

## Editorial

# Reader-friendly publishing, the role of special issues, and your possible role as guest editor

The 'publish or perish' culture that forces academic researchers to publish as many articles as possible, is one of the negative outcomes of a development, not only in university but all over our society, where managers rather than experts dictate the rules. Managers who cannot overview science, nowadays often are the ones who decide about the distribution of research funds over faculties, departments and persons. As they can, as a rule, not judge the scientific value of the articles published by individuals, they developed systems of points that are largely based on the number of publications of an individual (or a department or a faculty) and the reputation of the journals in which the articles were published – irrespective of whether the journal deserves its good or bad reputation.

As mentioned above, this approach forces academics to publish as many articles as possible, and journals are the preferred medium (mainly because managers cannot judge the value of each individual book or chapters within a book). An unfortunate consequence is that many academics nowadays consider journals as a publication medium for their articles, rather than as a source of information. One should realize, however, that the main function of journals – and therefore of journal editors – is to transfer knowledge. Journals should focus on their readers, not on their authors: a reader-friendly publishing policy should be taken as a starting point for decisions what to publish and what not, but also when an accepted article is published.

## Balanced issues

For readers, a new issue of a journal comes usually as a surprise as regards the contents:

only few journals publish a list with forthcoming papers. The main reason is that a reader-friendly editorial philosophy is that the majority of the readers should find something of interest in each issue, and that, consequently, accepted manuscripts are not always published strictly according to the date of acceptance; sometimes an interesting paper that is needed for a good balance gets priority, and sometimes the publication of an accepted manuscript is postponed, just because too many manuscripts about specific subjects might undermine the balance of an issue.

It may seem not always justified to delay the publication of good manuscripts for such a reason, and, fortunately, *Geologos* has been in the position to avoid this as a rule. It appears, however, that the journal is informed sometimes that a number of fairly related manuscripts is to be expected "sometime in the near future". Most journals are confronted every now and then with such promises, and in such a case editors can decide to adapt the scheduled order of publications, just to avoid unbalance. Promises are not always kept, however, and that is why many journals plan the publication of special issues.

## Special issues

A special issue is 'special' because it focuses on a specific topic. This topic can be a specific subject of research (Middle Devonian conodonts), it can relate to a geographical unit (Geology of the Tatra Mountains), it can be related to a special occasion (Issue in honour of Professor X) or it can reflect the main items presented during, for instance, a conference. In some cases the journal editors handle the manuscripts for such special issues following the routine

procedure, in other cases experts in the subject of the special issue may be asked to handle the manuscripts as guest editors.

It appears that *Geologos* has reached a stage in which the occasional publication of special issues needs consideration: several suggestions have been made in the recent past. Not all suggestions will result in a special issue, and the time lag between a first proposal and the actual publication of a special issue may be more than a year, sometimes even several years. On the other hand, some special issues can be realized quickly, for instance if a large project comes to an end in the form of a number of closely related manuscripts, if material from a conference or one of the sessions of a conference is sufficiently interesting, or if researchers from several universities, working on related topics, realize that their work will be much better read if published in a special issue, than if distributed over a wide variety of journals.

## **Invitation to our readers**

*Geologos* adheres to reader-friendly publication. Therefore we invite all readers, both in Poland and abroad, to contact us if they have ideas for a special issue. Obviously, there should – at a specific moment – be enough material of sufficiently high quality to fill an issue. If you are not sure about this, do nevertheless not hesitate to contact us: we might be aware of more research that is done in the same field and that might be included. Do not hesitate either to consult us about a possible role as guest editor: We will happily guide you through the process of handling a special issue, so that you – as an author and as a reader – can make your role in the transfer of information complete by becoming an editor as well.

*The Editors*