

OPEN MINDS TOWARDS OPEN ACCESS:

-An interview with members of the FinnOA working group

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The Finnish Open Access working group (FinnOA) was founded in 2003 in Helsinki by professionals in academia, libraries, learned societies and publishers. FinnOA was started as an informal working group with the aim to promote open access to scientific research. The group has retained its informal status but during the years it has by initiatives and seminars initiated projects for developing an infrastructure for open access in publication archives and publishing of open access scientific journals. Lately the aim of the working group has been to promote a broader spectrum of access to research, including research data.

For this article three members of the FinnOA working group; LL.D Marjut Salokannel (chair of FinnOA), Ph.D. Claus Montonen, Head of publishing Eeva-Liisa Aalto were interviewed about their membership and activities in the working group and how they see the future for open access.

The discussion started with the question on why each member started to promote open access and joined the FinnOA working group. Claus Montonen, physicist by profession and a background in the research tradition in high-energy physics was one of the founding members of FinnOA in 2003. At that time he was active in the European Physical Society and chair of their publications committee and an early promoter of open access. As we know, this scientific discipline was the forerunner in open access publishing introducing the submission of pre-print manuscripts to the subject-based archive *arXiv*. Claus Montonen found it natural to join the national FinnOA working group when it was started.

Head of publishing Ms Eeva-Liisa Aalto from the Federation of learned societies was also a founder of the FinnOA working group. In Finland learned societies have a national co-operative body for learned societies in Finland called the Federation of learned societies. The learned societies are also very important academic publishers of periodicals and books. The professional interest in academic publishing thus provided Eeva-Liisa Aalto with an incentive to join the FinnOA working group. The Federation of learned societies has hosted many seminars arranged by FinnOA during the years and they also started a project to supports its member societies to convert to e-journal publishing preferably also to open access

publishing.

The present chair of FinnOA, LL.D Marjut Salokannel is a researcher in intellectual property rights focusing on the socio-economic dimension of patent and copyright law. Her research interests in science policy and access to publicly funded scientific research and information lead her to join the FinnOA working group and since then she has actively promoted open access initiatives and mandates in the University of Helsinki as well as a national science policy and intellectual property right legislation regarding open access to research data.

During the years The FinnOA working group has been active mainly in three main areas: policy building initiatives, supporting an infrastructure of repositories for open access copies of research articles and supporting open access journal publishing.

As examples of policy initiatives in Finland where FinnOA members have participated, can be mentioned reports published by the Ministry of Education. In 2005 a memorandum on recommendations for the promotion of open access in scientific publishing in Finland and in 2011 a roadmap for the utilization of electronic data in research. The project OA-JES (2006-2008) promoted the ongoing work in starting, maintaining and improving institutional repositories in the universities and research institutes. Also the support to learned societies in Finland in publishing open access journal was carried out together with the Federation of Learned Societies. Eeva-Liisa Aalto pointed out the important issue of publishing in national languages as a strong motive for support to learned societies. We need to keep up a scientific discussion in the national languages and it is also important for making research known to a broader national audience.

All three interviewees found that there is a maturity process going on in open access activities. The infrastructure is mostly in place and there is knowledge about open access within the research communities. Also within the FinnOA working group the first intensive years has passed and there is a need to make strategies for the future.

When asked about their thoughts on the future of open access Claus Montonen found the future for journal publishing in the new business models for publishing. He sees that the most likely development will become the adoption of the model of publishing fees. Preferably this would not affect the researcher personally and could be handled centrally by the university or research institute or included in project funding. He also finds that the best choice in the future for “green” copies of articles would be large subject-based repositories instead of local university repositories. The idea that the researchers institution should be the first instance to collect the information and provide metadata is only a first step towards access. The data needs to be collected into a more user-friendly service based on broader subjects. The motives for this is better search facilities and thus more secure access to a research article.

One important issue that still has to be resolved is the long-term preservation of electronic journals. Preservation should be an issue for the national libraries and free and easy access to the older material should be secured.

Marjut Salokannel has been actively engaged in promoting the possibility to use electronic research data. Free access to research data is the key to successful research since all research is based on good research data. As research results are linked to research within a research discipline also research data is linked to other research. Also cross-disciplinary linkages are common and needed both nationally and globally to support new aspects in research. The work in this area is only in the beginning and is one of the important future strategic areas of the FinnOa working group. This fall a seminar on the topic will be arranged directed to researchers and persons responsible for research in universities. The hope is to start a discussion and involvement in future steps on how to promote open access to research data.

Eeva-Liisa Aalto was concerned about the situation for national scientific publishing in Finland. Small society journals have a hardship in surviving only in print format. A conversion to open access would free resources to content production. She therefore finds that one of the focus areas in the future will be to support small scientific journals to publish open access. Today tablets and applications for reading e-journals could make reading online versions more attractive to researchers. Another important matter is that publishing book is still an important channel in for example humanities. As an example Eeva-Liisa Aalto mentioned that the center for worldwide exchange of publications within the Federation for Learned Societies previously mostly was occupied with serials publications but today the exchange also includes more monographs. The future for e-books will be very interesting. The problem is that there are many small publishers on the market and some coordination on the e-book format and distribution would be needed. Until now the development has been rather slow but there are expectations for the future.

To sum up the discussion we can argue that the even though open access in its basic aspects is matured and rather well known and the infrastructure is in place there is much work to be done in order to keep up the enthusiasm for free access to research publications. As a result of the discussion in this interview session at least the focus areas in the future for FinnOA could be open access to research data, a continuing support for converting small scientific journals to open access and developing subject-based services on data from the institutional repositories not forgetting the importance of long-term preservation to secure access also in the far future. Furthermore a central task for FinnOA is influencing the legislator to amend copyright legislation towards a more research friendly direction.



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