

GAIA Code of Conduct and Best Practices

Editors’ responsibilities2
Fair play2
Confidentiality2
Disclosure and conflicts of interest2
Publication decisions3
Reviewers’ responsibilities3
Contribution to editorial decisions3
Confidentiality3
Standards of reasoned and fair evaluation4
Acknowledgement of sources4
Disclosure and conflicts of interest4
Authors and authors’ responsibilities4
Reporting standards4
Originality and acknowledgement of sources5
Multiple, redundant or concurrent publication5
Authorship5
Hazards and human or animal subjects5
Disclosure and conflicts of interest6
Fundamental errors in published works6
Publication ethics6
Allegations of scientific misconduct6
Data fabrication and data falsification7
Plagiarism7
Dealing with allegations of scientific misconduct7
Retractions, corrections and expressions of concern8
Corrections/Errata8
Retractions9
Expression of Concern9
Complaints and appeals10
Complaints and appeals during the editorial processes10
Complaints and appeals after publication10
Conflicts of interest10
Confirmation from the publishing house11

GAIA Code of Conduct and Best Practices

GAIA – Ecological Perspectives for Science and Society recognizes its responsibilities in upholding ethical standards and pursuing best practices in scholarly publishing. This document outlines the best practice principles that we apply to our journal. *GAIA* adheres to the recommendations of the German Research Foundation (DFG) regarding [Guidelines for Safeguarding Good Research Practice \(Kodex\) 2019](#). *GAIA* also fully supports the [European Code of Conduct for Research Integrity](#) published by the European Federation of Academies of Sciences and Humanities ([ALLEA](#)), *GAIA* also follows the [Core Practices](#) developed by the Committee on Publication Ethics ([COPE](#)) [as well as COPE Principles of Transparency and Best Practice in Scholarly Publishing](#).

In this statement, *GAIA* outlines its code of conduct for the members of the editorial and scientific advisory boards, *GAIA* guest editors, the editorial office, authors, peer reviewers and publishing house. *GAIA* presents its policies on authorship, on intellectual property, on handling competing interests as well as complaints and appeals. It describes its options for post-publication discussions and corrections as well as *GAIA* processes for identification of and dealing with allegations of research misconduct.

GAIA is committed to editorial independence, and strives in all cases to prevent this principle from being compromised through conflicts of interest, fear, or any other corporate or political influence. Any person involved in *GAIA*'s editorial processes is required to respect this commitment to editorial independence.

Editors' responsibilities

The following responsibilities apply to the editorial board, *GAIA* guest editors and the editorial office all subsumed in this section under the term "editor".

Fair play

Submitted manuscripts are evaluated for their intellectual content without regard to age, race, gender, sexual orientation, religious belief, ethnic origin, citizenship, or political philosophy of the author(s).

Confidentiality

The editors of *GAIA* must not disclose any information about a submitted manuscript to anyone other than the authors, reviewers, potential reviewers, other editorial advisers, and the publishing house, as appropriate.

Disclosure and conflicts of interest

Unpublished materials disclosed in a submitted manuscript must not be used in the own research without written consent of the author(s). Information or ideas obtained through peer review must be kept confidential and not used for personal advantage.

Editor(s) should declare any interests that may influence, or may be perceived to influence, their editorial practices and/or decisions as editor(s) of *GAIA*. Financial and non-financial interests

(including, but not limited to personal relationships, professional interests or personal beliefs) should be disclosed. The editors should recuse themselves from considering manuscripts in which they have conflicts of interest resulting from competitive, collaborative, or other relationships or connections with any of the authors, companies, or (possibly) institutions connected to the papers; this may include – but is not limited to – having previously published with one or more of the authors, and sharing the same institution as one or more of the authors. In the event that an editor has a conflict of interest with any subject matter or authorship of any work, he or she should decline to manage the work, in order to avoid incurring any subjectivities or undue delays in the process of editing the work.

Where an editor is on the author list, they must declare this in the competing interests section of the submitted manuscript. These submissions will be treated the same as all other manuscripts.

