First Inaugural Speech

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What is open science? Quite simply, it is the unfettered dissemination of the results, methods and products of scientific research, particularly through the development of digital technologies and products. Why is it important? Because it fosters collective progress, by allowing science to incorporate practices of reproducibility and collaboration. Also, because it leads to a democratisation of access to knowledge, by taking scientific publications and methods out of their traditional field, and by demanding more transparency. You know how important it is to me that scientific culture, which is too often impoverished in our society, should be universally shared and should be able to enlighten the decisions and consciences of citizens. Finally, because it promotes the multilingualism of scientific knowledge, which is no longer an obstacle thanks to the growing power of deep learning translation software and the potential plurality of scientific editions. And this diversity, which guarantees a plurality of ways of thinking and allows for a fairer evaluation system, is the only way to preserve scientific integrity and to produce a science that is up to the challenges of today.

This is not the first time that we have wanted to take strong political action in favour of open science in Europe, and this conference is part of a line of major milestones. Firstly, there are milestones at a European level since the European Commission recommended the generalisation of open access to scientific publications as early as 2012. In 2016, the Amsterdam Call to Action for Open Science was launched, calling for action on open science in all European countries. The European Open Science Days that I have the honour of inaugurating today, organised under the French Presidency of the European Union, are part of this legacy.

But we have also initiated major advances at national level. Together we have launched a first then a second National Plan for Open Science in 2018 and 2021, and progress is already being made. Our invaluable French Open Science Monitor, the latest edition of which was launched last week, now shows almost 62% open access, which is significant progress. During this period, we have managed to create a Committee for Open Science, and a National Fund for Open Science. We have integrated into the Law on Research Programming the objective of achieving 100% open access to scientific publications. We have also included these concerns in the decree of 3 December 2021 on scientific integrity. Finally, before the summer, we will launch the national platform for research data, which I announced last July.
At international level, UNESCO recently issued a recommendation on open science, which in many respects shares the concerns I mentioned earlier. It showed that open science is not a matter of convenience, not an option or even a fashion, but a necessity that can save lives, and I would like to pay tribute to UNESCO and to all the member countries that discussed the details of this fine text, with great rigour and always in the collective interest. Having a global recommendation on open science confirms in many respects its universal importance, not only French or European.

Obviously, there is still a long way to go, and that is why initiatives like these are important. We still need to discuss, debate and decide on a number of issues such as the transparency of health research, the evolution of research evaluation, or the essential contribution of new technologies to open science. The subject of health in particular, during a global pandemic, was bound to come up. It is necessary, at a time when lives may depend on the effectiveness of the solutions proposed, to identify ways of improving practices for communicating results, and the French Open Science Barometer has been a decisive tool for assessing the transparency of health research. Even today, although the rate of openness of health publications is higher than the national average, the results of clinical trials and observational studies, particularly those that are negative, are still not made public enough. This problem is not specifically French, it can also be seen on a European and international scale. We need to improve collectively on this point.

Another possible point of improvement, and in this I agree with the UNESCO recommendation, is scientific publishing. I strongly support the principle of bibliodiversity, and I am convinced, like many of you, that publishing diversity is an element that contributes both to academic freedom and to the dissemination of knowledge in society and among scientists. The publishing landscape sometimes suffers from its great concentration and could be more diverse and more balanced, and we must work in this direction so that everyone can find their place.

I would also like to talk to you about the reform of research evaluation, an evaluation that focuses more on quality and concrete impact than on the quantity or format of publications. With the Paris Call launched today, we are committing the scientific community, within the framework of the French Presidency of the European Union, to reflect on a fairer and more relevant method of evaluating research, one that better promotes the quality of research work. The European Commission’s recommendation for a reform of the research evaluation system, published last November, is also along these lines.
Finally, this diversity of research activities, which we hold dear, is only made possible by the fundamental role of digital technologies in sharing knowledge for all. For this reason, we wanted to focus in this conference on research software that are first-class contributions to research, discovery and knowledge, and we were keen to reward their actors. Thus, the Director General of Research and Innovation, Ms Claire Giry, will present the first six open science prizes for free research software tomorrow on my behalf. Without, of course, revealing the names of the winners in advance, I would like to pay tribute to them and say how privileged we are to have such talented people in our universities and research organisations who have chosen to develop their software under a free licence so that it can be used, modified and improved by everyone. This was an essential contribution to the digital heritage of humanity.

I therefore wish you collectively for these games to be able to raise awareness, to rethink, to find innovative solutions for a more open and more universally shared science. This is the future of European and global research, the only way to ensure that this research is equal to the challenges that await us.

References


12. See also “Jussieu Call for Open science and bibliodiversity”, 10 October 2017, https://jussieucall.org/jussieu-call/.
