

TOGETHER FOR TRANSFORMATION

16th Berlin Open Access Conference

6-7 June 2023

Harnack Haus, Berlin, Germany

Conference Report

National-level delegations representing research communities from 38 countries across six continents, including scientists and scholars, ministries of education and research, research funders, university and research leadership, their libraries and library consortia, gathered at the 16th Berlin Open Access Conference (B16).

Hosted by the Max Planck Society, initiator of the Berlin conference series, and organized by the Max Planck Digital Library's Open Access 2020 Initiative (OA2020), the conference was held as a strategy meeting of global actors in research communication committed to advancing viable strategies to replace the subscription paywall model underlying the bulk of today's scholarly journals with transparent and sustainable models that deliver immediate and open access to the results of research, enabling maximum scientific and societal impact.

Returning to the setting of the inaugural conference in this series, which gave rise to the foundational Berlin Declaration on Open Access to Knowledge in the Sciences and Humanities (2003) some twenty years ago, the international B16 participants utilized the conference to refine, renew, and coordinate its approaches and strategies, with a particular focus on transformative open access negotiations with scholarly publishers.



The imperative for an open scholarly publishing environment is to improve research quality and efficiency and to increase the impact of research through transparency, accessibility, usability, trustworthiness and equity. The key insights arising from the conference discussions highlighted the crucial role of transformative open access negotiations throughout all regions of the world in shaping the increasingly established open paradigm in scholarly communication in the service of science and scholarship.

Inclusivity in scholarly publishing is good for science and scholarship

Open access, as a mode of high quality scholarly publishing, is rapidly increasing, but fees for open access publishing services do not currently take local conditions into consideration, with consequences for the principle of inclusivity which is necessary for the process of research to function optimally. Scholarly publishing must integrate the principle of inclusivity into its business and operational practices. Where the publishing sector is not responsive to this expectation, it is incumbent on those who are in a mature phase of transition to collectively bargain for an inclusive and equitable system in open scholarly publishing for the benefit of the entire community. Science must not fail because of publication fees that are not financially equitable on a global scale.

Science must not fail because of publication fees.

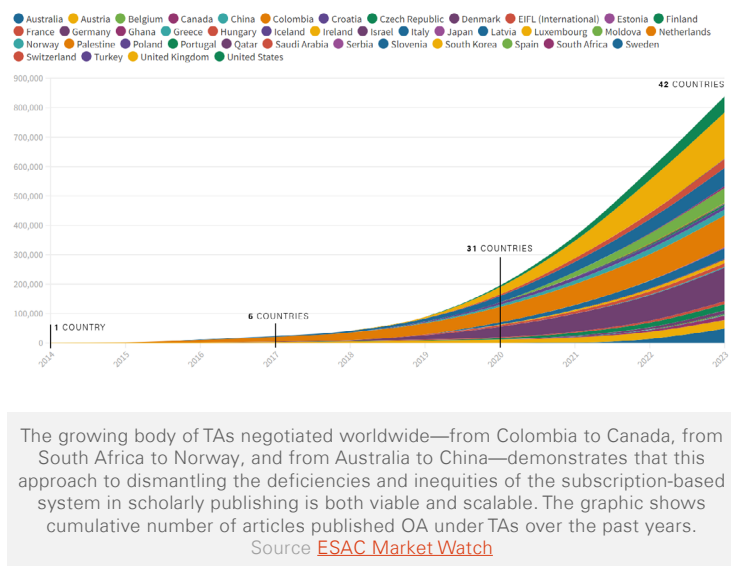
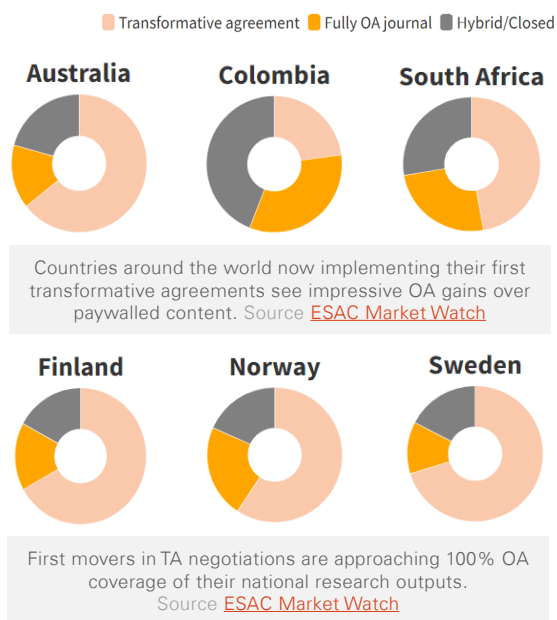
The implementation of our open access national policy is not sufficient: to make the transition to OA a global reality, cooperation with the international community is necessary—a cost neutral transition to open access for all research communities.