Publication decisions

The editorial board resp. the handling *GAIA* editor are responsible for deciding which of the submitted articles will be published. They are guided in their decisions by the scientific quality of the paper, the solicited referee reports, the adequacy of the peer review process, *GAIA*'s thematic profile, and formal editorial standards. *GAIA* policies do not bind the editorial decision to the majority opinion of the referees. Editors should justify a different decision for the benefit of the authors and reviewers. Editors are constrained by legal requirements regarding libel, copyright infringement and plagiarism. They may confer with members of the journal's editorial board, its scientific advisory board, other editors or reviewers when making these decisions.

The editors will maintain the integrity of the academic record, preclude business needs from compromising intellectual and ethical standards, and always be willing to publish corrections, clarifications, retractions and apologies when needed.

Reviewers' responsibilities

Papers submitted to *GAIA* are subjected to double-blind peer review and are sent to at least two experts qualified by proven expertise in the fields of the submitted manuscript. Papers submitted to the Research section are, additionally, cross-read by at least one so-called non-expert reviewer, i.e., a scholar or expert foreign to the subject. The following applies to expert and non-expert reviewers of *GAIA*.

Contribution to editorial decisions

The central aim of the peer review process is quality assurance. Peer review assists the editorial board of *GAIA* in making editorial decisions and through the editorial communications with the author(s) may also assist the author(s) in improving the paper. We ask any invited referee who feels unqualified to peer review the research reported in a manuscript or knows that its timely review will be impossible to notify in a timely fashion the editorial office.

Confidentiality

Reviewers must treat all information from manuscripts under review confidentially before

publication, or in the event that the manuscript is rejected. The manuscript must not be shown to or discussed with others except as authorized by the *GAIiA* handling editor.

Standards of reasoned and fair evaluation

All judgments and findings in the peer review process should be evidence based. Any negative as well as bias should be avoided. Personal criticism of the author(s) is inappropriate. Referees should express their views clearly with supporting arguments. Peer reviewers should avoid requesting citations of their own work for personal gain (citation stacking).

Reviews are based on standardized review forms for Forum and Research section. All reviews include an assessment of the submitted manuscripts according to the following dimensions: 1. significance (the article raises a current issue significant within the respective context); 2. originality (the material used and/or the argumentation have novelty value); 3. scientific quality (the article complies with scientific standards); 4. style (language, figures, tables), 5. audience (the article considers *GAIiA*'s inter- and transdisciplinary readership and is written in comprehensible language).

Acknowledgement of sources

Peer reviewers may point to relevant published work that has not been cited by the author(s). Any statement that an observation, derivation, or argument had been previously reported should be sustained by the relevant citation. Peer reviewers should also call to the editorial board's attention any substantial similarity or overlap between the manuscript under consideration and any other published paper of which they have personal knowledge.

Disclosure and conflicts of interest

Peer reviewers should not consider evaluating manuscripts in which they have conflicts of interest resulting from competitive, collaborative, or other relationships or connections with any of the authors, companies, or institutions connected to the manuscripts, in particular if they have the same research topic/stand in direct competition, have a close personal relationship or collaboration with the authors, or recent co-authorship with the authors. Unpublished materials disclosed in a submitted manuscript must not be used in a reviewer's own research without the written consent of the author(s). Privileged information or ideas obtained through peer review must be kept confidential and not used for personal advantage.

Authors and authors' responsibilities

GAIiA provides information and instructions for authors and their expected behaviour in its [guidelines for authors](#). The most important authors' responsibilities and good authorship practices to which prospective authors should adhere are summarized below.

Reporting standards

Authors of reports of original research should present an accurate account of the work performed as well as an objective discussion of its significance. Underlying data should be represented accurately in the paper. The manuscript should contain sufficient detail and references to permit others to

replicate the work. Fraudulent or knowingly inaccurate statements constitute unethical behavior and are unacceptable. Review and professional publication articles should also be accurate and objective, and editorial “opinion” pieces should be clearly identified as such.

