

# Transparency of peer review process in Croatian OA journals

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Towards new frontiers of peer review: prospects and challenges  
TD COST Action TD1306 PEERE "New Frontiers of Peer Review",  
Split, Croatia, 16-18 June 2015

# Croatia

4.4M population

32,2k registered, 11k active scholars

7 universities, 25 research institutes

Ministry of Science, Education and  
Sports

241 research projects (Croatian  
Research Agency), EC projects

25k papers (all types) per year

375 OA journals

more than 1200 islands



# Journals

print and digital (online)

fee, free, hybrid

„open access journal“ = gold OA = APC model

small journals, big journals, very big journals

prominent journals = high JIF journals = for-profit journals, low  
impact journals

„international journals“, „local journals“, „regional journals“

old concept from the printed world

main channel of scholarly communication

not implementing IT advantages, or at very, very slow pace

Are local journals *a priori* low quality journals?

What makes a journal high quality journal?

What is the role of „local“ journals?

What can be done to improve their visibility, readability, citeability, impact?

Is it the predominantly used metrics (JIF) fair enough?

What can we do to improve the quality of Croatian journals?

# Why are Croatian journals important?

communication of science in Croatia

research topics of local or national interest and in Croatian language

*(Leiden Manifesto: Protect excellence in locally relevant research)*

development of skills and competences: editing, publishing and writing (& citing)

need to get/raise credibility

- promotion of Croatian research
- raising awareness about importance of science in the decision processes



# Financial support

approximately 200 Croatian scholarly journals are subsidized by Ministry of science, education and sports (up to €45.000 annually)

only few journals are APC based journals



## Possible solutions for local journals?

PEERE "New Frontiers of Peer Review", Split, Croatia, 16-18 June 2015

# HRČAK

*goals*

## *history*

2002 – few journals online

2005 – HRČAK project  
proposal

2006 – HRČAK launch

infrastructure for **online version** of the (printed) journal

**single access point** for all  
Croatian open access journals  
(scholarly, professional and  
popular)

metadata and **full-text** articles  
repository

**metadata sharing** –  
international repositories,  
databases, archives



# Open Access journal repository as a solution for:

- low visibility
- difficulties with distribution
- small number of subscribers
- low circulation
- insufficient finances
- poor infrastructure (including ICT)
- low readability
- low citation impact
- **sometimes not-reliable peer review policies**
- **lack of international standards in editorial processes**



# HRČAK today – <http://hrcak.srce.hr>



Početna stranica  
Abecedni popis časopisa

Časopisi po područjima  
Prirodne znanosti  
Tehničke znanosti  
Biomedicina i zdravstvo  
Biotehničke znanosti  
Društvene znanosti  
Humanističke znanosti

Uredništva  
Posjećenost časopisa  
Prijava novog časopisa

Autori  
Prijava radova



## O Hrčku



Hrčak je centralni portal koji na jednom mjestu okuplja hrvatske znanstvene i stručne časopise koji nude otvoreni pristup svojim radovima ili minimalno bibliografskim podacima i sažecima svojih radova ([više](#)).

O Hrčku:

- za uredništva časopisa ([upute](#), [etički kodeks](#))
- za [krajnje korisnike](#).

Trenutno u Hrčku:

**388 journals**

Časopisa: 388

Objavljenih sveščića: 10.386

Ukupno objavljenih radova: 132.087

Objavljenih radova s cjelovitim tekstom: 126.159 **126.159 full-text articles**

### 10 najnovijih sveščića po datumu izdavanja

1. Metalurgija, 54(4), 2015
2. Acta pharmaceutica, 65(in press), 2015
3. Metalurgija, 54(3), 2015
4. Acta pharmaceutica, 65(2), 2015
5. Zbornik radova Ekonomskog fakulteta u Rijeci: časopis za..., 33(1), 2015
6. Arhiv za higijenu rada i toksikologiju, 66(2), 2015
7. Poslovna izvrsnost, 9(1), 2015
8. Biochemia Medica, 25(2), 2015
9. Krmiva, 56(3), 2014
10. Krmiva, 56(3), 2014

