An Action Plan for Diamond Open Access

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Lidia Borrell-Damián: We came up with this idea of an Action plan based on a study commissioned by cOAlition S, funded by Science Europe, and run by OPERAS (cf. infra), because we thought that the moment was right to create a community that would strengthen the Diamond Open Access (OA) sector. We thought that we could support this community to achieve a system that is better organised, coordinated and sustainably funded to support these researchers in their dissemination efforts. Moreover, we wished to provide the means for the diamond sector to develop its full potential in the context of open science and in the context of the scholarly communication system at large. We also thought that the moment was right at a practical level to develop this community to provide a common set of actions to better define a communication ecosystem and the infrastructure for scholars.

We wish to further aid Diamond OA journals and platforms that share the same principles, guidelines and quality standard. We want to advance the capacity of those journals and platforms to provide increased and improved services. It is a well-rounded initiative that we think is perfect to advance scholarly communication.

It has been defined by many speakers before me. Diamond OA means free of charge for authors and readers. It is community-driven, academic-led and -owned, which is very important, and since there is no fee, it provides equitable access for all, which is of tremendous importance for the results of research. It also involves the concept of bibliodiversity that is in development, and it respects all large- and small-scale multi-lingual and multicultural scholarly communities.

We now know much more, but with this in mind, about one year ago Science Europe issued a call for tenders to conduct a study on Diamond OA because we wanted to understand the landscape. We wanted to know more about this system that is so fragmented, and therefore so difficult to bring together in a way that provides a space
and a coherent voice to those concerned in the progress of the scholarly publishing system. A consortium led by OPERAS\(^1\) was the winner of that. I will mention a few key results of this very extensive study\(^2\).

What is important in this study is that they surveyed 1 619 journals, together with focus groups and interviews, which indicated that there are around 17 000 to 29 000 journals. 60% of them are in social sciences and the humanities, 17% in medicine and 22% in other scientific disciplines. Also, what is important to note from this study is that about 44% of the articles published in open access are published in diamond, so it is a non-neglectable size. Moreover, that represents 8-9% of the total publishing volume, compared to 10% of what represents the Gold Article Processing Charges. I think this is a very important figure because it signals the importance of a sector that normally has been underestimated. As Pierre himself confessed, this is not even a fully exhaustive study taking account of everything. It is possible that there is even more data that would give us increased and improved information, and we know that there are other researchers now taking this forward. This puts the importance of this sector of scholarly publishing into context.

What this study identified is that there are four main challenges. One is purely technical. You will hear more about it. Another is about the management. A third one is about the visibility, which we just addressed. A fourth one is about sustainability, which some of my colleagues have also addressed. This is a comprehensive way of presenting the challenges of the Diamond OA sector.

There are several recommendations to address these challenges. One major one is that indeed we need more dialogue and commitment between researchers, research funding organisations, research-performing organisations, university libraries, university presses and departments, scholarly societies, and ministries for all the reasons that you have heard very well presented by Arianna. It was on this basis that we decided to convene a group of experts in a meeting two days ago, with the support of the Ministry of Higher Education, Research and Innovation in France to precisely provide a shape to these four challenges. The study is available, and it is of course in open access. You can seek it out for more information. There are many more recommendations. It is a very in-depth study and I highly recommend that you read it. My colleague Johan will now take over and present to you the principal activities that we have decided to undertake to try to meet these four main challenges.

**Johan Rooryck**: As Lidia said, we came together a few days ago to discuss an action plan for Diamond Open Access and the discussion among the experts was specifically
focused on four central elements: efficiency, quality standards, capacity-building and sustainability. I will review those to tell you what we alighted on.

The first element is efficiency. We think that Diamond OA journals and platforms would benefit from sharing several common resources. That means aligning quality standards, in a flexible way of course. This is because you must to take into account various traditions across disciplines and various cultures, and research cultures as well. We need to create sustainability and build trust for all stakeholders via shared infrastructure standards, policies, practices and funding streams. That also means making the technical services more accessible, more interoperable and more streamlined. We know that the technical capacity of the existing diamond journals varies a lot from one journal to the next, and this is something that we would like to assist editors and journals with.

