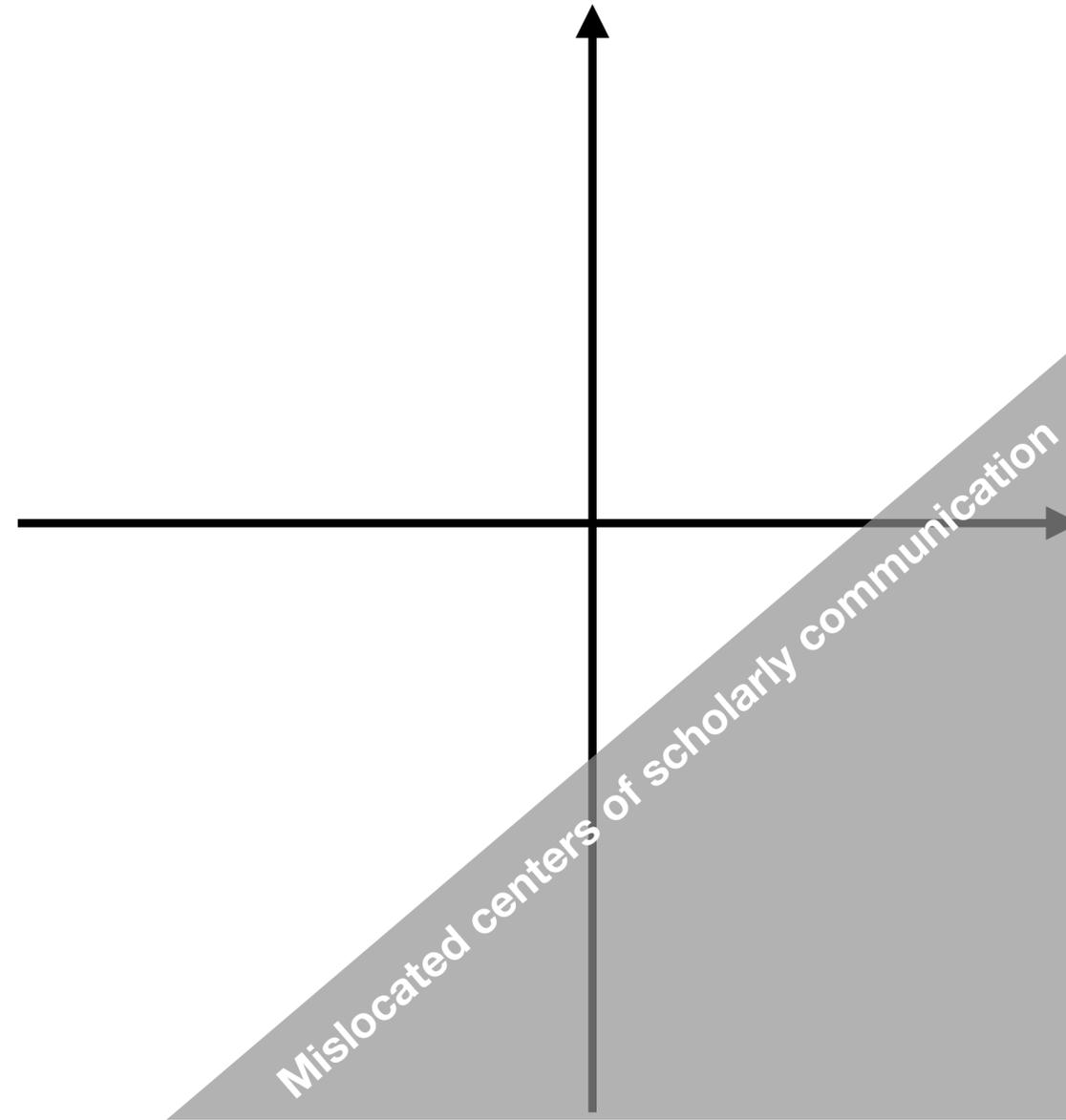
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No visibility & no legitimacy in the center

