

Changing publication practices: Conclusions

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Today's academic publishing landscape mostly consists of subscription-based academic journals owned by corporate publishers. Subscription paywalls and legal impediments make it difficult to share research results widely and prevent members of the public from accessing publicly funded research.

But academic publishing is changing rapidly. Researchers, funding agencies, and governments realize that the value and societal impact of academic research is severely limited by the fact that a large proportion of publicly funded research is locked behind subscription paywalls. Instead, governments and funding agencies increasingly require publicly funded research to be freely available to other researchers and the general public. More and more, researchers publish in open access journals and make versions of their articles available through online repositories. Proponents of open access, most notably Coalition S and their **Plan S**, seek to accelerate this change.

Some oppose these changes in publication practices. Critics of open access publishing argue that it is not mature yet and that quality open access journals are too few. These critics fear that the move towards open access publishing will reduce the quality of academic research.

However, proponents of open access publishing maintain that subscription-based journals are not essential to academia. The quality, integrity and use of scientific research can be ensured and even increased through open access publishing. A point demonstrated in today's talk of the editors of the European Journal of Taxonomy.

Apart from this discussion, there are concerns that will need to be addressed for open access publishing to be fully embraced by researchers. Let me raise on a few.

First, research has shown that most researchers lack awareness with regard to some of the basics of open access publishing such as licensing issues and that open access publishing does not mean lack of peer review.

Second, although early career researchers are most positive about open access publishing, their precarious working conditions dissuade them from abandoning dominant publication practices in their science fields and opting for alternative open access journals.

Third, definitions of scientific excellence and the evaluation of research careers will need to be reconsidered and new evaluation metrics will need to be designed as publishing in journals with high impact factors has wrongly come to be synonymous with excellent research.

Fourth, there is no such thing as a free lunch and the question arises who is going to cover the costs of open access publishing? As we have learned today, while a diamond open access journal might not charge its contributors and readers, there are costs associated with running a journal that must be covered somehow.

Finally, for Belgian researchers and in particular with regard to Plan S, the lack of clarity concerning the nature and extent of the national funding agencies' intended alignment with Plan S is a major limiting factor.

The San Francisco Declaration on Research Assessment (DORA) and the Hong Kong Principles for Assessing Researchers are first steps towards addressing some of these concerns.

There is also a larger concern regarding the unintended consequences of changes in the academic publishing landscape. How will our learned societies cope with this transition towards open access publishing? Subscriptions to their associated journals frequently fund the activities of these learned societies. An abrupt move towards new publishing models, such as diamond open access, could bring down these societies as they lose their income. Ultimately, this could lead to corporate publishers consolidating their power over the publishing landscape.

Nevertheless, there is a broad consensus within academia that open access to research is an important benefit, that public research funds should be used as efficiently as possible, and that this comes with a great societal responsibility: the general public deserves access to research results and these research results must be of the highest possible quality.

In conclusion, the academic publishing landscape today looks dramatically different from how Robert Maxwell imagined it in the middle of the 20th century. Open access publishing is here to remain. The evidence: corporate publishers have embraced open access publishing as well. As we have learned today, there exists as many publishing models as there are colors in the rainbow. But if there is one surprising message to take home today, it is probably that around the same time that Robert Maxwell gained dominance in academic publishing Marilyn Monroe unknowingly weighed in on the discussion as well since it seems that diamonds are a researcher's best friend.

