

OPEN MINDS – AN INTERVIEW WITH GUNNEL ENWALL, PRESIDENT OF THE ROYAL SWEDISH ACADEMY OF LETTERS, HISTORY AND ANTIQUITIES.

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Introduction

Gunnel Engwall is President of The Royal Academy of Letters, History and Antiquities, has served as Vice-President and President of Stockholm University and as President of UNICA (The Network of Universities from the Capitals of Europe).

In 1989 she was appointed Professor of Romance Languages, especially French at Stockholm University. Her research started out in the field of quantitative linguistics with a thesis in 1974 on the vocabulary of modern French best-selling novels. In addition to articles in this field she published ten years later a frequency dictionary based on these best-selling novels. Her other main field of research concerns linguistic and stylistic studies on the French works of the Swedish author August Strindberg. This work has resulted in two dozen articles. Since 1992 she is also the Chairperson of the board for the edition of August Strindberg's Complete Works.

Interview:

The Academy has signed the Berlin Declaration on Open Access to Knowledge in the Sciences and Humanities in 2009 and also the Petition to the EU for Open Access to the results of publicly funded research in 2007.

Could you give me some background to these decisions? Which were the motives?

What kind of discussion preceded the decisions?

For me the awareness of these issues was raised by my work with UNICA that organized a series of seminars about libraries and the journal crisis. UNICA is a network of universities from the capitals of Europe and today has 42 members. I have also been the Chairman of the Library Board of Stockholm University where those same issues were on the table.

When it came to signing these declarations and petitions there were really no contrary views or heated debate. When the principles of Open Access were explained to the members of the Academy they found it natural to support them. Research has always been based on the work of predecessors and therefore the results have to be openly available to all interested. Researchers should not sign away the distribution rights to their own work. The distribution of research results should not be restricted.

Actually the decision to sign the Berlin Declaration was taken already in 2007 but for some reason it has been registered for 2009 at the website of the Berlin Declaration. The Academy also signed the EU petition in the beginning of 2007.

What measures have been taken by the Academy to act in the spirit of the Berlin Declaration?

The Academy has strongly supported the project to digitize its journal *Fornvännen* – Journal of Swedish Antiquarian Research – from its start in 1906 up to the present and make it openly available online. The new journal issues are Open Access after a short embargo period of 6 months. The Academy has supported this project in several ways especially financially. This started before its signing of the Berlin Declaration.

The Academy is deeply involved, from this year also as one of the funders, in *Litteraturbanken*, where classical works of Swedish literature are made available on the Internet. This is a project which started a few years ago but which already is rich in contents. It keeps very high editorial standards. The texts are scientifically edited, and should have a quality that also makes it quite correct and obvious to cite the digital version. At the same time there is a clear ambition to make the works here available to the layman. There are introductions, specialist terms are explained, indexes make searching easier etc. As from this year I have been appointed chairman of the Board of *Litteraturbanken*.

The Digital version of *Fornvännen* has been much appreciated. Do you have any plans to go on converting other publications to online Open Access mode?

There are on-going discussions but no decisions taken as yet. The Academy has been looking for a solution combining online publication with print on demand. We know that many of our readers want a printed version even if it is available online. Now we use a publisher on Gotland who also offers print on demand. We publish both conference series and monographs.

Habits and publication patterns differ widely between different subjects. How would you briefly describe the special challenges for the Humanities in using digital and open access publication channels? In what direction do you think publishing in the Humanities is going?

The natural mode of publication in the Humanities is quite different from that in Sciences and Medicine. Monographs play a very important role and the subject matter of many disciplines often makes it more relevant to use other languages than English. Why publish studies on the French language in English? It would seem self-evident that studies in French, Italian, Russian or Swedish languages and literature are published in these languages. But today this is not the case. My doctoral students in French Language tell me that they are afraid to lose merit points if they publish in French instead of English.

This trend is strongly connected to the recently very popular methods of evaluating scientific quality using citation data from databases like ISI:s Web of Science. The coverage in these databases has a very strong bias towards Science, Technology and Medicine published in predominantly English language journals. Research in the Humanities, in monographs and in other languages than English is not at all well represented. There is a very strong critique among Humanities scholars of the models for quality evaluation now gaining ground. I do feel that whoever makes judgements of academic quality should also read the works of those being evaluated and not just use quantitative measures.

These evaluation models also constitute a problem for Humanities scholars that want to publish in Open Access journals to reach the widest possible audience.



Gunnel Engwall, President of The Royal Swedish Academy of Letters, History and Antiquities, professor of Romance languages at Stockholm University

OA journals have often not been around long enough to get citation measures. If they want to compete for papers from Humanities scholars they have to strive for excellence. Getting OA journals in the Humanities with a high quality ranking would definitely raise the interest of Humanities scholars. And I do believe that they should try to publish in high prestige publications. The problem today is how prestige is awarded to some publications and not to others.

The Academy is going to arrange a seminar about ranking universities, where issues of evaluation and publication channels will be very important.

You have a long research career at Stockholm University including assignments in a leading position at the university. Have you seen any changes in the attitudes of fellow researchers regarding digital publication and Open Access during that time?

Certainly there is a clear change. Researchers realize that they have greater chances of being cited if their publications are online. I hope that a growing proportion of publications will be Open Access. It is important that peer review in OA journals keeps a very high standard, and that this is getting well known among researchers. If highly respected scholars publish in OA journals and take part in their editorial boards other scholars will follow. There are already a number of high status OA journals in Medicine and Biology, so this is quite possible to accomplish.

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