Open access ‘excludes’ developing world scientists

I’ve been wondering how to respond to this misleading news* title lately.

10/05/21

Open access ‘excludes’ developing world scientists

*ORIGINAL ARTICLE CAN BE FOUND HERE: https://www.scidev.net/global/features/open-access-excludes-developing-world-scientists/

It sure is a hype title. But it is based on a misconception underlying one of the common myths* associated with open access, namely that all open access is based on a pay-to-publish model.

*SEE PETER SUBER’S ARTICLE FOR THE GUARDIAN HERE: https://www.theguardian.com/higher-education-network/blog/2013/oct/21/open-access-myths-peter-suber-harvard

Open access: six myths to put to rest

Open access is not subject to the same financial constraints as peer-reviewed research, contrary to popular belief.

THIS MYTH HAS BEEN DEBUNKED COUNTLESS TIMES BUT IT MOST LIKELY RESURFACES EVERY NOW AND THEN BECAUSE OF THE AMBIGUITY OF THE LABEL “GOLD OPEN ACCESS”. Despite its business or financial undertones, gold open access is just one route to achieving open access. But it does not refer to an economic model, let alone a pay-to-publish economic model.


Pay-to-publish open access is practiced by fee-based or APC-led journals. But this is just one of the possible models that the gold open access route entails. Some of the prices practiced by APC-led journals such as the ones shown below** can absolutely exclude some scholars from publishing in particular venues. There’s no denying that!

** Price list is available at: [https://www.elsevier.com/about/policies/pricing](https://www.elsevier.com/about/policies/pricing)

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**NOTE:**

*APC = “ARTICLE PROCESSING CHARGE” or "ARTICLE PUBLISHING CHARGE".

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But a quick look at the Directory of Open Access Journals (DOAJ) attests that this model is not the most common one for gold open access journals (a pleonasm of sorts if you’ve been following). As the image below shows, more than 70% of open access journals do not charge APCs.

This means that most OA journals function with a different funding model than authors or their institution paying fees. This other model can be considered a form of gold OA and is often referred to as the “diamond model”. A recent report has shown that this Diamond model is used by a significant number of journals outside those indexed in the DOAJ!
OF COURSE, GREEN AND GOLD OA WORK DIFFERENTLY AND REQUIRE AUTHORS TO DO DIFFERENT THINGS, WHICH WOULD NEED SOME FURTHER EXPLAINING (MAYBE IN ANOTHER FUTURE INSTALLMENT OF "THE SCHOLCOMM CHRONICLES").

THE POINT HERE IS THAT BOTH THE GREEN/GOLD COMPLEMENTARITY AND THE VARIOUS ECONOMIC MODELS OF GOLD OA HIGHLIGHT THE MISLEADING CHARACTER OF THE NEWS TITLE WE STARTED THIS NARRATIVE WITH. OPEN ACCESS DOES NOT EXCLUDE ANYONE. BUT APC-LED JOURNALS DO, ESPECIALLY WHEN THE PRICES OF APCS ARE BEYOND REASONABLE OR INCLUSIVE.

WHY OPEN ACCESS HAS TO BE GOLD
Gold OA publishing offers the simplest, most open, and most sustainable route to OA and open science

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YOU'RE STILL NOT DREAMING!

UNDERSTANDING THE GREEN/GOLD DISTINCTION AND THE MODELS AND SPECIFICITIES THAT THEY ENTAIL IS OF CRUCIAL IMPORTANCE FOR MAINTAINING THE DIVERSITY OPEN ACCESS VENUES AND OPTIONS. THIS IS ESPECIALLY TRUE WHEN COMMERCIAL PUBLISHERS SEEM KEEN ON PUSHING FOR THEIR OWN AND VERY ORIENTED NARRATIVE OF WHAT GOLD OPEN ACCESS IS AND ITS PRESUMED SUPERIORITY OVER GREEN OA, AS IN THIS IMAGE FROM A 2021 PRESENTATION* BY THE CEO OF THE SPRINGER NATURE PUBLISHING GROUP.

*OTHER SLIDES OF THIS PRESENTATION CAN BE FOUND HERE (ALONG WITH A SENSIBLE COMMENTARY): HTTPS://TINYURL.COM/KPMDJZ54