### 10 zadnje objavljenih sveščića na Hrčku

1. Zbornik radova Ekonomskog fakulteta u Rijeci: časopis za..., 33(1), 2015
2. Krmiva, 43(3), 2001
3. POLJOPRIVREDA, 21(1), 2015
4. Krmiva, 43(4), 2001
5. Krmiva, 44(5), 2002
6. Krmiva, 44(4), 2002
7. Arhiv za higijenu rada i toksikologiju, 66(2), 2015
8. Krmiva, 44(3), 2002
9. Krmiva, 44(3), 2002
10. Biochemia Medica, 25(2), 2015

- improved communication between editorials
- education

Portal Hrčak izrađen i radi uz potporu [Ministarstva znanosti, obrazovanja i športa](#), realiziran je u [Srcu](#). a

PEERE "New Frontiers of Peer Review", Split, Croatia, 16-18 June 2015



Pretraživanje članaka

**traži** ▶

[Napredno pretraživanje](#)

[Upute za pretraživanje](#)

Moj profil

[Registracija novih korisnika](#)

Korisnička oznaka (email)

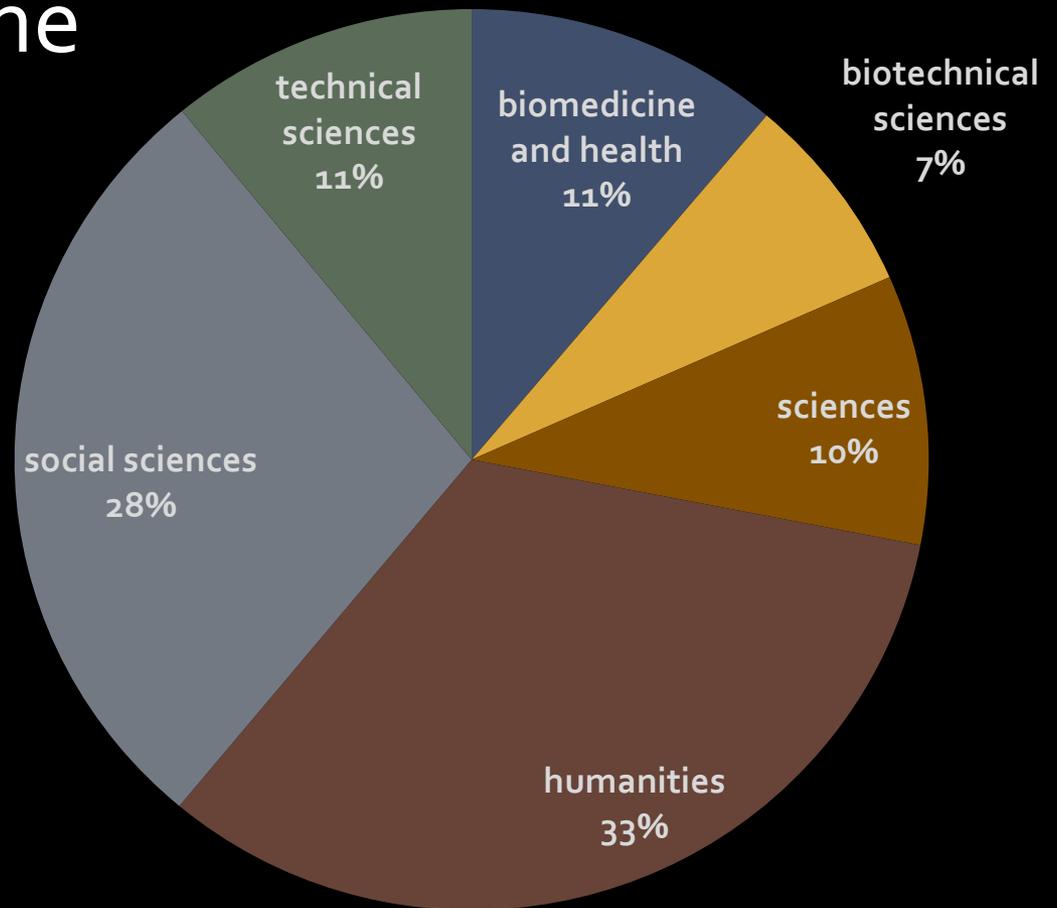
Lozinka

**prijava** ▶

[Zaboravili ste lozinku?](#)

