OPEN ACCESS AND THE FUTURE OF SCHOLARLY COMMUNICATION

Dilnavozxon Iqboljon-qizi Soliyeva
Scientific supervisor: Rashid Turgunbayev
Kokand State University

Abstract: *Open access has moved from the margins of scholarly publishing to its center, but its triumph is neither complete nor uncontested. This article examines the current state of open access and its implications for the future of scholarly communication, with particular attention to the role of librarians and libraries. Drawing on recent developments in transformative agreements, funder mandates, diamond open access, and preprint-based publishing models, the article argues that the open access movement has succeeded in making openness a default expectation while simultaneously generating new inequalities and dependencies. The future of scholarly communication will depend not on whether research is open, but on who controls the infrastructures and terms of openness. Librarians, as negotiators, funders, and stewards of scholarly infrastructure, occupy a pivotal position in shaping that future.*

Keywords: *open access; scholarly communication; transformative agreements; diamond open access; academic libraries*

The past decade has witnessed a profound reconfiguration of the systems through which scholarly knowledge is produced, evaluated, and disseminated. Open access, once a radical demand advanced by a relatively small coalition of advocates, has become an established feature of the publishing landscape. Major funders require it, prestigious journals offer it, and universities increasingly organize their subscription expenditures around it. Yet the normalization of open access has not resolved the deeper questions that animated the movement in its early years. If anything, those questions have become more urgent and more complex. Who bears the costs of openness, and who is excluded when those costs are prohibitive? Which forms of openness are being institutionalized, and which are being marginalized? And what role should libraries and librarians play in a system that increasingly treats publication as a transaction between funders and publishers, with the library relegated to the role of financial intermediary?

The evidence suggests that open access has achieved remarkable quantitative success. Springer Nature reports that by 2025, more than half of all articles published under its transformative agreements appeared in the most recent three-year period, with a twelve percent year-on-year increase in open access articles funded through such agreements. Coalition S, the group of funders behind Plan S, has been credited with helping push the share of newly published scientific papers available as open access above fifty percent. A large-scale study of five million papers supported by thirty-six funders across twenty countries found sustained growth in open access overall, particularly in hybrid and gold models, and confirmed that funded papers are significantly more likely to be open than unfunded ones. These are not marginal developments. They represent a structural shift in how research is disseminated.

Yet the character of that shift deserves closer scrutiny. The dominant model of open access to emerge from the past decade is one organized around article processing charges, or APCs, financed either directly by funders or through transformative agreements negotiated between publishers and library consortia. Transformative agreements, which combine subscription access with publishing rights in a single institutional payment, have become the preferred mechanism for large publishers and many research-intensive institutions. Springer Nature alone has signed over one hundred such agreements, covering more than four thousand institutions worldwide. For researchers at well-resourced institutions in Europe and North America, this arrangement has largely delivered on its

promise: publication is open, the author faces no direct cost, and the institution's subscription budget has been repurposed rather than simply expanded.

The difficulty is that this model works best for those already best positioned to benefit from it. The same large-scale study that documented overall growth in open access also found low global uptake of diamond open access and limited indexing of open access outputs in Latin American countries, pointing to disparities shaped by funding constraints, journal visibility, and regional infrastructure challenges. A separate analysis has warned that read-and-publish deals allow wealthy institutions to publish openly at no personal cost while researchers at poorer institutions cannot afford equivalent arrangements, with the result that the global North's dominance in knowledge production may actually increase even as access to that knowledge broadens. Open access, in other words, has made reading more equitable without necessarily making publishing more equitable. The gate has opened for readers while the toll for authors has risen.

This tension has not gone unnoticed by the architects of open access policy. Coalition S's latest five-year strategy represents a notable retreat from the confrontational posture of Plan S's early years. Where the original plan mandated immediate open access and initially discouraged publication in hybrid journals, the new strategy acknowledges that no single model can meet all needs and endorses a plurality of routes to openness, including preprints and diamond open access venues that charge neither authors nor readers. The shift reflects a recognition that the author-pays model, whatever its successes in accelerating uptake, has generated its own pathologies: high-volume automated publishing, the concentration of open access output among a handful of large commercial publishers, and a system in which the ability to pay determines the ability to publish. As one observer quoted in coverage of the new strategy put it, the original plan was naïve in its focus on open access at all costs.