We are not looking for a handout. What we want is something to be fair and sustainable for the future.

The most scalable strategy to enable open access for readers and authors

First pioneered in Europe, research communities in all regions of the world are now entering the open access transition in scholarly journal publishing, successfully negotiating transformative agreements (TAs). Newcomers to open access negotiations can leapfrog from distributed subscriptions and author-facing 'hybrid' open access publishing fees to centralized agreements that are cost-neutral with respect to the previous subscription investment. In this way, authors are supported with the opportunity to publish their articles immediately open access in the journals of their choice without paying APCs, and readers gain more access to peer-reviewed results of research. New and transitional cost-distribution models, adopted within research communities in reflection of their local principles, are proving effective in making the transition of investments from subscription-based to open publishing-based sustainable. A culture of transparency and the knowledge, experience, methods, tools and lessons learned of first

movers is at the disposal of the community, to ensure that all can enter and successfully complete the open access transformation.



Newly calibrated objectives to complete the open access transition

Having achieved their initial open access objectives working through cost-neutral transformative agreements, first movers are driving further advancement in the open access transition with newly calibrated objectives that reflect the community’s expectation to **move beyond TAs to open publishing** agreements based on a fair and transparent cost rationale that is commensurate with the services provided to authors. The community is committed to collectively and transparently assessing the progress made toward this objective, in order to hold the publishing community accountable. Read and publish models must only be transitional, and agreements with elements grounded in business and operational models inherited from the print era are to be abandoned.

“ For our consortium, transformative agreements have succeeded in dramatically expanding OA, keeping library costs in check, and significantly reducing overall institutional costs.

“ We have managed to cover 100% of our member institution’s article output, and our agreement includes both hybrid and full OA journals and even eliminates page charges and colour charges.

“ It is very important for us to say we are part of a global effort and that, even if we’re joining in late, we are standing shoulder to shoulder with giants in this space and moving together.

A change in culture at all levels is re-establishing science as a public good

Recent policy statements in different parts of the world have reaffirmed the shared vision for open access to research and the common concern that the increasing costs for scholarly publishing may become unsustainable for institutions accountable for public funds in the long term. Reducing the global research community's reliance on scholarly communication services provided by traditional journals requires a shift in publishing culture, organizational structures and mindset for the management of research-performing organizations. Reorienting subscription-based operations around openness support this shift, by increasing transparency and improving oversight and accountability for funds expended on scholarly publishing. As research communities proceed in completing the open access transition in scholarly journal publishing, they can prepare for further transformation by shifting investments to new and alternative forms of scholarly communication, participating in the development of open and interoperable infrastructure, and adopting rights retention policies for publicly-funded research.

Through our agreements we have strengthened the role of the library in the scientific community as a facilitator in open access publishing.

The greatest achievement of our TAs is the galvanising of key actors from government, the universities and science councils, now coming together around a single purpose.

Our TA negotiations have stimulated debate and additional interest in publishing Open Access, also among researchers.

We have managed to repurpose expenditure locked up in subscriptions to finance the open access transition. Many thousands of journals have become OA publishing venues for our researchers where they are not required to pay APCs and in this way, our country's research is becoming more visible to the entire research community.

