

Summary of LOWI opinion 2017-01

Keywords: accusation of plagiarism, assessment criteria, book not essential source

Relevant provisions: Elaboration 1.3 of the Netherlands Code of Conduct for Academic Practice

Petition

The Petitioner complained about an article that the Interested Parties had published in 2014. According to the Petitioner, the Interested Parties erroneously claim to have been the first to have written about a certain connection, although he had already described that connection in his book published in 2010. The Interested Parties further failed to reference his book in their article and are guilty of plagiarism.

Opinion of the Research Integrity Committee (RIC) & decision by the Board

According to the RIC, the Interested Parties have not violated the principles of research integrity. Since the book is not an essential source, the lack of a citation cannot be regarded as a culpable omission. The RIC also found no plausible evidence that the Interested Parties were inspired by the book to conduct their own study. E-mails by the Petitioner show that one of the Interested Parties was already working on the subject. The RIC recommended that the Board should rule the complaint unfounded. The Board decided to adopt the RIC's considerations.

The Petitioner's most relevant objections are as follows:

- The Petitioner does not agree with the RIC's assessment criteria.
- Although the Petitioner's book did inspire the Interested Parties to do the research for their article, they do not reference it. Copying other people's ideas without satisfactory source reference can be regarded as plagiarism.

Below are the most relevant considerations in the LOWI's opinion:

- In the LOWI's view, no plagiarism was committed. No direct quotations or paraphrases of the Petitioner's texts appear in the article, and no covert use is made of data collected by the Petitioner or of his tables. Neither do the Interested Parties strut with borrowed plumes: an expert has established that they were the first to discover a significant connection based on large-scale statistical analysis.
- The LOWI does not consider the book an essential source. The Petitioner has not argued plausibly that it is. According to the Royal Netherlands Academy's Advisory Memorandum 'Correct Citation Practice', only peers can assess whether or not a source is essential. The citation behaviour of parties other than the Interested Parties does not show that the book is regarded as an essential source. In addition, there is general consensus in various fields of research that researchers should preferably not reference works that have not been peer-reviewed.

LOWI ruling and opinion:

The petition is unfounded; the Board can adopt its decision unamended.

Final decision by the Board:

On 17 January 2017, the Board issued a decision in line with the LOWI's opinion and recommendations.