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# BOAI: leading the charge on open access publishing

Now celebrating its 15<sup>th</sup> anniversary, at the turn of the millennium the Budapest Open Access Initiative (BOAI) put forward a seminal statement defining 'open access' as the free online availability of peer reviewed research. Despite little support for the BOAI initially, open access publishing is now commonplace and an estimated 28% of scientific literature is now predicted to be published in this way. In our interview with **Melissa Hagemann**, Senior Program Manager of the Open Society Foundations, and co-organisier of the meeting in Budapest, we talk about the history of the movement and the challenges it still faces today.

**F**ifteen years ago, the Budapest Open Access Initiative (BOAI) saw that 'an old tradition and a new technology have converged to make possible an unprecedented public good'. The first to define the term 'open access', the initiative found that publishing openly online not only provided a solution to the geographical and financial restraints on distributing research, but also accelerated research efforts as work became freely available to read, without licensing or copyrighting constraints.

Melissa Hagemann, of the Open Society Foundations, chats to *Research Features* about how the vision came about, the impact the statement has had and what they are working on next.

*Could you just tell us about the BOAI background, heritage, mission and strategy?*

The Open Society Institute (now the Open Society Foundations) where I work, is funded

by George Soros and he also supported the Science Journal's Donation Program which provided hard copies of scientific journals to academies of sciences and universities in Central and Eastern Europe, and the former Soviet Union after the fall of the Berlin Wall. We would work with society publishers to negotiate discounts on the hard copies of their journals and then ship them overseas. In about 2000, I was meeting with Mr Soros to go over our budget. He challenged us to find a way to get the same academic content into the hands of the academics who needed it without paying the hefty shipping costs. Therefore, I started to do a lot of research and at that time, the Open Archives Initiative had held their first meeting. We saw that there was a growing interest among developing institutional or subject-based repositories and there were two open access publishers already then, *BioMed Central* and *Bioline International*. We organised a meeting in Budapest in December 2001, which brought together experts who were exploring alternative publishing models, and ►



at that meeting, we decided to call our vision 'open access'. We defined it as the free online availability of peer-reviewed research and published it in something called the Budapest Open Access Initiative (BOAI). The BOAI outlined two strategies for achieving open access: the first was the development of institutional or subject-based repositories and the second, publishing research in open access journals.

Following the release of the BOAI in February of 2002, there were two subsequent meetings organised which produced statements relevant to open access. One came out of a meeting organised by the Howard Hughes Medical Institute in Bethesda, Maryland, which offered a similar definition. In addition, the Max Planck Society in Germany organised another meeting and that produced the Berlin statement on open access. Many people refer to open access as a Budapest, Bethesda, Berlin definition. So, while Budapest was the first, it was further supported by other organisations.

**Can you tell us any more about your role and input to the initiative?**

I ran our library programme out of our office in Budapest, until Mr Soros asked us to come up with a new model. I then worked very closely with the chair of the Information Program board, Istvan Rev, and the director of the Information Program, Darius Cuplinskas, to organise the meeting in Budapest. We worked with the meeting participants to collectively write the BOAI. Peter Suber, now the Director of the Harvard Office of Scholarly Communication, was the main drafter of the BOAI. When we were ready to launch the BOAI, we really wanted to have other foundations come on board and support it with us. Unfortunately, at that time no foundations would agree to partner with us. It was a difficult call because in 2002, open access seemed like such a crazy idea, but we went ahead with it and OSI pledged three million dollars to support the growth of the movement. I have been managing the foundation's work on open access ever since.

**Can you explain self-archiving in more detail and its significance in terms of the open access goal?**

As I mentioned, the two strategies which the BOAI outlines for the development of open access are the development of institutional or subject-based repositories and the development of open access journals. When you develop subject-based or institutional



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repositories, the recommendation is for authors to self-archive, to post their own articles to either their institutional repository or a subject-based repository aligned with their field. Stevan Harnad is the leading voice behind this strategy. However, it is still challenging to get authors to self-archive. We have seen at many institutions that

libraries often play an intermediary role in trying to work with academics to self-archive their articles.

**If open access publications are not free to produce, how can they be made free for readers?**

There are of course costs involved with



## Celebrating a decade of OPEN ACCESS

publishing articles. One open access model which has gained popularity relies on something called the article processing fee; that fee is paid by an author's institution or research grant, and covers the organisation in terms of the peer-review process and the online publication of the article. Other models rely upon an institution to support the online publication of a journal. In the early days, a model was developed called the Hybrid Model for Open Access, and the hope was that it would help publishers to convert their journals to open access. It was supposed to be a temporary model through which if a journal was subscription-based, they could offer their authors an option of whether to pay the article processing fee, and then as the percentage of authors who were paying this fee increased, supposedly the subscription price for that journal would decrease. Unfortunately, publishers have not adopted that model as intended and many of them have been what we call, 'double dipping'. They take money to make the articles open access, but they also keep the subscription fee at the same price. This has created many problems within the community.

**Can you discuss the impact of the initiative after 15 years and what the recent survey showed?**

We can now see that a global movement has developed. The largest research funder in the world, the US National Institutes of Health has an open access policy; they were the first and still are the largest research organisation to have a public access strategy. The European Union has an open

access policy, and so we are seeing great progress made in terms of research funders developing policies to make their research openly available. Now, recent studies show that 28% of the scholarly literature is open access.

In terms of the recent survey (put out as part of marking the 15<sup>th</sup> anniversary), the community was asked questions to really try and determine what the state of the open access movement is and what our priorities should be moving forward. Unfortunately, not surprisingly, the leading challenge that the community feels that it is still facing is that of incentives around research assessment. Right now, if you are a tenured professor, you can of course have your pick of where you would like to publish your article, but as an early career researcher, your evaluation for tenure and promotion is based upon the impact factor of the journal in which you publish. Many of the open access journals are new and do not have impact factors yet. So, if an early career researcher wants to make her research freely available, she is hampered by the fact that if she does publish in an open access journal, then that research paper could basically disappear from her CV, because it will not count towards her tenure and promotion. We really must come up with new metrics to count the work of researchers in a different way, so that the value of their work can be counted towards tenure and promotion, rather than where it is published.

**What are the next steps envisaged as necessary to take this forward, regarding**

**the open access campaign? What does the future hold?**

I would love to take a sabbatical and focus on this issue of research assessment, and work with tenure and promotion committees. I think that is what the open access community should address before we can surmount the next hurdle, because if we cannot get the students and early career researchers to publish open access, then it will not continue to grow. Many within our community are beginning to focus on the issue of incentives and we are supporting some research in this area.

There are several ideas on new types of metrics, which could be produced and counted instead. It is an issue that is going to be difficult to tackle, because it really gets down to the behaviour of scientists. Also, for the first time ever, publishers are trying to use copyright to hamper the development of open access. The community has organised a campaign in Brussels to push back on this.

• For more information on the BOAI, recommendations as well as additional background on the Open Access movement, please visit their website at [www.budapestopenaccessinitiative.org/](http://www.budapestopenaccessinitiative.org/).



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