Working on TAs has brought more awareness to our staff about the potential value that our libraries can bring to their campuses as educators on open access licensing and publishing.

Our research agenda is interwoven with our need for socio-economic transformation. So when we talk about transformation, it's not just about changing the structure of the subscription contract; it's about meaningfully transforming our societies to become representative.

In its coordinating role, at the service of the global research community interested in accelerating the open access transition in scholarly publishing and shaping the emerging open paradigm in research, the Open Access 2020 Initiative will integrate these key insights into its many information-sharing, capacity-building and strategic activities.

Together, the B16 delegations assessed the performance of scholarly publishers in meeting the objectives and expectations set out by the research community engaged in transformative open access negotiations and formulated collective next steps to foster a scholarly publishing system that is transparent, inclusive, sustainable and financially equitable on a global scale.

Building from the [foundational call](#) for full and immediate open access, cost-neutrality and transparency, this Final Statement of the 16th Berlin Open Access Conference represents the strong consensus of all of those represented at the meeting around newly calibrated objectives for the community's transformative open access negotiations with scholarly publishers:

The global open access transition must advance at a far greater pace.

Through its open access negotiations, research communities in all continents are making research outcomes more visible and accessible at no cost to readers or authors, for the benefit of all but want to move faster. Publishers must offer transformative and transitional open access agreements to all as the default and work at pace and scale to effect a full, rapid and permanent transition away from paywalled access to research results.

Inequity is incompatible with scholarly publishing.

Progress in removing subscription paywalls must not risk creating barriers to participation in open science and scholarship. The open access transition must be truly inclusive and reflect the plurality of research disciplines, topics, languages, and outputs. Differentiated regional pricing (geopricing) of open access publishing services, that reflect the cultural, policy and financial positions of all communities, is in the interests of the entire global research community and supports the goals of scholarship. One size fits all open access publishing models based on high publishing charges are inequitable. Pricing for publishing services must be globally fair, transparent, affordable and sustainable.

Academic self-governance is an imperative in scholarly publishing.

Quality assurance in the process of scientific peer review must be clearly separated from the processes associated with the provision of publishing services to prevent practices that lower standards in order to increase publisher revenue. Editorial independence must be guaranteed.

Author choice and author rights must be fully enabled.

We strongly support retention of copyright and all rights therein by authors. Open access agreements with publishers should stipulate that authors only grant "limited" or "non-exclusive" licenses to publishers, and liberal Creative Commons (CC) licenses (e.g., CC-BY) should be applied as the default choice. In keeping with the spirit and goals of open access, more restrictive CC licenses (e.g., CC-BY-NC, CC-BY-ND, and CC-BY-NC-ND) should function as originally intended, in respect of the author's disciplinary needs; consequently, author "license to publish" agreements should not limit the author's rights in any way. The author's choice of license should not affect the price of publication services.

Publishers can restore our trust in their commitment to the integrity of scholarly communication by working with all members of the global research community to effect complete and immediate open access according to points stated above.

Reflecting the continued growth in uptake of transformative agreement negotiations around the world, the 16th Berlin Open Access Conference was distinguished by a powerful sentiment of global alignment among participants from a broad range of diverse geographic contexts. The conference program was crafted specifically to foster open discussion and information-sharing among veterans and newcomers to this strategy, in order to learn the unique positions and perspectives of individual negotiating teams, on the continuum toward a fully open paradigm. In his opening remarks, co-Chair Gerard Meijer congratulated participants on the significant progress made thus far and invited them to use the conference as an opportunity to strategize, together, approaches for continued advancement of all.

A special [welcome address](#) was given by Martin Stratmann, President of the Max Planck Society, who introduced two themes that featured prominently in the conference discussions. Referencing the [2022 Recommendations of the German Science and Humanities Council](#) (Wissenschaftsrat), he first emphasized that enabling an open paradigm extends beyond publishing and that research institutions must make significant changes in culture, mindset, and organizational structures in order to enable open publishing opportunities for all their researchers in respect of their academic freedom. Secondly, stating, “Inclusivity in science is good for science,” Stratmann stressed the importance of global equity in scholarly publishing, calling upon well-endowed scientific nations to use their influence to this end.