Originality and acknowledgement of sources

All submitted articles should be original works. If the authors have used the work and/or words of others, they should ensure that this has been appropriately cited or quoted and permission has been obtained where necessary. Proper acknowledgment of the work of others must always be given. Authors should cite publications that have been influential in determining the nature of the reported work. Plagiarism in all its forms constitutes unethical behavior and is unacceptable.

Multiple, redundant or concurrent publication

Authors should not in general publish manuscripts describing essentially the same research in more than one journal or primary publication. Submitting the same manuscript to more than one journal concurrently constitutes unethical publishing behavior and is unacceptable.

Authorship

Authorship credit reflects the individual’s contribution to the study. Authorship should be limited to those who have made a significant contribution to the conception, design, execution, or interpretation of the reported study. All those who have made significant contributions should be listed as co-authors. Where there are others who have participated in certain substantive aspects of the research project, they should be acknowledged or listed as contributors. A so-called “honorary authorship” is inadmissible.

The corresponding author should ensure that all appropriate co-authors and no inappropriate co-authors are included on the paper, and that all co-authors have seen and approved the final version of the paper and have agreed to its submission for publication. Authors of scientific publications are always jointly responsible for their content.

To increase transparency in authorship, *GAIa* requires authors to fill out an authorship contribution statement explaining how each author contributed to the submitted manuscript. Moreover, *GAIa* integrates established and emerging industry standards (for example, linking to authors’ [ORCID](#) profiles and linking to Contributor Roles Taxonomy – [CRediT](#), an open standard of 14 roles that allows for a standardized description of each author’s individual contribution to an manuscript)

Hazards and human or animal subjects

If the work involves chemicals, procedures or equipment that have any unusual hazards inherent in their use, the author(s) must clearly identify these in the manuscript. If the work involves the use of animal or human subjects, the author(s) should ensure that the manuscript contains a statement that all procedures were performed in compliance with relevant laws and institutional guidelines and that the appropriate institutional committee(s) have approved them.

Disclosure and conflicts of interest

All authors must declare any financial and/or non-financial competing interests – be it actual or potential – that could interfere with the integrity of the publication. Examples of potential competing interests which should be disclosed include employment, consultancies, stock ownership, honoraria, and grants or other funding. Conflicts of interest can arise from commercial, intellectual, financial, and other grounds. All sources of funding and financial support for the project should be disclosed.

GAIA requires disclosure of competing interests in form of a COI statement in the submission process.

Fundamental errors in published works

When an author discovers a significant error or inaccuracy in his/her own published work, it is the author's obligation to promptly notify the journal editorial office or editorial board and cooperate with the editorial team to retract or correct the paper. If the editor or the publisher learns from a third party that a published work contains a significant error, it is the obligation of the author to promptly retract or correct the paper or to provide evidence to the editor of the correctness of the original paper.

Publication ethics

For all parties involved in the act of publishing it is important to agree upon standards of proper ethical behavior. GAIA lays out its principles of transparency and expected good scientific and publishing practices for members of the editorial board, scientific advisory board, guest editors, editorial office, authors, reviewers and publishing house in this statement, its [guidelines for authors](#) and for [reviewers](#). GAIA is committed to following these guidelines and enforcing the stated standards of behavior. GAIA asks the members of the editorial board, scientific advisory board, guest editors, editorial office, authors, and reviewers to read the journal's guidelines and this statement carefully and adhere to the conditions. Where GAIA suspects or is made aware of ethical breaches by members of the editorial office, editorial board, scientific advisory board, guest editors, authors, or reviewers, GAIA will proceed to take the necessary measures, handling the suspected case with confidentiality. Depending on the scope and severity of the case, measures taken can range from contacting and investigating those under suspicion, to informing relevant institutions (e.g., those of members of the editorial board, editorial board, scientific advisory board, guest editors, authors, and reviewers), and involving further institutions or organizations as appropriate. In doing so, GAIA will follow [COPE guidelines and flowcharts](#).

