

OPEN ACCESS IN DENMARK

Adrian Price

As in a lot of countries the Open Access debate has raged in Denmark over the last eight to ten years. The paths followed by the debate have been more or less the same as in other countries, with the main protagonists being administrators, librarians, the occasional squeak from the politicians - and far fewer squeaks from scientists themselves.

The debate started with a very idealistic goal and tone: the existing publishing models and habits were working contrary to the spread of science for the good of society. On top of this, the economics were vulgar, where we first paid for science through research funding carried out for public money and then had to pay again to read all about it and learn from it. OA publishing would remedy all this by ensuring free and unhindered access to published results.

University libraries in Denmark have championed the cause, while at the same time being bound hand and foot to having to provide access to the core, peer-reviewed scientific literature available from commercial publishers, no matter the cost. Quite obviously no real attempts have been made at a boycott of the commercial publishers, as this would have to be a tactic from several fronts, and certainly not feasible. And one of the main reasons for this being, that without the very active support of scientists, this tactic would be nothing short of suicidal.

Steps along the way

Denmark's Electronic Research Library (DEFF) organization has been active in support of the OA movement. It has initiated studies and hosted working groups and committees to support the issues. In 2009 the economic aspects of OA publishing were studied by John Houghton in a report for DEFF¹ and this was followed up by a three-country comparison (United Kingdom, Holland and Denmark).² It is difficult to assess the impact of this study on the economic aspects of OA in Denmark, if there has been any at all in a

concrete sense: that the results did not indicate any adverse effects is probably just as important. It would be interesting to read an updated economic report as the OA landscape has changed since 2009 and mandates are more prevalent and national demands are in place. More about this later in this article.

In 2010 an Open Access Committee was established, with the participation of DEFF, universities and research libraries and government agencies. Their report was published in 2011 with 16

recommendations³, with points also covering basic steps to be taken in preparing the ground.

The first recommendation stated that a national policy should be based on "green Open Access" and that "there should be Open Access to the results of publicly funded research to as great an extent as possible". This phrasing has luckily been tightened considerably in the new national policy. Other recommendations include the formulation of Open Access policies by funders, universities and government, issues regarding national and institutional repositories, dissemination of OA information, international cooperation, OA and consortium licenses, long-term preservation, the national bibliometric research indicator, research data, publishers, effect on scientific journals etc. Not all issues have been systematically followed up on, some are continuing debates, for example research data, while others are not as relevant as at the time they were formulated, for example that universities should formulate OA policies: the need for policies has been superseded by the need for plans of action to ensure compliance with OA policies, not least in tackling the issues connected with changing ways of financing research publishing.

An important milestone stemming from the report was the commitment by government to establish a national OA policy which was recommended by the report and did arise. All were very clear that unless a political commitment was made the hope of getting anywhere at all would be tough going.

The “OA infrastructure”

While a political commitment was waited upon other actors were active in looking into various aspects of the “OA infrastructure”. The Danish Open Access Network (DOAN), which arose out of a DEFF project, linked mainly university libraries in preparing university libraries for giving support to researchers and university administrators, mainly in the areas of knowledge building on how best to achieve OA publishing and on how to comply with publishers’ conditions.

An extremely important, and still missing, brick in this “infrastructure” is the lack of easy access to information regarding the restraints and possibilities individual publishing channels present. This data should be in a form easily available to researchers. The Sherpa/Romeo database is widely used, but is not aimed specifically at OA conditions, is not always easy to interpret – and researchers find it difficult to use. Its aim is not to facilitate the choice of publishing channel using a faceted approach, which would take into account such factors as conditions for self-archiving as well as various forms of OA, the price of buying OA, as well as how to assess the quality and impact of individual publishing channels. A DEFF project “SOAP” – Support for Open Access Publishing - investigated the possibilities of establishing a database which would embrace all these aspects which are involved in deciding where to publish. The SOAP project is described in an article in a previous issue of this journal.⁴ The ideas of the SOAP project have as yet not been taken up, but easily accessible data regarding publishing channels, which can be used to facilitate the most relevant choice of publishing channel, is still a need. Especially data which can combine the issues of impact, quality as well as OA. The “Open Access Barometer” was another DEFF project which investigated how to measure the ongoing status of OA publishing in Denmark. It has also been described in a previous article in this journal.⁵ How to always keep an eye on what the status of OA is at research institutions in Denmark at any point in time, is an extremely important issue. The difficulty is in defining the objective metrics and data sources needed to enable a valid measurement of OA publishing. The issues of the necessary metadata has not yet been solved and neither has the issue regarding

the source of this data. But as we move towards OA compliance, these issues will have to be solved.