Martin Stratmann delivered the conference welcome address

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Two further conference themes were raised by conference co-Chair, Ulrich Pöschl in his opening remarks that recalled the importance of upholding and improving quality assurance in scholarly communication and, looking beyond the flip of scholarly journals to open access, prompting further advancements in research communication, such as open review interactive discussion, and transparent and traceable article-level metrics that are inclusive and accessible to the global scientific community and society at large.



Conference co-Chairs Gerard Meijer and Ulrich Pöschl

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Featuring the perspectives of research leaders and negotiators, the first day of the conference was dedicated to assessments of TAs, both their impacts for local research communities and scholars everywhere, as well as the performance of the publishing sector in fulfilling the community’s expectations for advancement along key drivers in the open access transition. Using data visualizations from the ESAC Market Watch, Ádám Dér (Head of the Scientific Information Provision at the Max Planck Digital Library, Germany) highlighted the achievement of the community in [enabling ~1M research articles to be published immediately open access](#), since adopting TAs less than five years ago, and the [individual successes of many countries](#) in ensuring that the vast majority

of their research outputs are freely and openly available to citizens and scientists everywhere, thanks to TAs and complementary strategies.

[Dér also contextualized](#) key shifts in the research policy and scholarly publishing landscape against the backdrop of the recent rise of open access negotiations and, together with other members of the OA2020 Working Group on Transformative Agreement Assessment from Europe and the US, [shared insights](#) into key innovations in their respective implementations of TAs, as well as the challenges and next steps.



Ádám Dér showcasing the ongoing work of the OA2020 Working Group on Transformative Agreement Assessment
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Strategies for garnering stability and cost control in publisher agreements, integrating research grant funding with former library subscription funds to expand open publishing opportunities to all authors, repurposing institutional investments in reading access to support open publishing, developing new consortium-level cost-distribution models to smooth the transition, and preparing stakeholders for a “walk away” scenario when negotiation objectives cannot be reached were among the key innovations highlighted, while challenges ahead included improving author experience, expanding central negotiations to the long tail of smaller publishers and fully OA publishers.

The Working Group also gave a preview of a new tool they developed to enable transparent, community-wide assessments of the performance of subscription-based publishers engaged in transformative agreements. The interactive tool, which will soon be openly available on the [ESAC website](#), tracks publisher progress along [key drivers](#) toward a paradigm in which the costs and operations involved in supporting all authors to publish the results of their research openly are transparent, fair and sustainable, to inform future negotiations and actions to prompt further progress and improvements.

Providing space for collaborative reflection on the quantitative and qualitative assessments presented, two panel sessions were held: [one](#) featuring a group of research and library leaders from Africa, Europe, South America, North America, Oceania and Asia and [the other](#) featuring the leadership of a representative group of scholarly publishers. The research leadership panelists shared their perspectives on the positive impacts of TAs—their own and those negotiated globally—for scholars and scientists, and on what they found to be the next key challenges to address, including ensuring that the inequities of the subscription system are not carried over into an open publishing system, and long-term affordability and sustainability in the face of ever-increasing growth in research outputs, ultimately expressing their resolve to address the challenges strategically, as a community, to complete and move beyond the open access transition in scholarly publishing.



Ellen Tise (SANLiC) speaking next to Günther Waibel (University of California) and Astrid Söderbergh Widding (Stockholm University), in a discussion moderated by Colleen Campbell (OA2020 Initiative).
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The publisher leadership panelists were invited to share their perspectives on the state of the art in the open access transformation in scholarly publishing, and, looking forward to the medium-term, thoughts on the opportunities and challenges of delivering optimal services to authors, in support of a scholarly communication paradigm that is open, transparent, sustainable, inclusive and globally equitable. Among the key issues highlighted in their opening statements were concerns around the 'green road' based on immediate deposit of accepted manuscripts, which relies on the continuation of the subscription-based system in journal publishing and, consequently, undermines the transformation to a fully open paradigm; the complexity of the current ecosystem in which research communities are at different stages of readiness for embracing an open scholarly publishing paradigm; and the importance of collaboration to leverage the full potential of all actors in the ecosystem and foster a healthy diversity of open publishing venues.



