

<http://chorasimilarity.wordpress.com/2013/02/17/episciences-math-lets-talk-about-this/>

## Episciences-Math, let's talk about this

February 17, 2013 [chorasimilarity](#) [7 Comments](#)

In other fields we have [PeerJ](#) and [Knowledgeblog.org](#) and [BMJ pico](#), to give only three extremely interesting examples. In mathematics we (shall) have Episciences-Math.

The presentation of the project Episciences-Math, as [given here](#):

The editorial process envisioned for the Episciences-Maths epijournals is quite standard: authors submit their articles after making them available in arXiv or in HAL, and provide the ID of their e-print to a specified epijournal of their choice. The Editorial board of that epijournal handles the submission exactly as for a traditional scientific journal, appointing referees, and deciding to publish – or not – when the report is received. If the article is accepted after suitable corrections have been made, it is subsequently listed on the web page of the journal as a link to the actual file, the final version of which is stored solely in the open archive. At some point in the future, the Episciences platform might also allow the publication of additional contents attached to each article (review by a reporter or by the editorial boards of epijournals, additional data provided by the author: source codes, lecture notes, presentations ...)

The Episciences-Maths initiative will be supervised by an “Epicommittee” composed of leading mathematicians. Its role is to stimulate the constitution of editorial boards willing to create new epijournals, especially thematic epijournals in areas not yet covered, to manage possible takeovers of existing journals, and finally to treat any ethical and professional issues. Members of the Epicommittee may or may not themselves take responsibility of an epijournal.

This is the project announced in the “[Good guys](#)” post by Gowers. Many mathematicians are looking forward to see the details.

Several posts on this blog witness the desire to see that epijournals become reality. Don't get me wrong, therefore, if I make some comments about some aspects which worry me a little:

- The public presence of this project is very low. Am I wrong about this? Please send me links to relevant places where this project is explained and ...
- ... discussed! Is there any public discussion about it, besides the fact that almost everybody who cares to comment wishes the best to the project? Yes, the creators of the project may say “it's out project, be patient”, but that would be plain wrong. That is because it does not matter whose project is, provided that it is a successful one, or, in order for the project to have success, they need us, those who are waiting to see what is

this really about.

- The third point is that, just by looking at the presentation, I don't get what is new in this project, excepting the fact that the final versions of the articles will be hosted by HAL or arXiv. Annals of Mathematics did this, why do the Episciences think they will succeed?
- I get that they hope to create the SEED of a journal, but platforms for journals exist already. The problem of scientific publication is not technical, it is psychological. I don't get how they want to address this.
- What about all the features which many people expect? Comments, peer-review, multiple journals "publishing" the same article (i.e. independent, multiple, peer-reviews by different journals for the same article, according to different communities interests, like Andrew Stacey suggests on G+), who will review the articles, what incentives will have mathematicians to publish in an epijournal, knowing that hiring committees and moronic bureaucratic organisms are still pushing authors to publish in traditional ways?

I invite anybody to discuss, here or anywhere. This satisfied silence, after the bad cop – good cop pair of posts by Gowers, looks to me as if our mathematics community is a bit sedated. Or maybe many mathematicians just think our field does not need to change publication practices, even if every other scientific field does it (I am mean, but really, that's the truth.)

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[Good news from the good guys](#)In "cost of knowledge"

[Straw-man argument against comments in epijournals](#)In "comments in epijournals"

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## 7 thoughts on “Episciences-Math, let's talk about this”

1. [Benoît Régent-Kloeckner](#)  
February 18, 2013 at 10:38 am

I will only address partial aspects of your comments.

The public discussions about the project happen a little bit, precisely at blogs talking about it. Understandably, the flow of comments was strong after Gowers' post, and as somewhat dried out. I expect further discussion to take place when the project announces new steps.

Also, <http://publishing.mathforge.org/2/> would be a good place to discuss these matters.

We do not really have the working force to maintain a high web presence though.

It is right that little is new in the project; it is only an implementation of an idea proposed before. What makes us feel we can succeed is that we are not doing what the Annals tried: we do not rely on subscriptions. This means we have other weakness (notably we depend on institutional support, we have at least at first to do no copy-editing and formatting), we hope and feel we can live with these.

Platforms for journal exist, what we provide is a implemented platform whose

development and maintenance is taken care of and backed up by an institution, and a strong scientific warrant, the epicommittee. Additional technical features that seem to be new (like the anonymized communication channel between reviewers and authors) are the cherry on the cake.

2. [chorasimilarity](#)  
February 18, 2013 at 10:56 am

[Comment updated] Thank you for the comment and link.