In June 2012 another important milestone took place. The Danish public research councils and foundations together adopted an OA policy for all publications resulting from projects which were financed, in whole or in part, by these funders.⁶ This was a decisive policy formulation as, together with for example funding from the EU and others, it affects a large part of research in Denmark. It is now no longer a question of choice but of demand, whether to publish OA. Researchers are now confronted, for the first time, with having to actually take an active role in what OA publishing requires, what it means, where to get help, what is the relationship between impact, quality – and OA, and where to get the data needed to make the relevant decisions. Up until now researchers have chosen to be, broadly speaking, happily ignorant of OA issues. It has largely been business as usual. Even though sanctions as such are not part of the research climate in Denmark, if funders actually mean what they say in their OA policies, some degree of sanction-giving will be necessary to enforce the policies. This will also have to become a part of EU policies.

A national OA strategy

Finally, in June 2014 the government announced its national strategy for OA with clear (and somewhat ambitious) goals for OA scientific publishing in Denmark.⁷ At the same time a national steering committee has been established, to oversee the national OA strategy. Apart from the usual formulations of why OA will be good for everyone, the cardinal points in the national strategy are: green OA and golden OA, focus on impact and quality, and a set of concrete goals.

To take the latter first: The two concrete goals are, that by 2017 80% of all peer-reviewed research articles produced by Danish research institutions and published in 2016 must be available OA from repositories, and that from 2022 100% of all peer-reviewed research articles produced by Danish research institutions and published in 2021 must be available OA from repositories. These are (probably) ambitious goals, taking into account what has actually been achieved in the previous three years.

In its own words, “focus” in the policy is on green OA and golden OA. Both models are recommended, but golden OA should only be used if it doesn’t result in an increase in publishing fees in relation to research – which must be a statement as seen from the view of the public funders. The only other address to where government can send the bill would be research institutions and researchers. In connection with this constraint is also the intention that, together with the “relevant parties”, the solution in the long run will be golden OA but in a “cost effective” fashion. What this precisely means is not formulated, but hopefully means that publishers will not necessarily be seen laughing all the way to their banks, twice – to also collect money once intended for research. Hope is probably not a relevant emotion to rely on in this regard, but results in consortia license agreements must soon begin to bear fruit.

Written into the document which governs the working of the national steering committee for OA, it is explicitly stated that the sum of all public expenditure for OA must not increase and that OA demands must not infringe on the publishing freedom of researchers, i.e. the right of researchers to decide where to publish. Repositories are in several sources named as the place where OA articles are to be made available, also for documentation purposes. All Danish universities have a repository where OA articles can be made freely available. For many years there has existed a national research database⁸, in its latest incarnation built upon the repositories of individual universities. This national database has never captured the imagination, and new, radical ways of dissemination research publications emanating from Danish universities in this database would be a good idea. At the same time universities should investigate ways of improving their own dissemination, as a counter-measure to the traditional publisher portals and channels, especially as we move towards the goals of the national strategy of complete OA.



Adrian Price Faculty Library of Natural and Health Sciences, Frederiksberg
Campus ap@science.ku.dk

An important issue connected to the national OA strategy is how progress towards “2022” goals can be monitored. The repositories of Danish universities are not yet capable of adequately measuring OA progress. There is a need for metadata as a part of repositories which will enable universities to document their “OA compliance”.

Conclusion

The OA movement has seemingly been successful in getting an OA agenda adopted, if one judges this by the fact that for example the EU, ERC, all Danish funders of public research, have adopted OA policies, and there has been adopted a national OA policy to cover all public financed research. Unfortunately, absolutely nothing has been achieved in remedying the situation which was in place prior to the adoption of the national OA policy: It seems like publishers will be enjoying additional payments for OA publishing, through what will largely be wide adoption of golden Open Access publishing, unless something is actually done to remedy this.

But the balances between the various stakeholders of funders, researchers, universities/research institutions, publishers, research libraries and government, have changed. If nothing drastic is achieved on the subscription front, it seems that financing for OA will be covered by universities and research institutions - and thereby by researchers through their funding. Some might call this due payment for a rather lackadaisical interest in the machinations of publishing and working with publishers, shown during the OA debate, but this might be a bit harsh. It would be good, and would probably help, if researchers took a more active interest in these factors, which influence their publishing activities.