

# **Professor, does your university (want to) know what you are doing?**

or

Does your university take any interest in your activity as reviewer?

By

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# The situation in my research field, nationally and internationally

- i) Resources are shrinking by the year
- ii) We are forced to design our research activities to maximize the outcome in our endless hunt for impact factors. Our wet dream is to publish in Nature to:
  - a) obtain a golden ticket to compete successfully for research grants, and
  - b) enjoy respect from our colleagues

The realization of

**TWO CENTRAL PARADOXES**

triggered my interest in politics and economics in  
scientific publishing:

# PARADOX #1

## True open access publishing - an unattainable goal?

The majority of the work connected to scientific publishing is done by scientists: writing, reading and commenting, peer reviewing.

Yet: The flow of money in scholarly publishing runs out of the control of the scientists' institutions:

- The license cost that universities have to pay to the big publishing houses to get access to scientific journals keep increasing unsustainably.
- The universities have so far not been able to change publishing into a true open access model, with all its obvious benefits.

# PARADOX #2

## **The spell of the impact factor – can we ever free ourselves from it?**

Most scientists know that a high impact factor of a journal is not a guarantee that all articles published in that journal is of high originality and quality. How come we are still unable to break the spell of the impact factor? Discussions on the topic have been going on for decades, but today we are more than ever slaves of the impact factor (at least in my field, biomedicine).

# **Analysis of these paradoxes**

## **- remedies to bring scholarly publishing back on track**

I have discussed these paradoxes with my co-author Leif Longva, and together we have suggested remedies to regain the universities' control of all steps of scholarly publishing.

*(Vitenskapelige tidsskrifter: makten og æren. Smedsrød & Longva, Forskningspolitikk, 2010 (1), p. 30-31)*

# In this presentation we will:

1. Propose that peer reviewing of scientific manuscripts is as central as designing and carrying out the research proper, and writing the manuscript
2. Identify the major players in the peer reviewing process
3. Discuss the curious fact that the universities show little or no interest in how and to what extent its scientific staff works as peer reviewers
4. Discuss what may be done from the university side to regain control of the peer reviewing process
5. Discuss what may be gained for the university by taking control of the peer reviewing regime

1.

