



## A Perspective on Chemistry and Society

A Column on the Occasion of the 75<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of CHIMIA

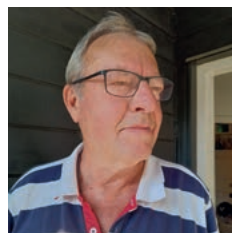
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### Open – An Obvious Concept!

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research & higher education. For two decades Lars has been a strong advocate of open access and for providing services to the open access movement. He is co-founder of OpenDOAR,<sup>[1]</sup> the Directory of Open Access Books<sup>[3]</sup> and Think. Check. Submit.<sup>[3]</sup> Lars lives outside Copenhagen, and is married with four children and four grandchildren. He enjoys vegetable gardening, growing cacti and succulents, and playing internet chess.

### Open – an obvious concept!

For me it all started in 2000 when I, as Director of Libraries at Lund University, Sweden, was approached by a young researcher, who just had quit the university and got a job at one of the many spin-off companies at the university's Science Park. He came to me and was very annoyed and disappointed: suddenly he was no longer an authorized user, and his access to the 10.000+ digital journals was cut off. He was supposed to develop new products in his company, and suddenly he had lost access to the research results, which were mostly generated by taxpayer money.

For my part this was also an eye-opener. It suddenly became clear that instead of providing information to users, we as librarians and libraries are, in fact, blocking relevant users from access to the information they need to be able to do innovation, product development, etc.

For our societies to benefit from research results, these must be available for those who can transform the knowledge into innovative products and services, without barriers.

### Why have our societies ended up in this mess?

In Western Europe and North America, it has become the norm that academia outsourced the dissemination of research results based on research funded by public money, to corporate companies. These companies are then able to turn these research results into a commodity priced in a way that only university libraries (hardly) can afford to make it available to institutional users. Users not affiliated to universities cannot afford access. (Please note, that I do not blame the publishers. They are doing what they are supposed to do; creatively exploit the conditions offered to them from academia).

In other parts of the world (particularly in Latin America) the tradition has been that not only the research is publicly funded

(upfront), but also the dissemination of the research results as they appear in academic journals with no subscription charges. In fact Latin America invented Open Access before we began discussing it!

### Open is the future

Initially – with the Budapest Open Access Initiative<sup>[4]</sup> from 2002 – it was primarily about providing access to academic journals and provide the “free availability on the public internet, permitting any users to read, download, copy, distribute, print, search, or link to the full texts of these articles, crawl them for indexing, pass them as data to software, or use them for any other lawful purpose, without financial, legal, or technical barriers”.

The Open Access concept was met with broad skepticism from academia and resistance from the dominant publishers. A lot of misinformation had to be dealt with. But now, nearly two decades later, the open agenda has broadened to encompass academic monographs, research data and peer-review. We have the open science agenda supported by the leaders of universities, research funders, governments, and international organizations. Today it is difficult to find a university president or a president of a research funder who would dare say that the open agenda is wrong.

So, we should be happy, we have won the discussion. But there is apparently quite a distance between what decision-makers say they want to see happen, and what they actually do, what kind of behavior they actually reward!

Strong forces are delaying the implementation of open.

### Academic Freedom – Academic Responsibility!?

In the discussions about Open Access the question about the freedom to decide where to publish has been central! The core of the problem is Research Assessment and Career Development for researchers. Unfortunately, academia has not only outsourced the dissemination of research but also the tools to support research assessment to third parties. The abuse of the Journal Impact Factor and other journal metrics has developed the practice of assessing research not based on the actual research but rather on where the results are published!! This has had (and still has) a lot of damaging consequences. Fortunately, we can see that more and more funders and universities are slowly moving away from this and adopting and most importantly actually implementing the Declaration on Research Assessment (DORA) principles.<sup>[5]</sup> But progress is too slow.

The concept of the Academic Freedom was quickly picked up by not only researchers (being subject to research assessment based on journal metrics), their institutions (involved in the global competition for research grants, based on university rankings (which in turn to some extent also are based on misleading journal metrics)) and of course the dominant publishers. Pushing for Green Open Access<sup>[6]</sup> with embargo could for a time allow researchers to publish in their favorite journals, while at same time accommodate first-generation soft open-access mandates. Later came the invention of the Hybrid journals,<sup>[6]</sup> again allowing researchers to accommodate Open Access mandates by paying specifically for open access to their results.

We all know the history of this: The publishers creatively lobbying against open access, claiming to protect the Academic

Freedom of researchers, and thus allowing hesitant decision makers in academia to avoid taking tough decisions.

Open advocates have stressed that Academic Freedom has nothing to do with where you publish, but with how to do your research (methods, *etc.*). Instead, the concept of Academic Responsibility should carry weight: You should publish your research, your data and your software in the open. This should be considered responsible researcher behavior and should be rewarded.

However, inertia in academia makes progress very slow.

### **Who can change the system?**

It is up to the decision makers to change the system, to introduce incentives for researchers to do the right thing – accommodating the open principles.

University managers and research funders have for more than a decade introduced open access mandates, at first as rather soft mandates, like recommendations – later more strong mandates, like requirements, have been issued. Unfortunately, the follow-up has not been very strong.

But strong mandates and concrete incentives are needed to bring about change in researcher behavior.

Universities and research funders should also promote the APC-free Open Access model by subsidizing the dissemination of the research they fund!

### **Open (access) is inevitable**

Much progress has been made over the last two decades. Universities, research funders, governments and international

organizations have all realized that access to research results, research data and the software associated with this should be open. Open benefits innovation, speeds up development of new products and treatments, thus benefitting our societies and people.

For two decades, we have come quite far in advocating for open access to research results and it is generally estimated that between 30–50% of results are published in Open Access in one form or another.

Open Access is inevitable. It will come in several forms. But much more determined decisions and actions from the decision makers are needed, or else we will see the access crisis develop into a participation crisis. Less privileged countries and their researchers might have access to more information, but due to high publication charges they will not be able to participate in the global scholarly discussion. This will harm all of us, just like we are now reproducing the global divide in access to Covid-19 vaccines!!

Received: August 9, 2021

[1] <https://v2.sherpa.ac.uk/opensoar/>

[2] <https://www.doabooks.org>

[3] <https://thinkchecksubmit.org>

[4] <https://www.budapestopenaccessinitiative.org/read>

[5] <https://sfdora.org>

[6] <https://oa100.snf.ch/en/context/open-access/versions-of-open-access/>