



European
Sociological
Association

European Sociological Association Response to PlanS

The European Sociological Association (ESA) aims to facilitate sociological research, teaching and communication between sociologists, sociologists and other scientists, and to give sociology a voice in European affairs. Its focus is the development of sociological knowledge. ESA is an academic association of sociologists and a non-profit Europe-wide association. As well as around 3000 individual members 25 National Sociological Sociological Associations from across Europe are also members of the ESA. It was established in 1994-95, following deliberations and consultations among sociologists from a wide range of countries.

Sociological research has much to contribute to European level debates and developments and the ESA has an important role to play in organising the European debate and setting the agenda.

The ESA publishes two scientific peer-reviewed journals *European Societies* and *The European Journal of Cultural and Political Sociology*.

In the context of both our wider mission and our commitment to publishing high quality research via our journals we are making this response to COalitionS with regard to the proposals in PlanS.

Background

As we understand it COalitionS through Plan S aims to create an intellectual commons via the action of funders and managed market mechanisms but, as (Ostrom 2015) has shown in, order to succeed PlanS would have to function as an overarching framework within which actors retain some autonomy and in this context needs to be adaptive as the new environment of scholarly publishing evolves rather than fixed as appears to be the case.

We appreciate the importance of making knowledge available for ‘the public good’ and are broadly supportive of the principle of OA, indeed a number of our member Associations already produce OA journals. However, we would question the statement in the preamble to the Plan, which, sets up OA as ‘foundational’ to the scientific enterprise itself, rather than as an obligation placed on science by society (Johnson 2019). The aim may be to create ‘a global knowledge commons’ but how feasible is this without global buy-in?

Up to now OA has been a ‘catch-all’ meaning different things to different people and organisations and because, despite the EU’s announcement in 2016 that it would pursue immediate OA by 2020, there has actually been relatively little change and the academic and publishing communities have adapted to OA in ways that are now being defined as unacceptable. While we appreciate that this can be seen as frustrating the intention to bring about ‘full’ OA by 2020, and that it is probably not possible to bring about the changes envisaged from *within* the present system – in large part due to big publishers commercial interests - we do not see that the current acceleration of pace is feasible either.

We consider that the policy and its pace of implementation are being driven by the competing demands and agendas of Funding Bodies, University Libraries and Publishers as well as political pressures to make research available to the commercial sector. We feel strongly, as do many researchers and their representative organisations, that it is the best interests of research that should drive any OA developments.

Funding and Equity

While, as an European Organisation committed to the global reach of our discipline, we welcome PlanS’s apparent commitment to reduce APC fees for authors from low and medium income nations, we would note that without financial support many scholars in many parts of the world will be prevented from publishing in the journals where their research is best placed. This must surely go against the intention of PlanS .We would also argue that this intention should cover low and medium income researchers. If not, then excellent researchers, and their outputs, will be excluded. It is not only the differentials between nations that are the issue, but the differences between Universities. An institution may have very little research income, but some

excellent researchers – and this is particularly likely to be the case in the Social Sciences (and Humanities) where excellent research and scholarship can be carried out without grant funding. A major concern for the ESA, as an organisation committed to the future development of our discipline, is the potential impact on ECA researchers – a group that includes higher numbers of women and BME researchers than the Academy as a whole. ECRs are more likely to be on short-term contracts and to need to change institutions – who will pay their APCs? This situation is likely to be particularly extreme for Doctoral students unless funding is built in to their awards. There is also the possibility that those not employed in University posts, but nevertheless undertaking important work, and those who are retired, and therefore, in a position to consolidate a lifetime's research, will also be excluded if APCs are high.

Licensing and Copyright

While we understand that it would be convenient to have one type of license, CC-BY, while appropriate for most STEM disciplines in most contexts is not at all suitable for the Social Sciences and Humanities (SSH). The more restrictive CC-BY-NC-ND version is necessary in SSH because in these disciplines form is commonly inseparable from content – the meaning/theory/evidence is in the words. The precise words are often fundamental especially in the context of qualitative research where quotations can be a significant part of the text. The permissive nature of the CC-BY license could easily lead to plagiarism and also to reputational damage, should text be taken out of context. There is also the issue of third party rights, which while not as big an issue for sociology as for some of the Humanities, are nevertheless important in relation to, for example, photographs. Rights are often time limited or in an OA context only given for poorer quality reproductions.

Gold versus Hybrid

While there are a number of fully OA sociology journals in Europe the most highly respected and international, English language journals, are not and are owned either by learned societies, Universities, or in one case a Trust, and published in partnership with publishers. In the context of these latter journals a relatively low percentage - no more than 15% are currently funded through Gold OA. In SSH almost all reputable journals globally are hybrid and we are puzzled as to how undermining, if not abolishing them entirely, or making it impossible for European researchers to publish in them can be a good thing for European research. In a discipline such as Sociology, which has many sub fields, it is crucial that researchers are able to publish in the journals most appropriate to their research - where their work will receive the best criticism and the most oxygen. Aside from the issues raised above it is important to note that many of these journals are published in the USA and thus will be 'out of bounds' under the current PlanS requirements. We would argue that hybrid journals, rather than being outlawed should be seen as crucial to the development of OA in SSH disciplines.