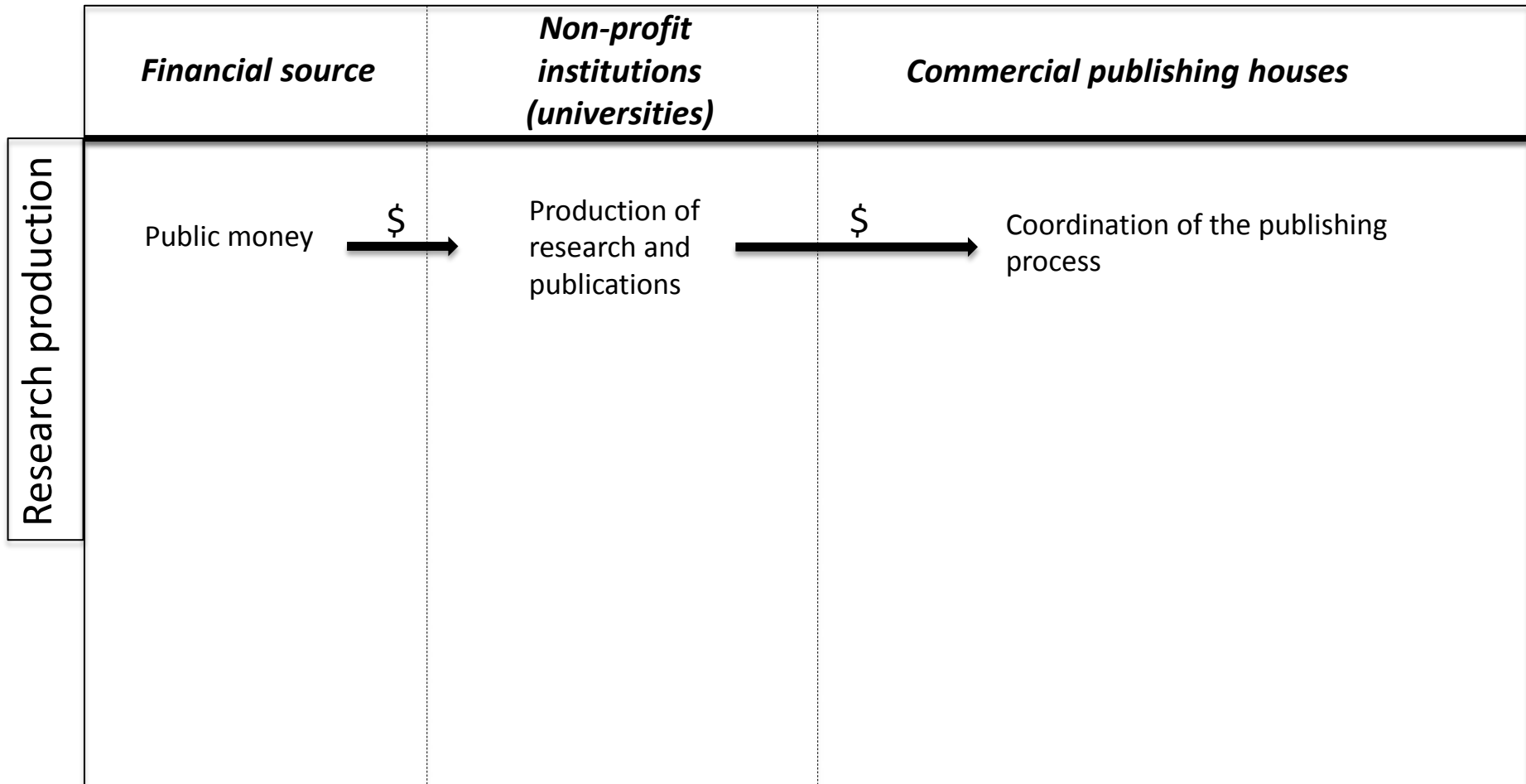
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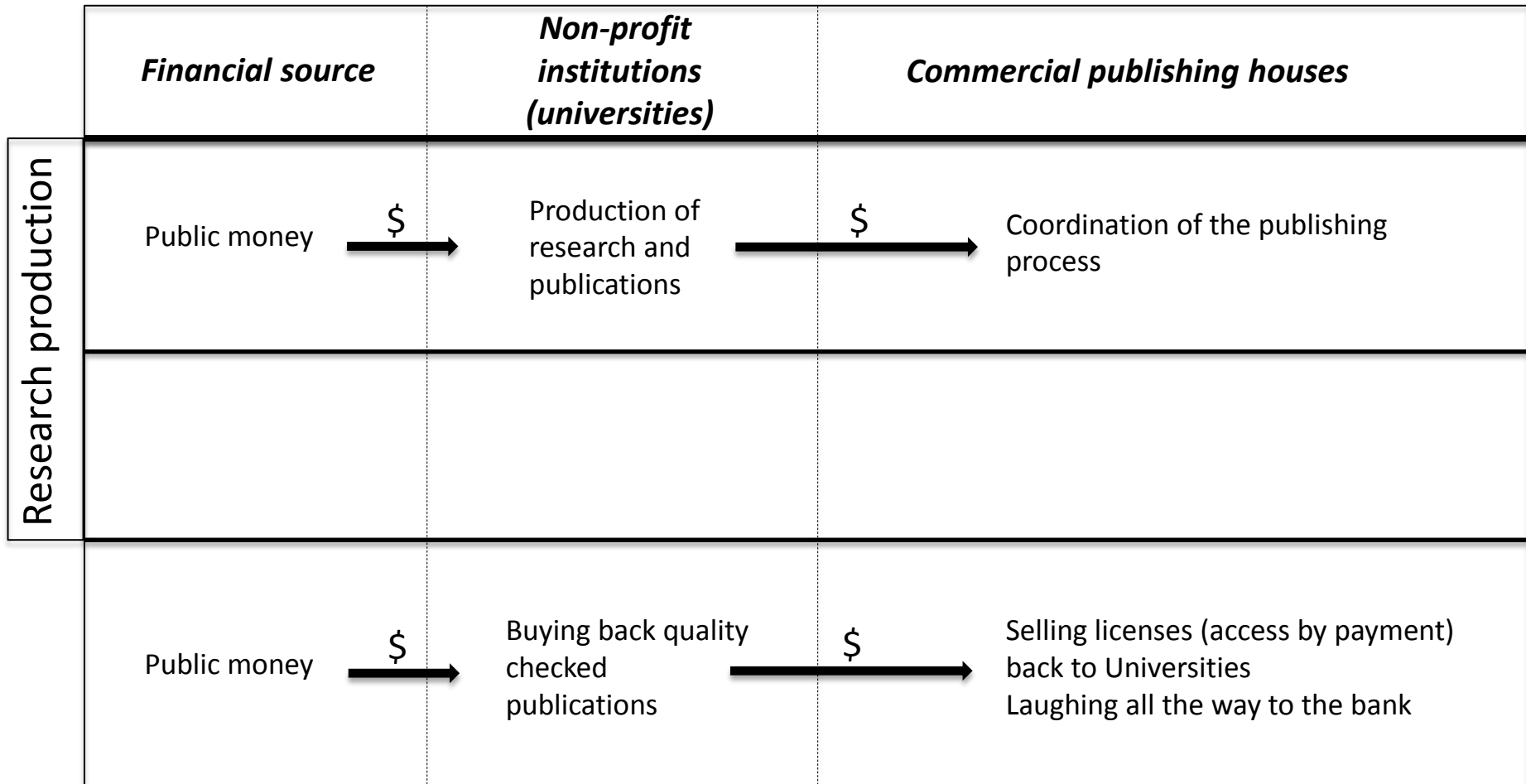
# How publishing houses make big profit on public money