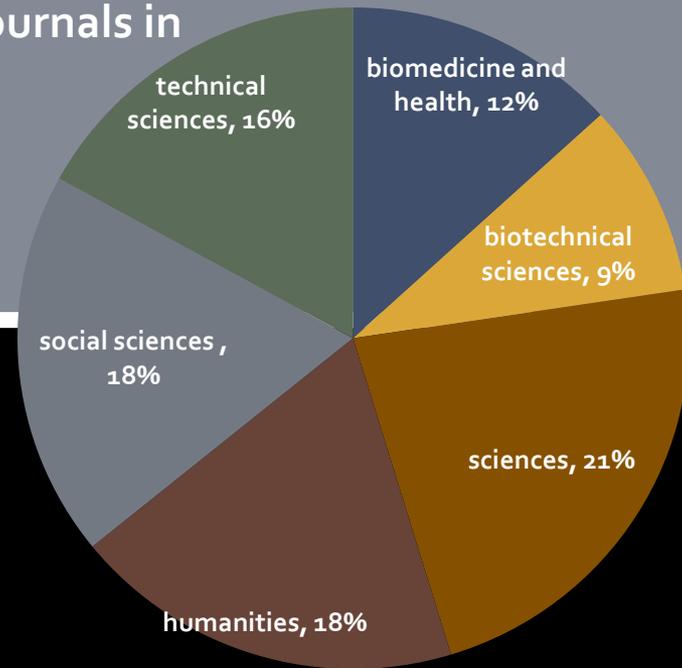


# HRČAK journals by discipline



average article is visited+downloaded 340 times

## HRCAK journals in WoS



# visibility

*375 active scholarly, professional and popular OA journals included in HRCAK*

100% in Google Scholar (GS)

93 in DOAJ

53 in WoS

106 in Scopus

...

# Peer review

still serves as the primary quality assurance system in Croatian scholarly journals

what kind of PR is possible in the community „*where everyone is a friend, enemy or neighbour*“? 😊

# Transparency

Croatian journals already adopted the concept of Open Access.

It was expected that Croatian OA journals have a set of editorial principles, including ethical principles, and a commitment to transparency.

It is necessary to ensure that readers, authors, peer reviewers and editors know as much about the background to each other's work as possible.

This can be done through different documents like instructions for authors, instructions for peer reviewers, and other policies, statements, guidelines etc.

# Instructions for peer reviewers

**author** – to know details about peer review process

**reviewer** - to make clear what constitutes a good review, to help reviewers understand what matters to editors about reviews, to give reviewers help in producing a good review, to make clear what is expected from reviewer in terms of journal quality standards

**readers** - may have more confidence on objective and unbiased peer review, and consequently more trust in the accuracy of the published research studies

# Research questions

Is it transparency of peer review process presented by Croatian OA journals?

What kind of issues are most frequently mentioned in the instructions for peer reviewers?

Is it possible to identify relevant ethical issues in the instructions for peer reviewers?

# Methodology

375 Croatian OA journals

84 instructions for peer reviewers (PDF, DOC)