Quality is Crucial

We are seriously concerned that if publishers are forced to flip journals to full OA and to meet their financial requirement via APCs then pressure will ensue for journals to publish more papers. This could be seen as positive, given that many journals currently reject high quality submissions due to lack of space. However, a potential negative consequence is that the current peer review system will not cope with this increase and there is no better system. High quality peer review is perhaps more time consuming in SSH disciplines where the theory data etc. is in the detail of the text and, where research is more to be highly specialised and much less likely to be part of an on-going development, in the way that more 'normal' science is.

Books are a special case

We welcome the stated intention, by COalitionS, that further moves towards OA for monographs and collections will be deferred until the issues have been further explored. For this reason we will only make a brief comment on books here. Monographs and collections are at the heart of SSH disciplines in a way which simply not the case in STEM – here one size will not fit all. The kind of in depth research often undertaken in the social sciences requires a monograph length exposition. Monographs are especially important to ECAs where the book of the thesis is often the first major step in building a reputation and gaining an academic post. ECAs are often writing this first book while unemployed or in a part-time and/ or short-term post and so would not be able to command the resources to pay APCs. Thus, there would be major issues to resolve with regard to support for publishing both editorial and financial if the expectation that full OA be applied to books were to be pursued. Also there seems to be an assumption that what is at stake for researchers is the loss of royalties, but these rarely reach significant levels in SSH

Publishers and Learned Societies

It should first be noted that the ESA is not, to any significant extent, financially reliant on income from our journals and we are therefore in a good position to comment on the implications of PlanS for Learned Societies. As has already been pointed out a number of our member National Associations already have OA journals, however for those which don't, and which are highly dependent on income from publications, the future looks potentially highly problematic. Such journals tend to be published in partnership with smaller publishers and by University Presses. The revenues from them are very important to the sustainability and autonomy of Learned Societies and National Associations. In our view, it seems that COalitionS does not fully appreciate the role of LS and NAs in the SSH disciplines where they are central to the standing and development of the discipline, and provide essential support and training for ECAs, as well as networking and development opportunities for all researchers. Undermining these organisations as a result of the sheer speed of implementation of PlanS could have damaging effects, which could not be recovered from. We understand that there are discussions in some contexts about other ways of supporting LS, but it is crucial that their autonomy is retained especially in the context of an HE sector which is becoming increasingly competitive

(at institutional level, and market driven sometimes at the expense of SSH disciplines.

As mentioned above the publishers of many of SSH journals (and most monographs) are not the big players, and they contribute a great deal to the quality of our outputs, via support for editorial boards, and editorial assistance as well as promotion and marketing. It is a mistaken view that in an increasingly digital world publishers input is increasingly redundant. This shows a lack of understanding of the skills and disciplinary knowledge which these publishers hold, built up over many years and based in strong relationships with the research community and also to much faith in the power of digital technology in and of itself - the whole issue of discoverability would be a good test case here.

Knowledge is Global

Surely part of the desire for OA is that research will also be more readily and widely available to the people most likely to use it – other researchers, but if there are major divisions in the world in relation to OA then these researchers will be divided from each other. PlanS, in its current form, constitutes a threat to international collaborations. There is also the bizarre unintended consequence of a retired or non-contracted academic being able to publish in a major US journal while a grant funded researcher is debarred from doing so.

Conclusions and Recommendations

The ESA recognises the need for a co-ordinated approach to OA and supports the desire to ensure that publishers are not making unacceptable profits from publicly funded research via ‘double dipping’ (NB there is no double payment when ‘funded’ papers in subscription journals are made available via Green OA). However, we have grave concerns about the some aspects of the plan, its timetable, and the unintended consequences, which could ensue and have severely adverse effects on research across Europe into the foreseeable future. We therefore recommend that:

- The current timetable be reviewed and a more realistic and phased one put in place to ensure that PlanS is based on a full evaluation of evidence from the research community
- A task force is established which should include for example The European Alliance for the Humanities and Social Sciences (so as to ensure that the important differences between SSH and STEM disciplines are fully explored)
- The position of hybrid journals is reconsidered
- That serious consideration is given to the requirements of SSH disciplines and specifically that a workable means is found to ensure that a CC-BY- NC-ND license can be used when appropriate

- That the indication of delay to the implementation of full OA for Monographs and Collections be transmuted into an acceptance that PlanS should not apply to Monographs and Collections at all

References

Johnson, R. (2019) From COalition to commons: Plan S and the future of scholarly communication *Insights* 32 (1):5 DOI: <http://doi.org/10.1629/uksg.453>

Ostrom, E. (2015) *Governing the Commons: The Evolution of Institutions for Collective Action*, CUP:UK

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