Diamond open access, which relies on institutional or community subsidy rather than author fees, has emerged as the most credible alternative to the APC-dominated landscape. Its scale remains modest, but its institutional foundations are growing. The Open Book Collective and the Open Journals Collective, for instance, are community-led initiatives creating sustainable diamond models for books and journals, with libraries participating as funders and co-governors through pooled supporter programmes. JSTOR's Path to Open programme, developed with the Association of College and Research Libraries and several university presses, has brought more than two hundred libraries and nearly fifty publishers together to fund monographs that flip to open access after a period of exclusive access; the first one hundred titles became openly available on JSTOR in January 2026. These initiatives share a crucial feature: they treat openness not as a product to be purchased but as an infrastructure to be governed. Libraries are not simply paying for access or for publication; they are exercising collective ownership over the means of scholarly communication.

The parallel rise of preprint-based publishing models raises a different set of possibilities and problems. The European Commission's Open Research Europe platform, which uses a publish-review-curate model in which preprints are posted, reviewed openly, and then flagged as peer reviewed, has expanded to include funders from eleven countries and three major research organizations, covering more than two and a half million researchers at no charge. A new Publish, Review, Curate Alliance, including eLife, OpenRxiv, and several major funders and university libraries, has been formed to promote such approaches. These developments promise to decouple dissemination from assessment, allowing review to function as an ongoing, transparent process rather than a gatekeeping hurdle. But they also raise unresolved questions about quality signals, incentives, and the integration of curated assessments into research evaluation systems. The risk, as one scholar has noted, is that alternative venues are seen as able to fix all the problems of commercial publishing without being properly nurtured, or that all of publishing will be solved if researchers simply preprint their work and leave it there.

For librarians, these developments present both an opportunity and a test. The transformative agreement era has, in many institutions, shifted scholarly communication work away from liaison librarians and into the hands of licensing and acquisitions specialists, who negotiate complex multi-year deals with consortia and publishers. This is necessary work, but it is not sufficient. The values that animated open access in its early years - equity, transparency, community control - are not automatically served by agreements that expand publishing output for already privileged authors. Librarians who wish to shape the future of scholarly communication rather than merely administer its transactions will need to engage with the full range of emerging models, from diamond journals and monograph collectives to preprint platforms and community-owned infrastructure. They will need to use their leverage as institutional funders to demand transparency about costs and equity provisions, to support non-profit and scholar-led publishers, and to bring faculty into conversations that have too often been confined to licensing negotiations.

The future of scholarly communication is not a single destination but a set of contested trajectories. One trajectory leads toward a publishing system in which openness is universal but authorship remains stratified, in which the major commercial publishers continue to consolidate their position by converting subscription revenue into APC revenue, and in which libraries function as billing agents for an increasingly concentrated industry. Another trajectory leads toward a more plural ecosystem in which diamond journals, preprint platforms, institutional repositories, and scholar-led presses coexist with commercial publishers, supported by libraries acting as collective stewards rather than individual customers. The difference between these trajectories is not primarily technical. It is a matter of governance, funding priorities, and professional commitment.

Open access has won the argument about whether research should be freely readable. It has not yet won the argument about who gets to publish, on what terms, and under whose control. That argument will be settled in the coming decade, in negotiations over transformative agreements, in decisions about which infrastructures libraries choose to fund, and in the willingness of the profession to treat scholarly communication as a commons to be cultivated rather than a market to be served. Librarians have a seat at that table. Whether they use it to reproduce the existing system with its access barriers removed, or to build something more genuinely open, remains an open question.

References

1. Albert, K. M. (2006). Open access: implications for scholarly publishing and medical libraries. Journal of the Medical Library Association, 94(3), 253.

2. Logullo, P., De Beyer, J. A., Kirtley, S., Schlüssel, M. M., & Collins, G. S. (2024). Open access journal publication in health and medical research and open science: benefits, challenges and limitations. BMJ evidence-based medicine, 29(4), 223-228.

3. Laakso, M., Welling, P., Bukvova, H., Nyman, L., Björk, B. C., & Hedlund, T. (2011). The development of open access journal publishing from 1993 to 2009. PloS one, 6(6), e20961.

4. Davis, P. M., Lewenstein, B. V., Simon, D. H., Booth, J. G., & Connolly, M. J. (2008). Open access publishing, article downloads, and citations: randomised controlled trial. BMj, 337.

5. Sengupta, P. (2021). Open access publication: Academic colonialism or knowledge philanthropy?. Geoforum, 118, 203-206.

6. Piwowar, H., Priem, J., Larivière, V., Alperin, J. P., Matthias, L., Norlander, B., ... & Haustein, S. (2018). The state of OA: a large-scale analysis of the prevalence and impact of Open Access articles. PeerJ, 6, e4375.