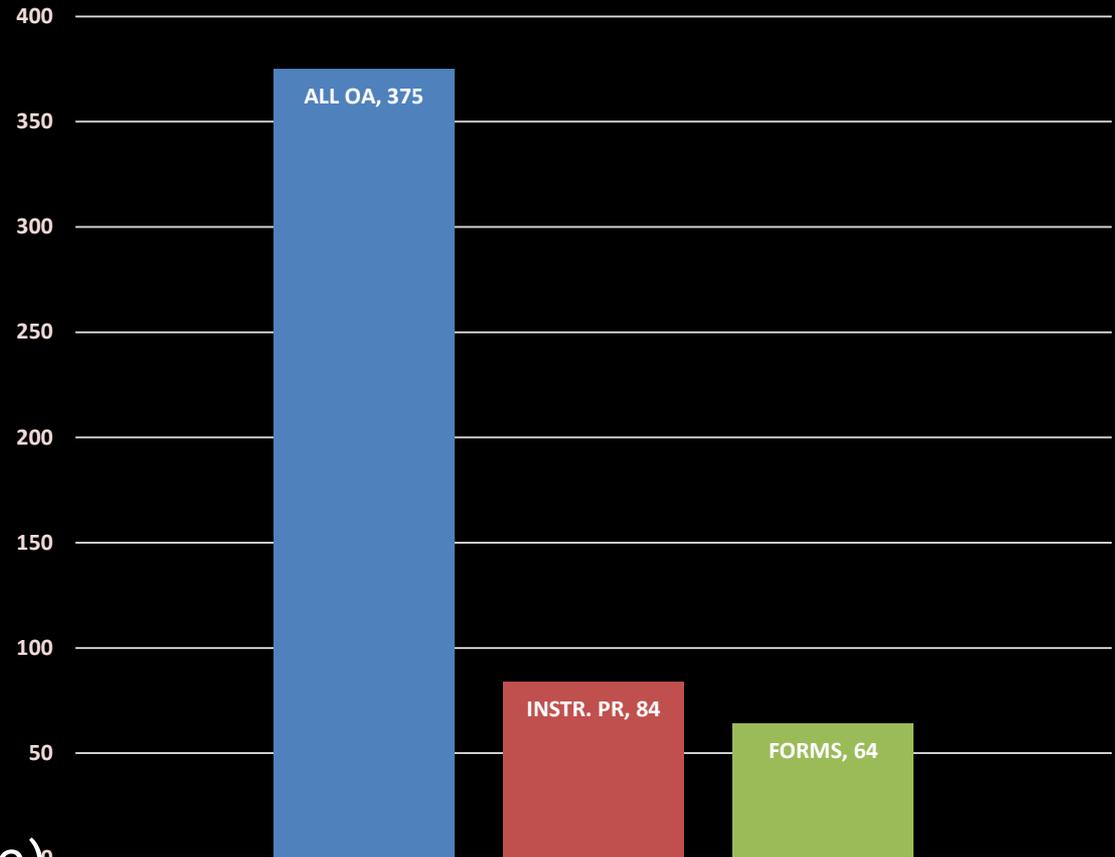
English and Croatian language

text analysis

document as an unit (case)

automatic coding using non-validated categorization dictionary

Provalis Research software for text analysis (QDA Miner and WordStat for word frequency analysis and text mining)



# From high expectations to the reality

 **SEEFOR** SOUTH-EAST EUROPEAN FORESTRY

ISSN 1847-8481  
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## REVIEWER GUIDELINES

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### Purpose of Peer Reviews

Peer Review is a critical element of scholarly publication, and one of the major cornerstones of the scientific process. Peer Review serves two key functions:

- Acts as a filter: ensures the research is properly verified before being published;
- Improves the quality of the research: rigorous review by other experts helps to hone key points and correct inadvertent errors.

Before you accept the editor's invitation for a review, consider the following questions:  
Does the manuscript you are being asked to review truly match your expertise?  
Do you have time to review the manuscript?  
Are there any potential conflicts of interest?

For more information please read Duties of Reviewers (SEEFOR Publication Ethics and Publication Malpractice Statement).

### Peer Review Process

All submitted manuscripts are going through a double-blind peer review process, where authors and reviewers are unknown to each other. Exceptionally, based on his consent, the name of the reviewer may be disclosed to the author. The whole reviewing process is usually carried out by using the Open Journal System and appropriate on-line forms. Reviews sent to the Editorial Board as e-mail attachment are accepted exceptionally. The Reviewer is invited by e-mail to review a submission, which includes its title and abstract, as well as the journal's URL, the username and password for the Reviewer to use to enter the journal. Additionally, an e-mail invitation may contain a special URL that takes the invited Reviewer directly to the Review page for the submission, without the need to create an account or log in.