Allegations of scientific misconduct

Violations of good research and publication practice damage the integrity of the research process or of researchers. GAIA is committed to upholding the integrity of the work GAIA publishes.

In line with the rules for ensuring good scientific practice laid down by professional bodies like the [German Research Foundation \(DFG\)](#) and the [European Federation of Academies of Sciences and](#)

[Humanities \(ALLEA\)](#), GAIA considers as scientific misconduct those cases in which in a specifically scientific context, either intentionally or through gross negligence, false assertions are made, the intellectual property of others is infringed upon or their research work harmed in any other way. Particular examples of scientific misconduct include (but are not confined to) fabrication of data, falsification of data and plagiarism.

Data fabrication and data falsification

Making false assertions in performing, or reviewing research, or in reporting research results seriously deviates from good scientific practice and is unacceptable:

- Data fabrication concerns making up results and recording them as if they were real.
- Data falsification concerns manipulating research materials, equipment or processes or changing, omitting or suppressing data or results without justification (for instance, by selecting desirable results or evaluation methods or dismissing unwanted results or evaluation methods, without disclosing this decision, or by manipulating reports, diagrams or illustrations. Manipulating images and figures by obscuring, enhancing, deleting and/or introducing new elements into an image or figure is considered improper.

Plagiarism

Scientific misconduct includes the infringement of intellectual property rights. This includes, among other things, plagiarism. Plagiarism is using other people's work and ideas without giving proper credit to the original source, thus violating the rights of the original author(s) to their intellectual outputs. GAIA does not tolerate plagiarism in any of its publications.

GAIA reserves the right to check all submissions through similarity ("plagiarism") detection software (Crossref Similarity Check powered by iThenticate). Submissions containing suspected plagiarism, in whole or part, may be rejected.

Cases of alleged plagiarism pre-publication or post-publication initiate a process in which authors must provide exonerating evidence and/or correct the manuscript. The editor(s) of the publication together with the editorial board will evaluate the evidence and/or corrections. If plagiarism is discovered pre-publication, the editor(s) and editorial board will make a decision whether to reject the submitted manuscript or continue with the editorial process. If plagiarism is discovered post-publication, the editor(s) and editorial board will make a decision whether to retract or correct the published article. Articles may be removed from the publication if deemed appropriate.

GAIA's plagiarism policy also applies to 1. so-called "self-plagiarism", i.e., authors recycling or borrowing content from previous work without citation, as well as 2. other forms of redundant publication, i.e., one study split into several parts and submitted to two or more journals, and 3. duplicate publication, i.e., submitting the same study to two journals or publishing more or less the same study in two journals.

Dealing with allegations of scientific misconduct

GAIA will take all appropriate measures against publication malpractices such as alleged or proven scientific misconduct, fraudulent publication or plagiarism pre-publication and post-publication.

In order to actively identify and prevent the publication of papers where research conduct has occurred, GAIA has various systems in place:

- The editorial office checks that all submissions adhere to scientific quality and standards.
- GAIA also reserves the right to use similarity (“plagiarism”) detection software.
- External reviewers evaluate scientific quality, substance and novelty during the peer-review process.
- Any questions raised with regard to possible misconduct or plagiarism will initially be evaluated by the editor(s) of the publication and GAIA’s editorial board, in consultation with the manuscript’s peer reviewer(s) if appropriate. If allegations of scientific misconduct cannot be resolved or if the response received from the parties involved is unsatisfactory or if the misconduct is beyond the means of the editorial board to investigate, the matter will be taken up with the institution where the scientific work in question was performed. In principle, matters will be reviewed in accordance with the institutional procedures for handling allegations of misconduct. At all stages, every effort shall be made to ensure that the process is fair and just, both for those who have been accused of misconduct and for those who have raised the issue of scientific misconduct.
- GAIA follows COPE guidelines and flowcharts on dealing with allegations of misconduct, in particular
 - if fabricated data is suspected in a [submitted manuscript](#) or in a [published article](#),
 - if plagiarism is suspected in a [submitted manuscript](#) or in a [published article](#),
 - if redundant (duplicate) publication is suspected in a [submitted manuscript](#) or in a [published article](#).

