

Open Access Publishing under Plan S: When Good Intentions Remain Eurocentric

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Plan S responds to feedback from the research community

The Revised Guidance on implementing Plan S, which reportedly considered 600+ comments received as feedback to its primary guidance, acknowledges many of the challenges, such as:

- ❖ The problem of high Article Processing Costs (APCs) and the need for standardising/reviewing publishing costs charged by Open Access (OA) journals
- ❖ Likely disadvantages for researchers who wish to publish in journals not currently compliant with Plan S
- ❖ The importance to account for books, book chapters and other publications that are popular in Social Sciences and Humanities (SSH) research and do not comply with Plan S stipulations
- ❖ Unequal number of OA journals across disciplines
- ❖ Inability to pay required APCs for some researchers, especially researchers from low- and middle-income countries (LMICs) and the need to offer fee waiving and discounts as an option
- ❖ No full representation achieved in terms of participating funders and organisations



But...

cOAlition S has not yet openly and thoroughly discussed how Plan S fits in the current unequal knowledge production system and what its implications will be for existing inequalities among researchers from different nations, economic classes, career stages, or other determinants that currently affect access to funding and publishing opportunities.

The system: an unequal funding landscape

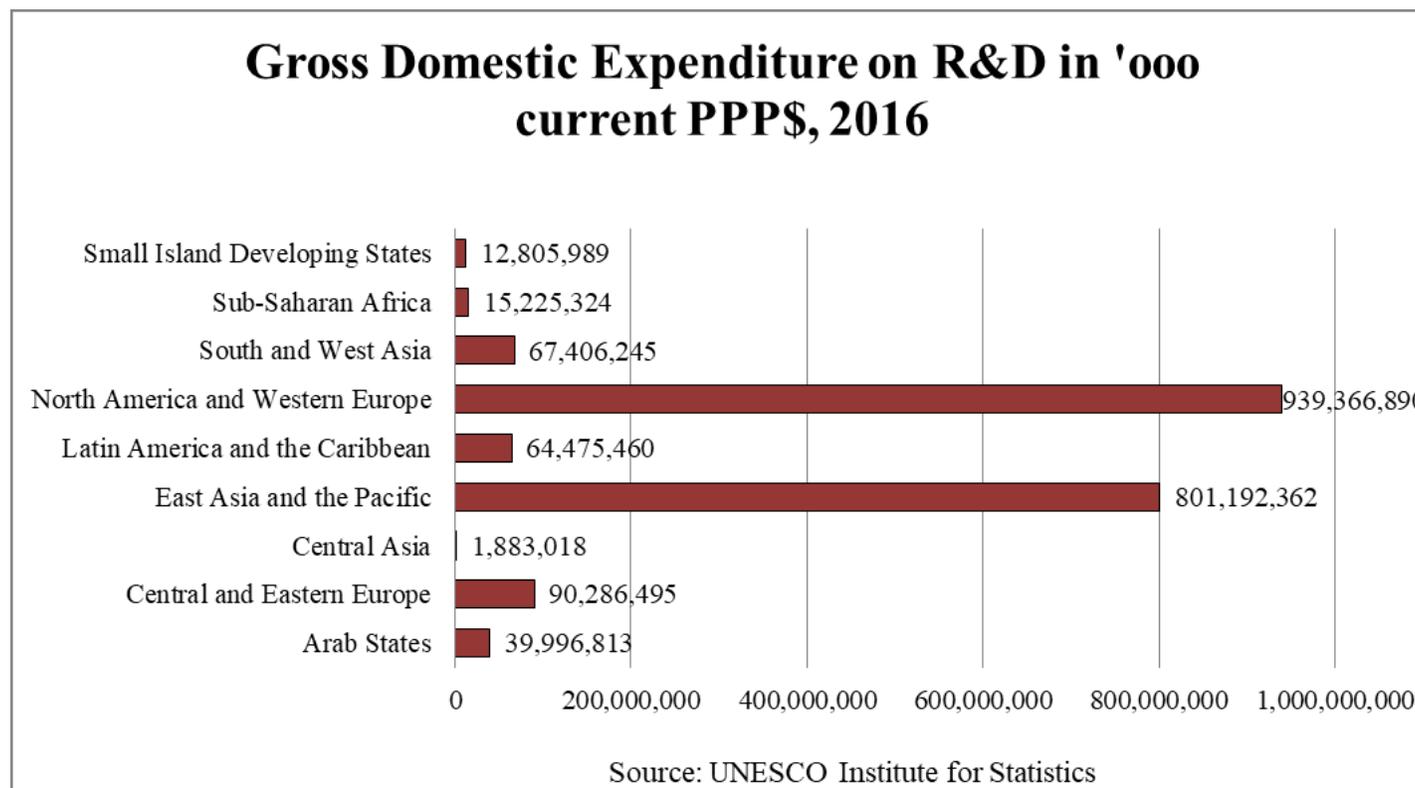
Foundational to the effective implementation of the objective of Plan S to make knowledge immediately and permanently accessible is to acknowledge and respond to the unequal distribution of research funding in the world since the potential of implementing its principles relies largely on the availability of research funding and regional funders' willingness and ability to cover OA publishing costs.