### On-line Reviews

Reviewers enter the journal web site to agree to do a review, download submissions, submit their comments and select a recommendation by using the on-line SEEFOR Reviewer Form. The on-line reviewer's form requires that a set of questions on the scientific relevance and methodological soundness of the manuscript be answered by using radio buttons or the drop-down box. Additional comments that are optional, as well as confidential, for the editors, may also be provided by using the designated text-box fields.

### Reviews by e-mail

Upon an agreement with the editors, Reviewers may also send their comments as attachments to an e-mail message to the seefor@sumins.hr. In that case, the Reviewer is encouraged to submit his comments by using the appropriate form (.docx) available at the SEEFOR Review Form.

Reviewers accepting to review a paper are kindly requested to send their comments within three weeks. If it seems you might miss your deadline, inform the editor.

### Conducting the Review

Reviewing needs to be conducted confidentially, the manuscript you have been asked to review should not be disclosed to a third party. Most editors welcome additional comments, but whoever else is involved will likewise need to keep the review process confidential. You should not attempt to contact the author. Be aware when you submit your review that any recommendations you make will contribute to the final decision made by the editor. The report should contain the key elements of your review, addressing the points outlined in the preceding section. Commentaries should be courteous and constructive, and should not include any personal remarks or personal details including your name. Providing insight into any deficiencies is important. You should explain and support your judgment so that both editors and authors are better able to understand the basis of the comments. You should indicate whether your comments are your own opinion or reflected by data.

Please, evaluate the manuscript according to the following:

### Scope of the Journal

Is the content of the manuscript within the scope of the Journal?

### Originality

Is the manuscript sufficiently novel and interesting to warrant publication? Does it add to the canon of knowledge? Does the article adhere to the journal's standards?

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**REVIEWER'S FORM**

**1. Reviewer's personal data**

1.1. Name, surname  
\_\_\_\_\_

1.2. Academic degree, academic title and academic discipline  
\_\_\_\_\_

1.3. Institution  
\_\_\_\_\_

1.4. Address  
\_\_\_\_\_

**2. Date of the review:**  
\_\_\_\_\_

**3. Data on reviewed paper**

3.1. Publication/publisher's title  
**Histria archaeologica / Archaeological Museum of Istria, Pula**

3.2. Title of the paper  
\_\_\_\_\_

*Please answer the following questions:*

1. Is the paper, regarding its subject matter, appropriate to be published in Histria archaeologica?

Yes                      No

2. Can the paper be published in Histria archaeologica?

Yes      Yes, with revision      No

3. If the paper can be published, what would be its classification:

PHRASE	FREQUENCY	NO. CASES	% CASES
ORIGINAL SCIENTIFIC	57	42	48,30%
SCIENTIFIC PAPER	57	40	46,00%
EDITORIAL BOARD	54	22	25,30%
ORIGINAL SCIENTIFIC PAPER	48	38	43,70%
PRELIMINARY COMM.	44	37	42,50%
PROFESSIONAL PAPER	43	36	41,40%
REVIEW FORM	28	17	19,50%
REVIEW ARTICLE	21	15	17,20%
CONFERENCE PAPER	16	16	18,40%
TITLE OF THE PAPER	16	10	11,50%
REVIEW SHEET	16	4	4,60%
KEY WORDS	14	10	11,50%
PEER REVIEW	14	8	9,20%
ORIGINAL RESEARCH	14	7	8,00%
CONFLICT OF INTEREST	13	9	10,30%
MAJOR REVISION	12	11	12,60%
RESEARCH RESULTS	12	9	10,30%
MINOR REVISION	11	10	11,50%
ADDITIONAL COMMENTS	11	7	8,00%
REVIEW PROCESS	10	6	6,90%

# Most frequent phrases

# Adaptation to the present content

**REVIEWER**

**PEER REVIEW** (INCLUDING ETHICAL ISSUES)

**MANUSCRIPT**

11 subcategories were added at first and 18 at second hierarchical level

Subcategories included in total 269 words, phrases and rules

# Coding dictionary – rather simple

Word categorization based on Boolean (AND, OR, NOT) and proximity rules (NEAR, AFTER, BEFORE)

## REVIEWER

COMMENT\* (1)  
CONCERN\* (1)  
CRITICIS\* (1)  
EXPERT (1)  
OPPINION\* (1)  
REFEREE\* (1)  
REVIEWER (1)  
SUGGEST\* (1)

