

Editorial Note

A case of plagiarism

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Natural Hazards and Earth System Sciences (NHES) is the interdisciplinary, open access journal of the European Geosciences Union (EGU) dedicated to the publication of original research on natural hazards. The first article in NHES, a Preface to a special issue on seismic hazard evaluation and precursory phenomena, was published in the spring of 2001. On 23 December 2008, Volume 8, Number 6, was closed with a paper discussing rainfall associated with tropical cyclones in Taiwan. In this eight year period, the journal has published 621 papers, and has become a reference for scientists and practitioners working in the realm of natural hazards. The journal growing success is demonstrated by its Impact Factor, 1.021 for 2007; the highest for journals dealing with research on natural hazards. Like in other science journal, the success of NHES is the result of several factors and the work of many individuals, including the seventeen editors, a number of motivated guest-editors, tens of invaluable referees, hundreds of inspired and tenacious authors, and an efficient and tireless editorial and production office.

Managing NHES is a challenging and exciting professional experience with few problems. An emerging problem is plagiarism. The Webster's Dictionary (1979) describes plagiarism as the "act of plagiarizing", i.e. "to take and pass off as one's own the ideas, writing, etc. of another" (p. 1371). According to Wikipedia, the online free encyclopedia, "Plagiarism is the use or close imitation of the language and thoughts of another author and the representation of them as one's own original work" (<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Plagiarism>, accessed 2 January 2008). Plagiarism is a growing concern for NHES, as for other scientific journals. Unethical use (and misuse) of language and thoughts taken from

peers is increasing driven by multiple reasons, including lack of understanding for the need of critical verification and adequate recognition of previous work, and easy access to information on the internet.

In October 2008, I was informed that a paper published by Taramelli et al. (2008) in Volume 8, Number 4, may have represented a case of plagiarism. Following this information, I examined the paper carefully, and compared it to a paper by Chen et al. (2003) published in the journal Environmental Management. The two papers discuss different subjects. Chen et al. (2003) present an integrated, GIS-based approach to access the risk posed by bushfires. Taramelli et al. (2008) use GIS technology to determine the potential hazards posed by hurricanes.

Examination of the two papers revealed that the paper by Taramelli and co-workers contains considerable parts of text, including most of the abstract (19 lines), the beginning of the introduction (3 lines), and most of the conclusion (34 lines) that were taken word by word, with only minor language modifications, from the paper by Chen and his coauthors. In their work, Taramelli et al. (2008) have not cited the work of Chen et al. (2003), nor have they obtained a written authorization from these authors or the publisher to use their language and thoughts. The extent and relevance of the sections of the copied text (specifically, the Abstract and the Conclusion) were sufficient to identify a case of academic plagiarism.

Following this comparative examination, I have written the authors of Taramelli et al. (2008) individually, to obtain detailed and direct information. In their responses to my inquiry, these authors recognized the problem, and apologized for the unfortunate incident, which they attributed to careless use of material taken from a Master's thesis.



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Having obtained sufficient information, the paper Taramelli et al. (2008), including its digital version (file nhess-8-839-2008.pdf), was withdrawn. This Editorial note was written to announce and explain the decision. NHESS does not accept or tolerate scientific or academic plagiarism, and it is committed to prevent, detect and prosecute it.

References

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- Webster's New Twentieth Century Dictionary of the English Language Unabridged, Simon and Schuster, New York, ISBN-0-671-41819-X, 1979.