I wish the best of luck to the project, but you don't need a "working force to maintain a high web presence". It is enough to make people dream about it, concerned about it. See in this respect [MOOCs teach OA a lesson](#) by Eric Van de Velde, who puts as CONJECTURE 4 this:

"OA is not sufficiently disruptive. Hoping to minimize resistance to OA, OA advocates tend to underemphasize the disruptiveness of OA. Gold and Green OA leave the scholarly-communication system essentially intact. When presented in a minimalist frame, they are minor tweaks that provide open access, shift costs, and bend the cost curve. Such modest, even boring, goals do not capture the imagination of the most effective advocates for change, advocates who have the ears of and who are courted by academic leaders: venture capitalists. This is a constituency that seeks out projects that change the world."

About the epicommittee, this looks to me as something which is basically an appeal to authority argument (strange for math, where we have the PROOF). It is good though for stirring the interest of people (if Gowers, Baez, etc support this then it's a big deal), but it creates a pyramid (a bottleneck) in the organization, or the best thing about these new forms of collaboration is that they don't require a pyramidal structure in order to exist. I don't believe that the new publishing model, which surely will emerge, will be one based on dinosaurish like pyramidal structures.

Finally, maybe I am paranoid, but from the start (I can document by giving links to previous comments) I saw the potential of this project as an excuse for more delay until real changes are done. I definitely don't believe that your project is designed for that purpose, I am only afraid that your project might be used for that, for example by stifling any public discussion about new OA models in math publishing, because you know, there are these epijournals coming, let's wait and see.

1. [Benoît Régent-Kloeckner](#)  
February 18, 2013 at 11:51 am

Let me elaborate on the epicommittee.

First, think of the « Chaos, Soliton and Fractals » scandal. CCSD is a service unit, with no researcher, let alone researchers in all domains episciences aims at covering, but has to have a mean to deal with this kind of issues, with a journal not maintaining a sound editorial process, or violating ethical rules. This is one of the role of the epicommittee, one which is essential for episciences to earn and keep confidence of the scientific community (without this confidence, who would submit papers to epijournals?) It is much better than having a few people involved in the project like me giving exclusive advice to CCSD with respect to

these matters.

Second (well, chronologically first), the epicommittee has a role to have journals join the project. Members are well placed to gather editorial board or convince existing ones to join, and this is a crucial step for the launch of the project.

Last, thinking that the mathematical community works without appeal to authority is a naive idea, as witnessed by all the current publishing system: we rely on editors to take decision on paper acceptance, they rely on reviewer to evaluate these papers. That we should all be able to ultimately determine which proofs are ok does not mean that we do, or that we should (at least not beyond a certain extend). The real question is how to assign authority. For now editors assign authority to reviewers by asking them to review, and authors assign authority to editors by submitting them their papers. We can aim at different mechanisms, like a less hierarchical network of peer, but I truly think that we need to rely on fellow mathematicians, and therefore assign them some authority one way or the other. I tend to believe that assigning to the present epicommittee the authority of playing for epijournals the role editorial boards play for articles is a reasonable move, but of course this is mostly a personal appreciation.

1. [chorasimilarity](#)  
February 18, 2013 at 12:28 pm

If this were true: “Last, thinking that the mathematical community works without appeal to authority is a naive idea, as witnessed by all the current publishing system: we rely on editors to take decision on paper acceptance, they rely on reviewer to evaluate these papers” then Wikipedia would not exist. But it does.

[UPDATE:] Let me add that at the time when the printing press was a new thing, academia had a low opinion about scientific publishing. At that time, anybody could order the printing of a paper and many did. The irony is that now, some historians and such excepted, we have no idea about mathematics results which were not printed at due time.

In the current publishing system there are (at least) two bottlenecks which damage it: (1) the peer review is done before publication and it is not actualized during the lifetime of the article (which leads to awkward situations where papers are retracted after passing the peer-review), (2) the editor takes practically no responsibility of his/her decisions because most of the times he is not the publisher and because of the fact that today there are much more articles being written than journals to publish them (due to the absurdity of counting articles instead of reading them). Compare this to wikipedia, which was not an invention of the academia. Long time (even today) people believed that it is impossible to rely on an encyclopedia written by thousands of anonymous contributors. What authority do they have? None. But why does that system work? Because of the enthusiasm of the contributors and because of the easiness of the use of the system.

3. [Benoît Régent-Kloeckner](#)  
February 18, 2013 at 11:59 am

“I saw the potential of this project as an excuse for more delay until real changes are

done.[...] I am only afraid that your project might be used for that [...] by stifling any public discussion about new OA models in math publishing, because you know, there are these epijournals coming, let's wait and see."

Well, should we do nothing in order not to prevent other people doing better? I am ready to take responsibility for my actions, not for other's action or lack thereof. I do hope several different projects take off so that we can have a choice as a community.

1. [chorasimilarity](#)  
February 18, 2013 at 12:31 pm

I agree, the burden of change it is not on you, in fact you are an inspiration for others and I congratulate you for this. I only say that worries like those expressed by me would be easily dispersed by a more open communication. We are (many of us) eager to help, or disagree, according to personal beliefs.