

# Players or Pawns? University Response to the Introduction of Plan S

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The European Plan S initiative intending to transform the field of academic publishing towards open access has been received with both enthusiasm and criticism. This article reflects on this case as an example of how policymaking in ‘the Europe of Knowledge’ – characterized by increasing complexity caused by problems of multi-level coordination, combined with multi-actor divergence of norms, ideas, and interests – affects and triggers university responses. The analysis of response to this initiative for reform of scientific publishing takes the concept of normative match and mismatch as its theoretical point of departure, and the article provides an overview of how Plan S has been implemented in Norwegian higher education, where the challenge for universities has been to find a balance between responding to political expectations and expectations from societal and academic stakeholders. Our findings suggest a normative mismatch related to the Plan S initiative. The article argues that the university level was left with the task of defending the academic freedom of the individual scholar, while also being delegated the responsibility of controlling the rising costs of publishing services. As a result, issues relating to academic publishing are currently of strategic interest to universities.

## Introduction

The role of science in societal development is one of the core arguments that lend legitimacy to all activities related to science and knowledge development (Boltanski and Thévenot 1991; Altbach and Knight, 2007). The outputs of this activity – especially via the academic publishing industry – have been the key mechanism for science not only to foster internal communication across the various academic fields, but also to communicate with society and provide updated knowledge (Merton 1973). However, the fact that most of the science communication industry is controlled by a

limited number of private publishing companies that normally demand a fee or a subscription for accessing the scientific results has been an issue drawing increasing attention as one of the main obstacles for improving the links between science and society (Smits and Pells 2022). It is increasingly recognized by both public and private research funding bodies as well as the broader public that science results should be openly accessible to all. Open science has not least been a key policy initiative fronted by the European Commission, to make scientific data both accessible and re-usable; to create a scientific infrastructure allowing for storing, sharing, and safe-guarding scientific data and information; and to make scientific publications freely accessible to the public (European Commission 2019).

In 2018, Plan S was launched as a possible solution, realizing the ambition of open access and open science, stating that from 2021 all scholarly publications on research results funded by public or private grants provided by research councils and other funding bodies must be published in an open access journal, or made available in other ways – for example through open access archives or repositories (European Commission 2019). Science Europe, an association of major research-funding bodies in Europe, and the more recently established cOAlition S – an international consortium of research funding bodies including the European Commission – was a key supporter and a key driver of Plan S (Smits and Pells 2022).

A recently published and interesting ‘insider’ account of how the Plan S policy initiative was born and later developed provides more detailed evidence of both formal and informal negotiations between EU commission officials and various stakeholders that eventually led to the formation of the cOAlition S consortium (Smits and Pells 2022: 83–85). As such, the development of Plan S for open access and the forming of the cOAlition S is an interesting case of the multi-level and multi-actor configurations that tend to characterize European policymaking in the knowledge area (Chou and Gornitzka 2014), where complex interactions connect different levels of governance, driving overlapping and intricate processes of change (Maassen and Stensaker 2011; Torfing 2012).

After the implementation of Plan S within the countries where major research-funding bodies were part of cOAlition S, much criticism has also been directed at the unintended consequences of the policy initiative (Wenaas 2022). Key points of criticism include: (i) that costs are rising as a number of academic journals currently charge fees not only for subscriptions but also for reading access; (ii) that the freedom of researchers to choose their preferred journal to communicate research results is more limited, and finally; (iii) that scientific quality may suffer due to the rise of predatory academic journals and a weakened peer review system (see, for example, Anderson 2015; Carling et al. 2018; Wenaas 2022; Wenaas and Gulbrandsen 2022; Karlstrøm et al. 2021).

Thus, for universities – the key institutions in the system of knowledge production – the quest for open science and the consequences of Plan S present a huge challenge. In short, they need to balance between responding to societal expectations concerning open science and defending academic freedom for the individual academic, while also controlling the rising costs of publishing services they have to pay for.

The ambition of the current article is to shed more light of how the shifting landscape of academic publishing affects the role of universities. The research questions asked are:

- How can the policy context embedding the drive towards open access and Plan S specifically be conceptualized?
- How are universities navigating the different expectations directed at them with respect to open access?
- Under which conditions are policies for OA likely to take effect, and what is the role of the university level in responding to political expectations and demands from both national and international levels of governance?

The latter two questions are answered by providing more detailed insight into how the Norwegian publishing landscape has changed and by offering reflections on the initiatives and dilemmas facing research-intensive universities, focusing on the University of Oslo as a case study.

### **Organizational Manoeuvring in a Complex Policy Terrain – a Theoretical Reflection**

European policymaking in the knowledge area has always been characterized by complexity, often driven by multi-level, multi-actor, and multi-issue configurations (Vukasovic et al. 2018), which may sometimes lead to creative solutions, while at other times resulting in destructive outcomes (Hooge and Marks 2001; Peters 2015, Chou et al. 2017).

Behind many of the policy initiatives driving European integration in the knowledge area is the ambition of modernizing the science system (Maassen and Olsen 2007). The key argument is that the main European science producers, i.e., public universities, have not reached their potential to act as catalysts of innovation and transforming knowledge breakthroughs that can be utilized to foster economic growth and societal development (Olsen 2007). In short, the links between science and society need to be strengthened with the support of supra-national coordination and stimulation (Chou and Gornitzka 2014).