We would also like of course to create synergies between diamond journals in the same disciplines, in the same languages, in the same geographical locations, according to their needs via existing organisations, groups and societies. Basically, what we want is to federate and align in a flexible way without imposing standards, but by inviting everyone to participate and co-create these new standards.

The second element is quality standards. Quality of course needs to be flexibly aligned, like I said. It is not something where one standard fits everyone. However, we need to specify quality standards for the core components of publishing operations and services. That is in terms of, for instance, reviewer policies or author guidelines, or in terms of what a reviewer can expect, what a reader can expect, what an author can expect when they submit a paper to a diamond journal. At least there we should have some guidelines that are relatively identical across disciplines and languages and that can be flexibly aligned. That is why we want to align nontechnical standards, non-technological standards, and best practices for open access publishing into what we have called temporarily a European Quality Standard for Institutional Publishing. We also want to develop a self-assessment tool that can allow journals and editors to assess the quality standards for diamond journals to assist progress, to allow journals to progress towards this quality standard.

Thirdly, we want to focus on capacity-building. We want to enhance editorial and management skills across the various disciplines, languages, and countries by creating tools for open access publishing in diamond, training materials for institutional editors and service providers, quality standards for journals, authors and review policies and guidelines that will all become available from a common access point.
To that end we would like to create a capacity centre for diamond publishing that provides technical, financial, and training services for these journals and platforms.

Finally, there is the issue of sustainability, and this was already mentioned by various speakers before me, namely we need to investigate the revenue streams, the legal status and the governance of Diamond OA journals and platforms. That needs to be stabilised. For instance, we need to ensure that the operational costs of diamond publishing are carried by a network of institutional actors, like Arianna mentioned in the presentation before me. We need to develop a coordinated financial mechanism that will deliver various sources of funding both to the central capacity centre and the individual journals, infrastructures, and platforms. We must make sure that the legal status of these various journals clearly states that they are scholar-led, scholar-owned and -governed and that their titles are protected in a legal manner. This also requires that we seek a better understanding of the costs of Diamond OA and promote transparent financial and administrative good practices to inform all stakeholders. Clearly it is not just about open access, but it is also about open governance here.

In conclusion, as mentioned earlier, this action plan was developed by the participants in the workshop on 2 February. This workshop was organised by Science Europe in collaboration with cOAlition S³, OPERAS and ANR⁴. It was sponsored by the French Ministry of Higher Education, Research, and Innovation in the context of this Open Science European Conference. What is important and encouraging news is that a consortium of 23 organisations was awarded a capacity-building grant for 3 million by Horizon-Widera⁵ to develop institutional publishing and diamond publishing in Europe. That will certainly help towards realising this action plan. However, of course we need much more participation from various organisations, not only across Europe, but also across the world, and this is why we will launch an appeal in the next few weeks to sign this action plan to the various organisations and journals who are willing to support it. We certainly need a community of organisations worldwide to bring this action plan for Diamond Open Access forward. We are planning a conference in June 2022 to discuss the implementation of that action plan.

To go a step further

“The agenda for the next two years is to achieve a consolidated network of research centres, funders, researchers, research infrastructures and service providers willing to contribute to the consolidation of the diamond sector. This is a very healthy option for academic scholarly publishing.” (L. Borrel-Damián)
“We would also hopefully have a much better overview of the data of all the journals that exist, what their quality criteria are, how they are subsidised and how they function so that we are able to have a better understanding of this intricate landscape.” (J. Rooryck)

"A quality-certified journal is first and foremost a researcher-run and owned journal that does not require money from either readers or authors. Some services such as the DOAJ can provide a more accurate assessment of such journals." (J. Roorick)

"All disciplines are affected by Diamond Open Access. It is simply a matter of researchers changing the way they think about the dissemination of their work and taking ownership of that dissemination." (L. Borrell-Damián)

References