

DECLARATION I LOVE OPEN ACCESS

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Arguments for Open Access to Research Results



This text was first published on 15 March 2013 in [Le Monde](#) by sixty professionals belonging to the community of higher education and research: university presidents, directors of several Maisons des Sciences de l'Homme, publishers, representatives of journals, representatives of university libraries, professors and researchers. The call is open to everyone: engineers, scholars, students, information professionals, librarians, journalists, etc.

In July 2012, the European Commission issued a [recommendation](#) on Open Access (i.e. free for the readers) publication of the results of publicly funded scientific research. The Commission believes that such a measure is necessary to increase the visibility of European research before 2020, by gradually suppressing the barriers between readers and scientific papers, after a possible embargo period from six to twelve months. Latin America has been benefiting from this approach

for ten years after the development of powerful platforms for Open Access journals. Scielo and Redalyc, which together host almost 2000 journals, have considerably increased their visibility thanks to their Open Access policy: the Brazilian portal [Scielo](#) now has more traffic than the US-based [JSTOR](#). Such examples show that Open Access changes the balance of power in a world dominated by groups which hold thousands of (mostly English-language) journals: it paves the way to what could be called a real “bibliodiversity”, since it enables the emergence of a plurality of viewpoints, modes of publication, scientific paradigms, and languages.

Some French editors of journals in the Humanities and Social Sciences (HSS) have expressed their concern with regard to this recommendation, which they saw as a threat to a vulnerable business model. However, a thorough assessment of the sector would be required to provide a true cost-benefit analysis: one should shed light on its funding sources and modes, both direct and indirect, public and private, and determine the roles the various actors play in this field, pinpointing the added value brought about by each of them.

To be afraid of Open Access is, in our eyes, to commit oneself to a narrow – and in fact erroneous – vision of the future. If the HSS were set aside in a specific “reservation” today, they would become isolated and would ultimately become extinct. On the contrary, we think that the HSS can be at the forefront of this opening movement, precisely because there is an increasing social demand for their research results (we estimate the overall traffic on Cairn, OpenEdition, Erudit and Persée to be around 10 million visits per month!). The fears voiced by our friends and colleagues are largely groundless in this respect. Not only is the share of sales made outside of higher education and research institutions very small in the business models of HSS journals, which remain mostly directly or indirectly funded by public money, but there exist new business models capable of reinforcing the position of publishers without having the authors pay, as is demonstrated by the success of the Freemium programme developed by OpenEdition, a French initiative. Solutions to finance a high-quality open digital

publication system are being invented and have started to prove their [efficiency](#), as in the cases of [SciELO](#), the Public Library of Science ([PLOS](#)), [Redalyc](#) or [OpenEdition](#). It would be a disaster if the HSS were kept aside from this powerful and innovative movement which is bound to reshape our scientific landscape. Far from backing off, they must be among the leading disciplines in this movement, as they are in the Spanish- and Portuguese-speaking countries. The resistance to this evolution advocated by some of our colleagues seems to be a short-term strategy neglecting the potential benefits for science and education, as well as the democratisation of access to knowledge it will enable.

According to us, this is not only an economic and commercial problem. Although the existence of an Elsevier-Springer-Wiley [oligopoly](#) exerts heavy pressure on university budgets and although the funding system of academic publishing should be rethought, generalised Open Access is first and foremost a matter of [scientific policy](#). Knowledge cannot be treated as a commodity and its dissemination is more than ever a vital concern in our societies: we can work towards a revolutionary democratisation of access to research results. Knowledge behind barriers, which only the happy few working in the richest universities can access, is barren knowledge. It is confiscated, though produced thanks to public funding. In this debate, higher education and research institutions have a [key role to play](#). The diffusion of knowledge and research results, their spreading among an audience as large as possible, is one of the missions of these institutions. Therefore a relevant scientific policy has to build public digital infrastructures, but also needs to support innovative publishing policies aimed at fostering cross-disciplinary exchanges, new forms of writing, multilingualism and the broadest diffusion.

Who is afraid of Open Access? Private access policies hinder the dissemination of ideas and is ill-suited to the new paradigms introduced by digital media. It is high time that we considered the Web as a unique opportunity in terms of innovation, the diffusion of knowledge and the emergence of new ideas.

We are not afraid of Open Access. To take knowledge out of silos and beyond the boundaries of academic campuses is to open knowledge to everyone, acknowledge that it has a pivotal role to play in our societies and open up perspectives for collective growth.

Do not be afraid of Open Access! It is now possible to establish a new scientific, publishing and business contract between researchers, publishers, libraries and readers in order to enter for good a society of shared, democratic knowledge.