

Giving Voice project – helping authors publish reports about the consequences of the War in Ukraine

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In 2022, we launched the *Giving Voice* project that offers assistance for writing reports about the war in Ukraine for Ukrainian authors lacking experience or time to do so.

The war in Ukraine

On 24 February 2022, Russia invaded Ukraine, initiating a devastating ground war on the European continent and transforming the world more profoundly than any other recent conflict. Besides causing numerous deaths and the exodus of millions of refugees, the war in Ukraine has affected the global economy with a sudden inflation surge and disrupted energy and food supply chains [1].

The war shattered the serenity of European countries lulled into the comfort of life in abundance to be awakened into a nightmare, in which the possibility of nuclear war is no longer a matter of science fiction. That painful awakening soon transformed into an im-

mense effort to help Ukraine in defending its sovereignty. Together with the United States, the European Union has armed Ukraine with weapons and military equipment worth billions of euros [2]. The European Union has also pledged billions in various forms of aid to Ukraine, imposed numerous sanctions on Russia, and greeted more than eight million Ukrainian refugees [2, 3].

Inspiration: *Croatian Medical Journal* war-related articles

In these disastrous times, we need more than empathy for those suffering from the immediate consequences of the war. The academic community can help by doing what it knows

best – helping document important evidence and publishing research. The experience of the *Croatian Medical Journal (CMJ)* editors during and after the 1991-1995 war in Croatia shows how a scientific journal can help in times of war [4]. The *CMJ* published scientific articles on various aspects of war medicine, documented cases of war crimes and human rights abuses, engaged in peace promotion through medicine, assisted hundreds of medical professionals in contributing knowledge needed when a disaster strikes, and by doing so, told a story of human resilience and resourcefulness [5-7].

The first collection of war-related articles was published by the *CMJ* in November 1991, as a supplement to its first issue, and another one in May 1992. These supplements contained reports on civilian deaths and massacres, child casualties, analysis of people displaced from war regions, psychological analysis of war trauma, the health status of refugees and released prisoners of war, destruction of medical institutions, consequences of ethnic rapes, and the organization of the Croatian Medical Corps [8].

The preparation of war-related supplements demonstrated that the largest problem for the members of the Croatian academic community was not the lack of professional knowledge or expertise, but rather a reluctance and lack of skills in writing for scholarly medical journals [4]. That problem required a special approach, an author-helpful prereview, which was developed as a result of *CMJ* editors' close collaboration with the authors [9]. *CMJ* editors worked with the authors to help them prepare their manuscripts and the data presentation until the manuscripts were considered ready for a traditional, external peer review [10]. Editorial staff working closely with authors formed the cornerstone of *CMJ* editors' work and become a unique approach in the world of medical journal editors [4, 11].

Furthermore, *CMJ* editors encouraged the members of the Croatian academic community to submit their manuscripts to other, more prestigious journals. Some 360 articles on the medical aspects of the war in Croatia and Bosnia and Herzegovina were published as a result of that effort [7]. Those publications can now serve as inspiration for researchers who want to write about their war experiences [12].

We do not know what the impact of these war-related articles has been since these types of reverberations are difficult to measure. We can only hope that these articles published in war-related *CMJ* supplements were important not only for the education of medical professionals [13] and for informing the medical community but also served as important historical documents and perhaps as evidence in the legal proceedings at the International Court of Justice and the International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia.

The TRIBE approach: helping with planning, preparing, and publishing research

As directors of the postgraduate doctoral program Translational Research in Biomedicine (TRIBE), our daily routine consists of reviewing the research protocols of our students, teaching them how to write scientific articles, and guiding them through the publishing process. This is why our doctoral program is highly accomplished in terms of student grad-

uation rates [14]. Thus, we decided to offer our model and expertise to all authors who would like to write about the consequences of the war in Ukraine.

Alliance with the *ST-OPEN* journal

Together with the editorial board of the *ST-OPEN* journal, which is now led by the former editors of *CMJ*, we want to use our experience and offer assistance in writing and publishing research and reports related to the war in Ukraine to authors who are currently not in a position to devote their time to publishing or to those who lack experience in scientific writing and publishing. We named the project *Giving Voice* (Figure 1) because we want to give a platform to voices that are often not heard loud enough, particularly to those that do not belong to academic elites: students, refugees, vulnerable and marginalized groups, and others whose lives have been disrupted by war. We also hope to attract contributions from brave individuals from Russia who do not support violence or believe in propaganda, and who are protesting and working against the war despite censorship and repression.



Figure 1. The logo of the *Giving Voice* project.

Since *ST-OPEN* is an interdisciplinary journal, we seek contributions from all scientific fields. In addition to articles on war medicine, war crimes, and human rights breaches, we welcome articles on the economic consequences of war, changes, and adaptations of educational processes, destruction of cultural heritage, social consequences, and other topics.

You are invited to contribute

We invite interested authors to contact us. In addition, we invite those who would like to help us with this project to become a part of our network of mentors. We would also appreciate help in establishing contacts with researchers in Ukraine affected by the war. Through this network, we will get in touch with potential authors, select relevant topics for publication, review the data, connect authors with our team of experts, and publish their experiences in an *ST-OPEN* supplement devoted to the war in Ukraine. Our help will include assistance with study planning, statistics, writing, and English language editing to make the obtained data publishable. All articles will go through a formal external review

process, so we cannot guarantee that all will be accepted for publication, but we will do our best to make them publication-ready.

We can make a difference and be agents of change

As members of the academic community, we can make a difference within our professional realm. We should not only be a simple service for publishing articles but also, perhaps more importantly, agents of change for the scientific community. As directors of the TRIBE doctoral program, we aim to educate scientists to solve research problems and write reports about them. We provide them with transferable skills that will be useful to them outside of academia [14]. These sets of skills should be expanded to the skills needed to navigate through this complex world of today. We need to adopt transformative learning at every level of professional training [15, 16]. We should not only try to provide future scientists with knowledge and skills or gather them around the key values – we should also help create enlightened agents of change and equip them with leadership qualities accompanied by social and moral accountability [15]. We will extend the same efforts to the authors and mentors who decide to take part in the *Giving Voice* project.

Scientific knowledge strengthens individuals' learning and professional development because it encourages them to adopt critical thinking in various aspects of their life. Accordingly, the attainment of scientific knowledge may allow increased awareness of individual and social needs and rights, which could be a good outcome of our efforts.

Everyone is invited to join us in the *Giving Voice* project, either as an author seeking support toward publishing a war-related report or as an expert willing to help others. We are looking forward to hearing from you.

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