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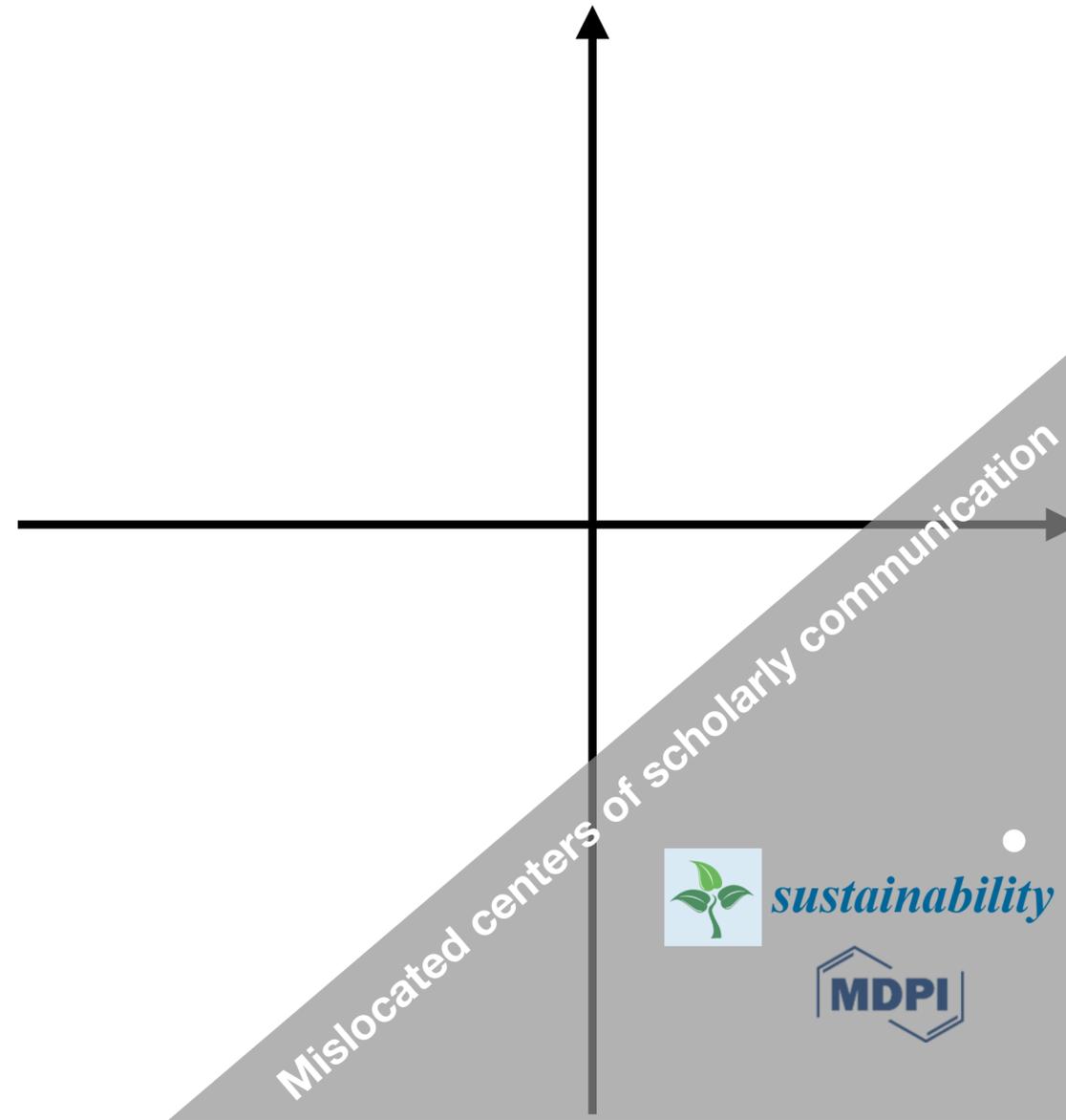
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MDPI was accused of malpractices in the past (Beall 2015), and around 2018, the journal started being criticized for publishing a large number of papers to collect APCs (Wals 2018).



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- The journal is not completely invisible or illegitimate in the center, but is controversial enough to not be considered prestigious by central institutions.
- Its publications can sometimes be seen as dishonest shortcuts to enriching authors' CVs.
- However, considering the number of articles from the peripheries and the journal's high APCs, it seems that **this journal is regarded as prestigious** by many peripheral authors because of its origin in a central country, indexation, and decent citation rates.

Summarizing the mislocation



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- ▶ Mislocated centers arise from peripheral actors' **misjudgment** of a journal's geopolitical position.



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- ▶ Mislocated centers arise from peripheral actors' **misjudgment** of a journal's geopolitical position.
- ▶ Such journals emerge because the center is an essential **source of legitimization** in the peripheries, and because there is considerable uncertainty in the peripheries over what is central and what is not.