Publisher panel featured leadership representatives of publishing houses Elsevier, American Physical Society, Frontiers, Wiley, Cambridge University Press, PLOS and Springer Nature.

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The panel moderators, speaking on behalf of the B16 participants, challenged the publisher leadership on further issues, including potential collaboration with funding agency representatives in the development of a standardized, low cost clearinghouse that relies on publisher automation to route author accepted manuscripts into repositories; differentiation of fees for open publishing services in respect of local economies and currencies; and reformulation of policies so that authors are never required to transfer any of their rights exclusively to publishers, and that any non-exclusive transfer of commercial and derivative rights to the publisher would be voluntary.

Building on insights surfaced in a recent [series of workshops](#) held in different regions, the second day of the conference opened with a [panel discussion](#) on the topic of global equity in open access publishing featuring research and library leaders from Africa, Asia, Europe and Latin America. The panelists discussed the financial barriers that researchers in their own contexts encounter and reflected on the role of the publishing sector and the broader international research community in reducing inequities in scholarly publishing. The ensuing discussion and subsequent [strategy session](#) involving all conference participants resulted in the conference Key Insights, to guide the research community's next steps in shaping the increasingly open paradigm in scholarly communication, and the conference Final Statement summarizing the community's newly calibrated expectations of scholarly publishers.



Panel dedicated to global equity in open access publishing featured Herman Erčulj (Slovenia), Remya Haridasan (India), Faranah Osman (South Africa) and Andréa Vieira (Brazil), with moderation by Bregt Saenen (Science Europe).

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Looking beyond the transition phase, as research communities re-orient their subscription investments, organizational structures and processes around openness and are better positioned to incorporate further innovations in research communication, the [final session](#) of the 16th Berlin Open Access Conference focused on the different elements that might contribute to an open and diverse ecosystem

and the practical steps that could be taken to integrate them into our evolving strategies. Acknowledging the strategic importance of negotiating transformative, or open publishing, agreements, panelists representing different actors in research communication—funders, university leadership, library consortia and open access publishers—underscored the importance of investment in research assessment reform (e.g., [DORA](#), [CoARA](#)), pre-print review platforms and infrastructure (e.g. [ASAPbio](#), [Review Commons](#)), the exploration of new research communication models (e.g. [eLife](#)), support for open monographs and regional and native language publishers, and investment in the long tail of small, fully open access publishers—in particular those already operating with models that do not rely on author-facing fees. The role of policy and political statements, such as the [Joint Guidelines of the Federal Government and the Länder of Germany on Open Access](#), unveiled at the conference by Sabine Döring, State Secretary of the Federal Ministry of Education and Research of Germany (BMBF) and Andreas Handschuh, State Secretary of the Saxon State Ministry for Science, Culture and Tourism, was also stressed as an important driver of improvements in the research communication ecosystem, in particular when combined with bottom up approaches.



State Secretary Sabine Döring (BMBF) presented the joint federal and regional guidelines on open access in Germany.
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In their concluding remarks, the conference co-Chairs reiterated the importance of transparency at all levels—from the editorial and peer review process to the pricing of publishing services and conditions secured in open publishing negotiations—to ensure quality and continued improvements in research communication. Bringing the conference to a close, participants heartily affirmed co-Chair Meijer's conclusion: there is no question as to whether we should be negotiating transformative or open publishing agreements; the task at hand now is to continue to improve them in order to complete the transition and shape the emerging open paradigm in scholarly publishing in the service of science and society.



Participants of the 16th Berlin Open Access Conference. © CC-BY-SA Georg Botz