## PEER\_REVIEW

ETH\_ISS

## AUTHORSHIP

AUTHORSHIP\* (1)  
CONTRIBUTORSHIP\* (1)  
GHOST (1)  
GUEST (1)  
HONORARY (1)

## FUNDING\_AND\_COI

FUNDING

SPONSOR\* (1)  
GRANT (1)  
FUNDING (1)  
FINANC\* (1)

## COI

DISCLOS\* (1)  
CONFLICT\*\_OF\_INTEREST\* (1)  
COMPETING\_INTEREST\* (1)

## GUIDELINES

COPE (1)  
ICJME (1)

## MISCONDUCT

FABRICAT\* (1)  
FRAUD\* (1)

<i>CATEGORY</i>	<i>SUBCATEGORY 1</i>	<i>SUBCATEGORY 2</i>	<i>WORDS</i>
REVIEWER			reviewer, expert, referee, comments, suggestions
MANUSCRIPT			
	MANUSCRIPT_ELEMENTS		
		ABSTRACT	
		ACKNOWLEDGMENT	
		CONCLUSION	
		INTRODUCTION	
		KEY_WORDS	
		LITERATURE	literature, reference
		METHODS	materials, methods, methodology
		RESULTS	
		TITLE	
		DISCUSSION	
	DATA		dataset, raw data, research data, underlying data
	CONTENT_CONS		deficient, inadequate, inappropriate, incorrect,
	CONTENT_PROS		accurate, adequate, adherent, appropriate, clear, concise
	TABLES_AND_FIGURES		drawing, figure, graph, illustration, image, map, table
	TYPE_OF_PAPER		original scientific, professional paper, conference paper
	JOURNAL_SCOPE		discipline, filed, topic, subject

# PEER\_REVIEW

## ETH\_ISS

AUTHORSHIP authorship, contributorship, ghost, guest

FUNDING\_AND\_COI

FUNDING grant, funds, sponsor

COI conflict of interest, competing interest

GUIDELINES COPE, ICJME

MISCONDUCT misconduct, fabrication, malpractice

PLAGIARISM

REDUNDANCY redundant, recycled, compiled

REPORTING

TIMELINESS month, week, day, timeliness

PEER\_REVIEW\_PROCESS fair, unbiased, confidentiality, fair

PEER\_REVIEW\_TYPE anonymous, blind, open...

REVISION\_RESULT acceptance, rejection, revision...

# Results – top categories level

	FREQUENCY	NO. CASES	% CASES
MANUSCRIPT	2265	83	99%
REVIEWER	614	79	94%
PEER_REVIEW	545	71	85%

# Results – subcategories (1st level)

	FREQUENCY	NO. CASES	% CASES
MANUSCRIPT\MANUS_ELEM	778	82	98%
REVIEWER	614	79	94%
MANUSCRIPT\CONTENT_PROS	794	75	89%
MANUSCRIPT\TYPE_OF_PAPER	374	67	80%
PEER_REVIEW\REVISION_RESULT	415	66	79%
MANUSCRIPT\JOURNAL_SCOPE	176	59	70%
MANUSCRIPT\TABLES_AND_FIGURES	101	35	42%
PEER_REVIEW\METH_ISS	72	28	33%
MANUSCRIPT\CONTENT_CONS	42	23	27%
PEER_REVIEW\PEER_REV_PROC	31	23	27%
PEER_REVIEW\PEER_REV_TYPE	27	22	26%
MANUSCRIPT\DATA	0	0	0%