Any reports of potential misconduct or plagiarism should be sent to gaia@oekom.de.

Retractions, corrections and expressions of concern

Where GAIA suspects or is made aware of that findings (content or data) are unreliable due to honest error, naïve mistakes, or research misconduct, the editorial board will take all reasonable steps to prevent the publication of papers and correct the literature in order to maintain the integrity of the research literature; this includes the prompt publication of corrections as errata or, in the most severe cases, the complete retraction of the affected work. The GAIA editor-in-chief will consider retractions, corrections or expressions of concern in line with [COPE’s Retraction Guidelines](#).

Corrections/Errata

GAIA will consider issuing corrections

- when errors could affect the interpretation of data or information, whatever the cause of the error (i.e., arising from author errors or from editorial mishaps);
- if a small portion of an otherwise reliable publication proves to be misleading (especially because of honest error);
- if the author/contributor list is incorrect.

Retractions

The *GAIA* editor-in-chief may decide to retract an article from the *GAIA* online presence as well as from associated databases in the event of demonstrable fundamental errors in a published article or if work is proven to be fraudulent.

- There is clear evidence that the findings are unreliable, either as a result of misconduct (e.g., data fabrication) or honest error (e.g., miscalculation, experimental error).
- Serious errors have been revealed in the published article which place its scientific value in question.
- The publication constitutes any forms of plagiarism, i.e. the deliberate or unconscious omission of references to sources for empirical data or cited text passages.
- The findings have previously been published elsewhere without proper cross-referencing, permission or justification.
- A third party expresses claims concerning copyrights for the article or its parts.
- The article reports unethical research.
- The peer review process has been compromised/manipulated and the scientific integrity of the article cannot be guaranteed.
- Author conflict of interest was not disclosed prior to publication and the disclosure is significant enough to potentially change the conclusions

Authors may be given the opportunity to add the errata to the publication. If this is not possible, the result may be the permanent withdrawal of the article. The text for retraction notes can be submitted/written by the author(s), *GAIA* editor, or jointly. Where any content is retracted, *GAIA* would do so in a way that still preserves the integrity of the academic record and of other affiliated works.

Expression of Concern

GAIA will consider issuing an expression of concern if *GAIA* editors have well-founded suspicions of misconduct or if there is inconclusive evidence of research or publication misconduct by the authors.

- There is evidence that the findings are unreliable but the authors' institution will not investigate the case.
- It is believed that an investigation into alleged misconduct related to the publication either has not been, or would not be, fair and impartial or conclusive.
- An investigation is under way but a judgment will not be available for a considerable time.

By publishing in *GAIA*, authors commit themselves to expressing any concerns and notifying the *GAIA* editor-in-chief and/or members of the editorial board at the earliest possible opportunity should they become aware of any inaccuracy or fundamental error in their text. Authors are obliged to cooperate with the *GAIA* editor-in-chief to retract or correct the paper. If the *GAIA* editor-in-chief or editorial board learns from a third party that a published work contains a significant error, it is the obligation of the author to promptly retract or correct the paper or provide evidence to the *GAIA* editor-in-chief on the correctness of the original paper.

GAIA expects its readers, reviewers and editors to notify them of any concerns about alleged or

proven scientific misconduct, fraudulent publication or plagiarism, by contacting the *GAIa* editor-in-chief.

Complaints and appeals

Complaints and appeals against the journal *GAIa*, its editorial board, scientific advisory board, guest editor(s), editorial office, reviewers, publishing house, or authors are handled by the *GAIa* editor-in-chief. The *GAIa* editor-in-chief shall be the first point of contact and is responsible for investigating the issue, mediating between parties and taking a final decision on the issue. In this process the *GAIa* editor-in-chief may consult the expertise of other members of the editorial board, the scientific advisory board, the guest editors, the reviewers, or any other person the *GAIa* editor-in-chief deems appropriate in order to resolve the conflict. The *GAIa* editor-in-chief shall not be obliged to follow instructions. If the *GAIa* editor-in-chief is accused of a conflict of interest, the editorial board shall appoint a substitute.