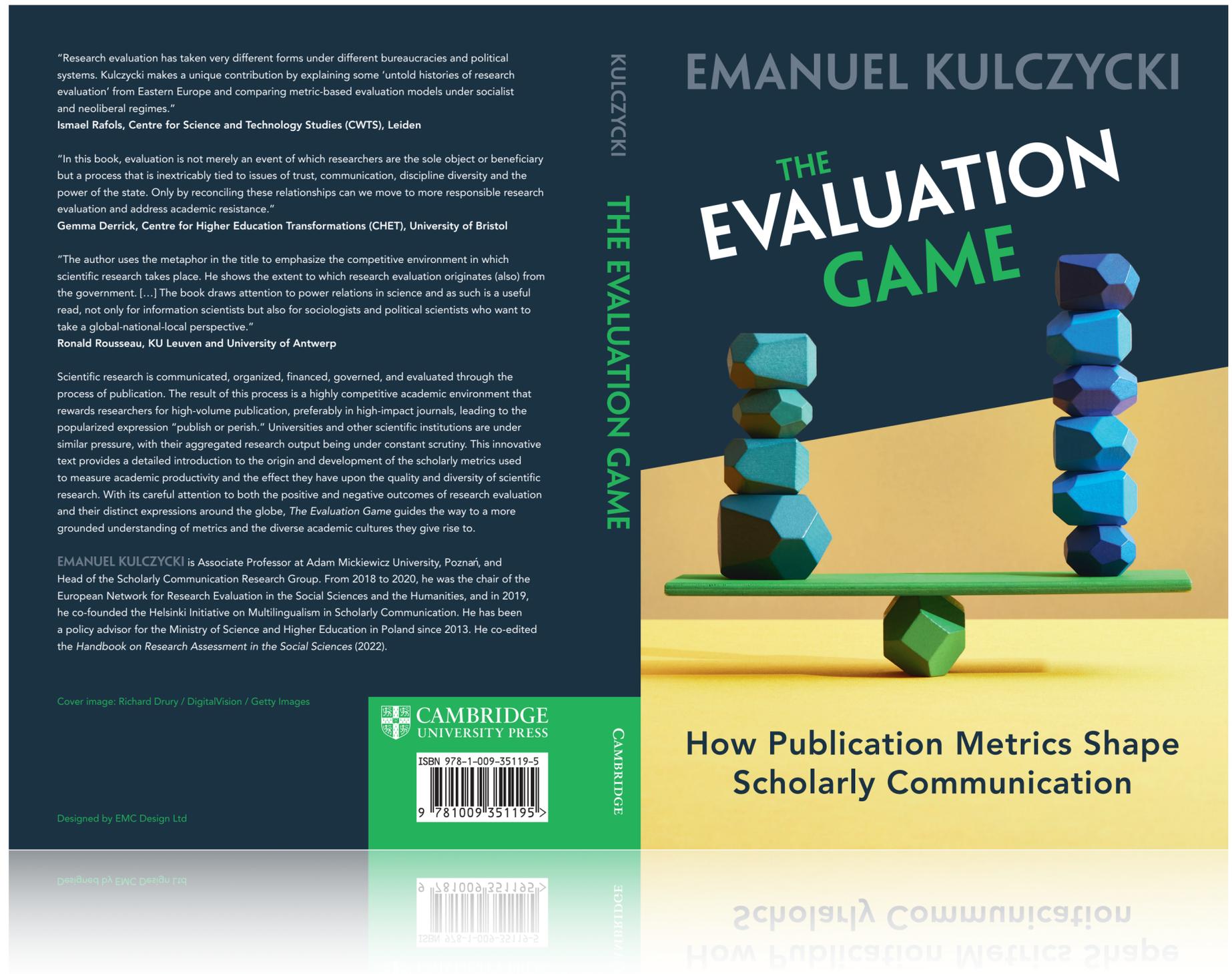
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- ▶ Mislocated centers arise from peripheral actors' **misjudgment** of a journal's geopolitical position.
- ▶ Such journals emerge because the center is an essential **source of legitimization** in the peripheries, and because there is considerable uncertainty in the peripheries over what is central and what is not.
- ▶ The current academic system, established by the central actors, actively contributes to the creation of mislocated centers through the **research evaluation regimes**.



Research evaluation

- ▶ Researchers publish in mislocated centres in order to fulfil the **evaluative expectations expressed in the metrics.**
- ▶ They do this at the lowest possible cost, if universities do not provide them with adequate financial and material conditions (infrastructure).
- ▶ This phenomenon, which has a two-hundred-year history, is called playing the **evaluation game.**



Thank you

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