



COMETS
CNRS Ethics Committee

OPINION n°2011-24

« RELATIONS BETWEEN RESEARCHERS AND PUBLISHING HOUSES »

Approved at the plenary session of 30 june 2011



I. SUMMARY

The publication of research articles is taken care of by publishing houses whose role is de facto important in the life of the scientific community. They have indeed the responsibility of registering articles, the date of submission serving as a reference when anteriority is an issue, to organise the life of an editorial board consisting of acknowledged specialists, the heart of the modus operandi from an intellectual point of view, to manage publishing rights, most of the time given to the journal, to typeset articles in an issue and to make them accessible on paper and electronically, to disseminate information about the availability and the content of the journal and to archive the whole collection of articles.

The statement made by the COMETS analyzes some of the problems encountered by researchers in their relations with publishing houses, evaluates their consequences and suggests some measures to be taken to deal with them. The central role taken by communication through internet introduces a new context in which the current economical models for publishing, that have been used for more than a century, have to be revised. It gives the academic community an opportunity to control the overall process. It also represents new challenges that the commercial sector has taken up more quickly than the academic one that is less efficient when it comes to mobilizing quickly important resources.

In the concluding part of this statement, one finds recommendations to deal with the issues raised, e.g. that CNRS gives its personnel better legal information on its situation when they publish an article in a journal, in particular in relation with the free use of it for non commercial purposes and for public archives, and/or when they negotiate access to journals. Within a few years, the control of the scientific publishing market has been taken, in several disciplines, by commercial companies or by learned societies using their journals to finance other types of activity. Public institutions, such as CNRS, should implement a strategy making it possible for entities, whose practices are more in line with the mission of their researchers, to develop a viable economic model for publishing.