	FREQUENCY	NO. CASES	% CASES
MANUSCRIPT\CONTENT_PROS	794	75	89%
MANUSCRIPT\MAN_ELEM\TITLE	148	73	87%
MANUSCRIPT\MAN_ELEM\LITERAT	179	71	85%
MANUSCRIPT\TYPE_OF_PAPER	374	67	80%
MANUSCRIPT\JOURNAL_SCOPE	176	59	70%
MANUSCRIPT\MAN_ELEM\ABSTRACT	87	51	61%
MANUSCRIPT\MAN_ELEM\CONCL	80	51	61%
MANUSCRIPT\MAN_ELEM\RESULTS	140	51	61%
MANUSCRIPT\MAN_ELEM\METHODS	69	36	43%
MANUSCRIPT\TABLES_AND_FIGURES	101	35	42%
MANUSCRIPT\MAN_ELEM\KEYWORD	36	24	29%
MANUSCRIPT\CONTENT_CONS	42	23	27%
MANUSCRIPT\MAN_ELEM\INTROD	17	13	16%
MANUSCRIPT\MAN_ELEM\DISCUSS	20	12	14%
MANUSCRIPT\MAN_ELEM\ACKNOW	2	2	2%
MANUSCRIPT\DATA	0	0	0%

manuscript subcategories  
(2nd level)

	FREQUENCY	NO. CASES	% CASES
PEER_REVIEW\REVISION_RESULT	415	66	79%
PEER_REVIEW\PEER_REV_PROC	31	23	27%
PEER_REVIEW\PEER_REV_TYPE	27	22	26%
PEER_REVIEW\ETH_ISS\TIMELIN	24	19	23%
PEER_REVIEW\ETH_ISS\FUND&COI	35	17	20%
PEER_REVIEW\ETH_ISS\MISCOND	7	4	5%
PEER_REVIEW\ETH_ISS\REPORTING	2	2	2%
PEER_REVIEW\ETH_ISS\AUTHORSH	2	1	1%
PEER_REVIEW\ETH_ISS\PLAGIAR	2	1	1%
PEER_REVIEW\ETH_ISS\GUIDEL	0	0	0%
PEER_REVIEW\ETH_ISS\REDUND	0	0	0%

peer review subcategories  
(2nd level)

# Most frequent words

	FREQUENCY	NO. CASES
REVIEWER\COMMENT*	180	40
REVIEWER\REVIEWER*	167	41
MANUSCRIPT\MANUS_ELEM\TITLE\TITLE	112	46
MANUSCRIPT\MANUS_ELEM\LITERATURE\LITERATUR*	100	47
PEER_REVIEW\REVISION_RESULT\ACCEPT*	99	33
MANUSCRIPT\TYPE_OF_PAPER\@ORIGINAL	97	45
MANUSCRIPT\MANUS_ELEM\RESULTS\RESULT*	87	33
REVIEWER\SUGGEST*	72	35
MANUSCRIPT\CONTENT_PROS\CONTRIBUT*	67	30
MANUSCRIPT\MANUS_ELEM\LITERATURE\REFERENCE*	64	38
MANUSCRIPT\TYPE_OF_PAPER\@PROFESSIONAL	63	37
PEER_REVIEW\REVISION_RESULT\REVIS*	61	25

# Conclusions (1)

Among 84 instructions of Croatian OA journals, 64 are just reviewer forms

The most present category was information about *manuscript* (83/84), with *manuscript elements* (title, literature etc.) as most frequent subcategory (82/84)

Research *data* (raw data, underlying data) were not mentioned in a single instruction

Information about *reviewer* was present in the majority of instructions (79/84), with reviewers' *comments* and *suggestions* as most frequent terms (50/84 and 45/84 accordingly)

# Conclusions (2)

*Peer review* was the least represented category in the instructions for peer reviewers (71/84)

Among *peer review* subcategories the most present was about *revision results* (accepted, rejected...)(66/84),

- subcategories *peer review types* (blind, anonymous, open...), *peer review process* (confidentiality, fairness, unbiasedness...) and *ethical issues* (authorship, misconduct, redundancy, plagiarism...) were represented poorly (22-28/84)

# Final remarks

The aims of peer review are poorly defined in Croatian OA journals' instructions for peer reviewers

Croatian OA journals depend on the system of peer review

Croatian OA journals don't recognize the importance of peer review and the transparency of the whole process

While the volume of available content on HRČAK is vast, there is no consistent prove for its quality or trustworthiness

There is a need for raising awareness about the importance of transparency of peer review, and clear and consistent peer review guidelines

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Thank you for your attention,  
comments and suggestions! 😊

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