<i>Financial source</i>	<i>Non-profit institutions (universities)</i>	<i>Commercial publishing houses</i>

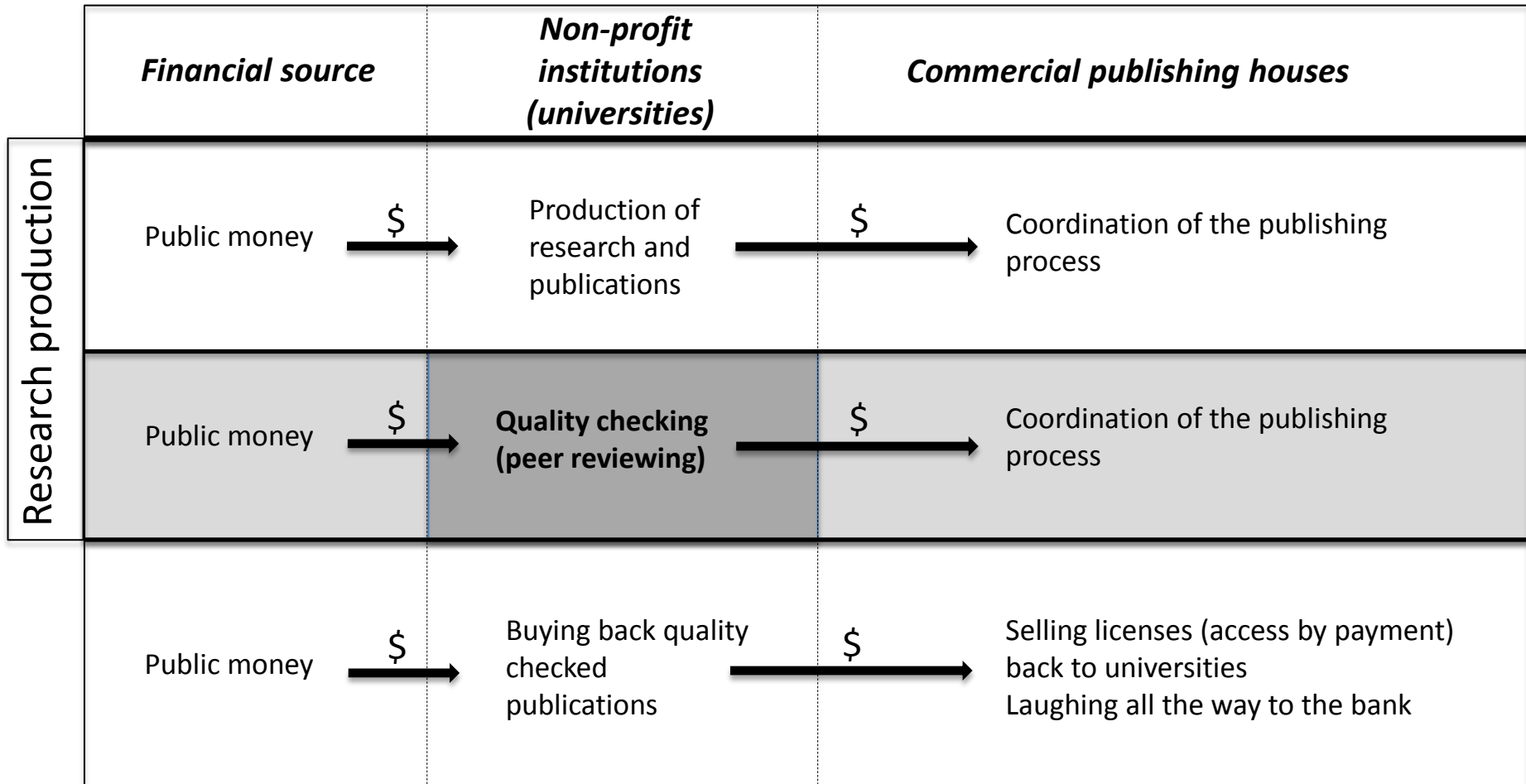
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## 2.