R&D asymmetries

Sub-Saharan Africa: 0.7
percent of world total

Central and Eastern Europe:
4.47 percent of world total

North America and Western
Europe: 46.5 percent of world
total



Supporting statements



CANCER RESEARCH UK



Young Academy of Europe

DFG Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft



SWISS NATIONAL SCIENCE FOUNDATION



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OPEN ACCESS 2020



LIBER Ligue des Bibliothèques Européennes de Recherche Association of European Research Libraries



LE RU LEAGUE OF EUROPEAN RESEARCH UNIVERSITIES



EMBO



eulife



ZonMW



EUA European University Association



MARIE CURIE ALUMNI



SPARC Europe



COAR Consortium of Open Access Researchers



FOAM For Open Access Movers



eurodoc The European Council of Doctoral Candidates and Junior Researchers



NIHR National Institute for Health Research



Yerun Young European Research Universities



CASPA Open Access Scholarly Publishers Association



DARIAH-EU



OpenAIRE



FIOOC



AAS The African Academy of Sciences



RIKSBANKENS JUBILEUMSFOND THE SWEDISH FOUNDATION FOR HUMANITIES AND SOCIAL SCIENCES



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As of now, the initiative remains Eurocentric being dominated by (Western) European funders and supporting organisations. African, Asian, Caribbean, South American, Eastern European and other historically marginalised regions have no or few funding bodies and organisations to represent their interests (an exception is the African Academy of Sciences).

Inequalities within regions and research disciplines

Even if all regions were to be represented by funding and other publishing bodies, these would tend to benefit researchers who make part of these bodies and networks, who tend to disproportionately represent the elite or more privileged classes with access to such information and networks (e.g. researchers affiliated with in-country elite institutions but not researchers in smaller, regional or rural educational and research institutes).

This risks marginalising the interests and needs of researchers who are not members of regional associations and do not benefit from regional funding opportunities, including researchers from SSH disciplines who might already have fewer funding opportunities compared to researchers within STEMs.

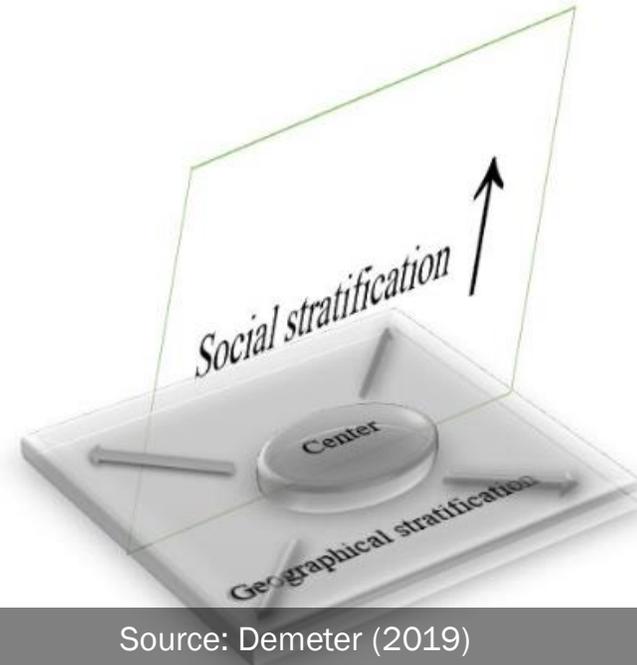
The system: An unequal economic landscape

A second major issue is economic inequalities across countries, which largely pre-determine the ability of researchers to publish in high-impact, rigorous journals, their access to funding opportunities and the capacity of their academic institutions to cover OA publishing costs.

3-dimensional model of academic stratification

Core-periphery structure of global academic capital

Inequalities at different levels: geography, institution, socio-economics class (associated with 'cultural capital')