The *GAIa* editor-in-chief shall also handle conflicts of interest of authors, reviewers, the editorial board and editorial office, guest editors, journal and publishing house, whether identified during the editorial process or after publication. The same process as described above will apply.

Complaints and appeals during the editorial processes

GAIa will consider appeals on decisions taken during the editorial processes. The *GAIa* editor-in-chief, together with the original reviewers and/or a third reviewer and/or members of *GAIa*'s editorial board, will consider any new data supplied by the author in support of their argument. The author will be notified of the outcome of their appeal along with an explanation of the decision. *GAIa* would like to stress that *GAIa* policies, similar to the policies of most academic journals, do not bind the editorial decision to the majority opinion of the referees.

Complaints and appeals after publication

Such cases include:

1. When an author discovers a significant error or inaccuracy in his/her own published work, it is the author's obligation to promptly notify *GAIa*'s editorial office or editorial board and cooperate with the editorial office to retract or correct the paper.
2. In the event of errors noted after publication, the author(s) are obliged to provide corrections, which will be published as errata.
3. In the event of fundamental violations of *GAIa*'s code of conduct detected after publication of the manuscript, the author(s) are obliged to consent to the retraction of the article.
4. In the event of errors detected only after publication of the manuscript and committed by *GAIa*'s editorial office, or the publishing house, the latter are willing to publish corrections, clarifications, retractions and apologies where needed.

Conflicts of interest

Disclosure of competing interests is part of a transparent publication process.

Conflicts of interest may exist when an author, editor, reviewer, and/or the publisher has any personal interest that could affect his/her professional judgments or actions or could be perceived to exert an undue influence on the presentation, peer review, editorial decision-making, and/or publication of articles submitted to *GAIA*. Conflicts of interest can arise from financial, commercial, non-financial, professional, contractual, personal and other grounds.

GAIA requires authors, reviewers, and editors, to declare all conflicts of interest relevant to the work under consideration (see specifications of expected behaviour for authors, editors, reviewers, and/or the publisher in case of conflicts of interest in the respective sections of this code of conduct).

The *GAIA* editor-in-chief shall handle conflicts of interest of authors, reviewers, the editorial board, editorial office, and guest editors, whether identified during the editorial process or after publication. In case of suspected undisclosed conflicts of interest in a submitted manuscript or published article, the *GAIA* editor-in-chief follows the recommended actions by COPE, e.g., what to do if a [reviewer suspects undisclosed CoI in a submitted manuscript](#) or what to do if a [reader suspects undisclosed CoI in a published article](#).

Readers who wish to comment on a published work should declare their conflicts of interest with the subject matter or authors.

Confirmation from the publishing house

In the event that the publishing house oekom - Gesellschaft für ökologische Kommunikation mbH, Munich, is made aware of any allegation of research misconduct relating to a published article in *GAIA*, it will in cooperation with *GAIA*'s editor-in-chief and editorial board take all measures necessary, including the prompt publication of an erratum or, in the most severe cases, the complete retraction of the affected work (see *Retractions, corrections and expressions of concern* above). The publishing house, the *GAIA* editor in chief and the editorial board declare that they shall follow the principles of expected ethical behavior developed in line with [COPE Core Practices](#) and laid out in this statement and shall turn in cases of controversial issues to the procedures and recommendations provided by COPE.

While every effort is made by the publishers and the editorial board to see that no inaccurate or misleading data, opinions or statements appear in *GAIA*, they wish to make it clear that the data and opinions appearing in the articles herein are the sole responsibility of the contributor concerned. Accordingly, the publisher and the editorial board accept no responsibility or liability whatsoever for the consequences of any such inaccurate or misleading data, opinions or statements.

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