### **The major players in the peer reviewing process**

- i) The researchers
- ii) The publishing houses
- iii) The universities (and also research councils and other public financial sources)

# The researchers

How do the researchers think about peer reviewing?

- Peer reviewing is the only acceptable way to have our research production checked for quality.
- Peer reviewing is pivotal in order to build a CV, and write successful grant applications to funding bodies.
- A positive referee report is a mental boost to most researchers: shows to colleagues that the researcher is successful.

# The publishing houses

How do the publishing houses think about peer reviewing?

- Required to give the journals their reputation and status of exclusivity in the hierarchy of publishing channels
- Enables attraction of a steady flow of manuscript submissions, making it impossible for libraries to cancel their subscriptions of such journals
- Required for the publishers to dictate the price of their licence/prenumeration agreements



# The universities

How do the universities think about peer reviewing?

The universities passively agree that peer reviewing is the basis of quality evaluation of the research produced by its scientific staff.

But the sad fact is that they do not seem to think much at all about it

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# 3.

## **The universities are indifferent to how and to what extent its scientific staff work as peer reviewers**

Why have the universities not yet flagged a clear policy about peer reviewing as a task of same importance as teaching and research?

At the University of Tromsø as much as 15—20.000 hours are used annually by its scientific staff to work for free for scientific journals (*“Peer review at the University of Tromsø: a study of time spent on reviewing and researchers’ opinions on peer review”*, Master thesis of Maria Refsdal, 2010)

## **Reasons to claim that universities are indifferent to how much time its scientific staff work as reviewers:**

- i) No registration of peer reviewing activities (in contrast to vivid attempts to register teaching and research activities).
- ii) No formal education on how to behave as a peer reviewer. The universities show no interest in how and for whom its own scientific staff carries out their reviewing activities.
- iii) Would the university care if I or other scientists declare to the major publishing houses, for instance Elsevier, that I will no longer publish my research results in their journals, nor do any refereeing or editorial work for them? No! The university does not have a policy regarding delivery of reviewing tasks. It has left it completely up to its scientific staff to decide how to respond to requests of reviewing tasks.

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# 4.

## **What may be done from the university side to take control over the peer reviewing process?**

- i) Start registering reviewing tasks! Be positive about it: give rewards.....
- ii) Use the peer reviewing activity to negotiate the license price claimed by the big publishing houses. Peer reviewing is something that only the university can deliver, and without a peer reviewing system the publishing houses would be nothing.

- iii) Establish peer reviewing courses, with a curriculum that is based on international agreements.
- iv) Make sure that those who deliver peer reviews are doing a good job. The university wants high quality teaching and research. It should also exclaim clear and loud, that it wants high quality reviewing activity from its staff.
- v) All this would only make sense if the university do implement peer reviewing as part of its strategy. Make a clear statement about the peer reviewing task in the university strategy plan.

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**What may be gained for the university by taking control of the peer reviewing regime?**

- i) Less expensive, and OA journal licenses: Peer reviewing may be used as a negotiation tool to bring down license costs and also Article Processing Charges for OA publishing, where these charges are viewed as too high.
  
- ii) Perhaps the act of taking control of the peer review process will enable a concerted international system among the universities to establish an organ that coordinate the reviewing process. Open reviewing would be more acceptable if the review process is taken care of by scientists.
  
- i) By implementing peer reviewing as a credit giving activity at the university, and establishing a course to ensure that the reviewing is carried out in a scientific and ethically healthy and high quality way, this activity will be cleaner and more reliable than it is today.

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Question #4: Why is this not OK?

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Question #4: Why is this not OK?

Answer: *Peer reviewing is as a key to regain the universities' control of scientific publishing.*

Question #5: What should be done to correct this situation?

Answer: *Immediately identify peer reviewing as a “countable” activity with similar importance as other major research associated activities.*