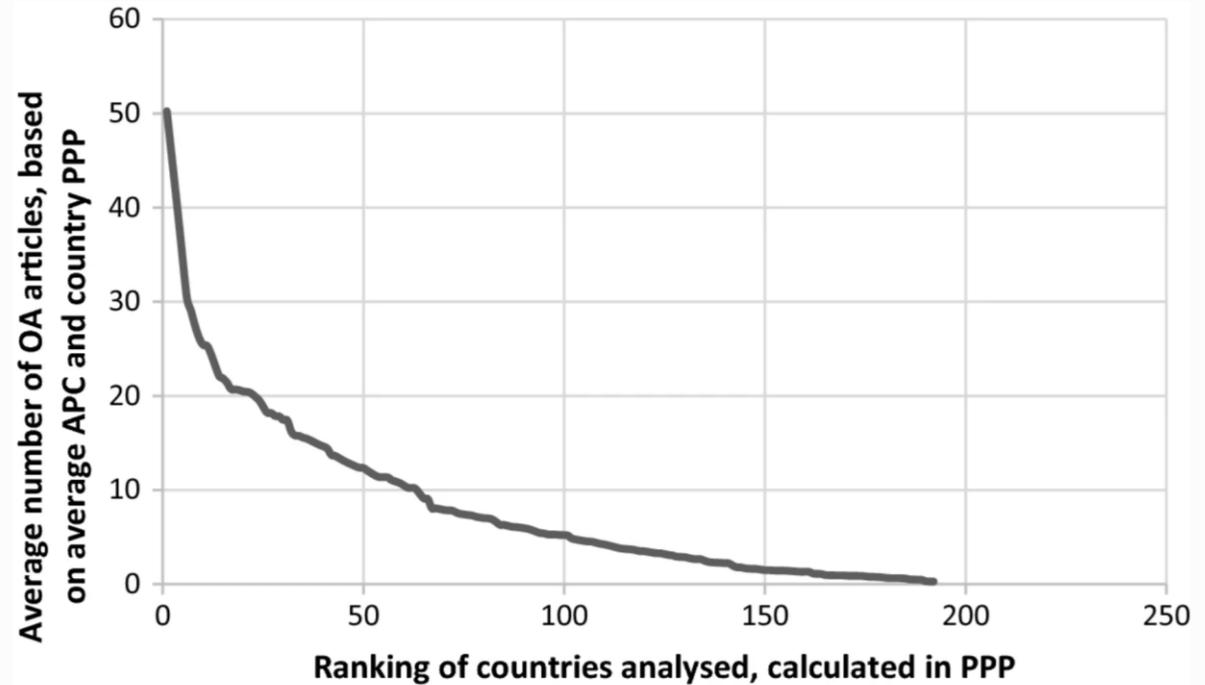
Source: Demeter (2019)

OA articles per year for different countries

The horizontal axis shows the analysed countries by World Bank ranking 2018. This ranking assigns the countries (range: 1–192) by their annual per capita GDP (PPP).

The vertical axis shows the number of OA articles per year that could be theoretically published by country (calculated by dividing the country per capita GDP (PPP) by the average APC)

The majority are found in the area of < 20 articles per year, which explains why the diagram is long-tailed



Incentivising profit-seeking behaviour among publishers

The current OA publishing model has become another business model for large publishers to continue their oligopolistic behaviour and profit-seeking practices.

APCs charged under hybrid or Gold OA models correlate positively with Impact Factor in Northern-dominated disciplines, which anticipates an increase in publishing inequalities in these disciplines.

‘Scrutinising what Open Access Journals Mean for Global Inequalities’ (Demeter and Istratii 2020)

The study found significant positive correlations between APCs and Impact Factor (IF) in Area Studies and Anthropology but not in Computer Science (Theoretical and Engineering). The average APCs in Anthropology and Area Studies were found to be considerably higher than in Computer Science (Theoretical and Engineering). Both Anthropology and Area Studies were found to be dominated by Northern publishers.

The implication is that different subject areas are dominated by more or less internationally distributed publishers, which shapes their interest in IF journals, the kind of market competition they face, and subsequently the APCs they choose/are able to charge.

Authors in Southern regions of the world will be challenged to publish as prolifically as their Northern peers in *pareto* optimal conditions, but will be especially challenged to publish in Global North-dominated subject areas and journals, such as in Anthropology and Area Studies.

In subject areas that are dominated by Northern publishers, the level of APCs charged and IF will move together, which, combined with the existing economic inequalities among countries, are anticipated to grow publishing disparities between Northern and Southern researchers.

Implications for ‘mid-career’ researchers

This question may need to be reframed or explored with the below considerations in mind:

The typology early-career/mid-career researcher is defined by funder speak and ultimately within a western epistemological framework that values such distinctions. For example, an Early Career Researcher is usually defined on the basis of years since obtaining a PhD. What about those researchers who practise in the field but are not sitting within the academy?

Academic titles and definitions of seniority differ by geography, country and institution. Career trajectories vary geographically – how to know how Plan S might influence career trajectories since how one moves across career stages is not uniform?

Let's rephrase: How might Plan S publishing impact on researchers with significant research experience looking to achieve seniority?

Not all researchers will be able to take advantage of the benefits of OA publishing as promoted by Plan S. Among other factors, this will depend on:

- A) where these researchers are based institutionally and geographically;
- B) their knowledge of funding speak and their capacity to develop competitive funding applications to secure the funding that will cover OA publishing costs;
- C) their 'academic capital' and ability to navigate Northern-dominated publishing norms to achieve publication in high-impact journals ('academic capital' defined by geography, institution, family background, gender, etc.) - ultimately, as long as career development is based on citations the current system will tend to favour those Northern researchers who can publish with Northern-dominated high-impact journals;
- D) discipline-related differences: e.g. SHH researchers need to publish monographs, invited chapters in prominent handbooks, specialised journals or other. If these do not offer OA options, these researchers will not be able to achieve the same level of dissemination and impact for their research.