The theoretical contribution of the multi-s (multi-level, multi-actor, and multi-issue) perspective is the recognition that authority is distributed and embedded across levels and actors (Hooge and Marks 2001), shaping particular institutional logics (Thornton et al. 2012) in the form of domestic–international, centre–periphery, and state–society configurations (Piattoni 2010).

However, whether the specific configurations always appear in a distinct and clear-cut way has also been challenged (Chou et al. 2017), for example, in that both public and private stakeholders may appear at various governance levels, thus challenging the distinction of the three multi-s. As a response to this, Chou et al. (2017) have called for empirical studies that take a closer look at the various combinations that can appear in multi-level, multi-actor, and multi-issue governance frameworks. Not least, it is possible to identify new forms of organizing that cut across the various multi-s – for

example in the form of meta-organizations (Ahrne and Brunsson 2008), such as Science Europe, a (private) European association consisting of major national research funders in 41 European countries.

The establishment of meta-organizations – organizations where other organizations make up the membership (Ahrne and Brunsson 2008) – is interesting, as it hints at the possible ways individual universities might respond to an environment characterized by multi-level governing actors, a range of public and private stakeholders which, taken together, may bring a rather complex set of issues to the table. As such, the establishment of a meta-organization implies that individual organizations infuse and attempt to ‘control’ their own environment (Maassen et al. 2022; Stensaker et al. 2023) by producing ideas, refining their interests and suggesting new templates for action. In short, they contribute to and constitute the ingredients of their own institutional environment (Scott 2014: 125). Of course, individual universities may also respond in other ways and by other means (Lounsbury and Crumley 2007; Frølich et al. 2013). The point to be made here is that individual organizations are far from passive pawns when asked to comply to new standards and rules, or when facing mixed and even conflicting sets of expectations directed at them (Brunsson and Jacobsson 2000; Djelic and Sahlin-Andersson 2006; Greenwood et al. 2011). The specific capacity a focal university may have to respond to policy developments such as the quest for Open Access and Plan S specifically could still be questioned. Two issues are of particular interest here.

The first challenge is related to the level of intra-organizational coordination needed to provide a coherent response to open access/the Plan S initiative. Gornitzka et al. (2017) have shown, on the one hand, how European universities have strengthened their capacity for internal coordination, although studies also suggest that internal coordination remains a challenge in universities, where the administration also has become professional and specialized (Maassen and Stensaker 2019). From a university perspective, initiatives such as Open Access/Plan S may also create tensions with other academic *values and norms*, not least academic freedom, which also must be taken into account (see also Stark 2009).

The second challenge concerns how to coordinate the external attempt to influence Open Access/Plan S processes. While establishing and working through a meta-organization is certainly one option, there are other ways of organizing interest articulation and fostering policy uploading (Vukasovic 2017; Vukasovic and Stensaker 2018), not least through expertise (Gornitzka and Sverdrup 2013). From a university perspective, the existence of various options must be weighed against the potential effectiveness of actions taken, as well as a university’s capacity to be a consistent advocate for policy initiatives taken (Gumport 2000).

Hence, the perspective developed here is not so much emphasizing the need for bold strategic institutional leadership (Salmi 2009; Wildavsky 2010) as the need for more reflective institutional strategies that navigate a landscape with many conflicting and legitimate interests. Borrowing from scholarship on institutional change and reform (Olsen 2002), we take as our key theoretical point of departure the concept of normative match and mismatch and how that plays a role in the process of

shaping university response. Policy instruments may be effective in terms of achieving policy goals. Such efficacy and efficiency can make policy measures appear to be legitimate, i.e., having instrumental legitimacy or yielding output. On the other hand, where norms and beliefs within an institution do not match the underlying ideas and objectives of the policy, even technically effective and efficient policy means will generate opposition and attempts to undermine or block implementation.

Consequently, we will explore how the legitimacy of Plan S and the normative (mis-)match of this plan has influenced the responses of universities and their academic staff as key drivers of implementation (Olsen 2002: 586). Our initial assumption is that the more mismatch there is in the norms embedded in the policy and the norm sets that are held high in the academic communities, the more university response will involve filtering and ‘editing’ government policy. Furthermore, the central level of the university can act as a filter between policy and ‘shopfloor’ actors, while also working with the major actors at national and international levels that promote the policy initiative. The more the mismatch, the more filtering will take place to accommodate key veto-players in the university. In addition, we also expect that the degree to which policy is clear or ambiguous will also affect the leeway for interpretation in university response.

### **A Note on the Empirical Context and Data**

Norway is an interesting setting for investigating implications of Open Access/Plan S, as it has been an early supporter of Open Access initiatives, and as the Norwegian Research Council was also one of the founding members of the cOAlition S consortium. The Ministry launched national guidelines for Open Access in 2017 with the goal of full open access from 2024 onwards. These guidelines responded to earlier policy initiatives from the government in 2008 where Open Access was defined as one of the key ambitions of the national research policy (Wenaas and Gulbraandsen 2022). Following the Plan S initiative, Norway has also implemented so-called transformative agreements with several major international publishers.

Norway has had a sharp focus on academic publishing over the last few decades – not least as this has been a key dimension in the national higher-education funding system – resulting in a number of evaluations and studies of how the field of academic publishing has changed over time (Sivertsen 2022). The current article uses this knowledge base to describe and analyse changes in publication patterns and the implications of Open Access policy initiatives.

To shed light on how higher education institutions respond to Open Access/Plan S, we also identify initiatives and analyse strategy and policy documents from the University of Oslo, providing a case study of how research-intensive universities are trying to navigate the new landscape of academic publishing. The fact that the authors of the present article are positioned within the institutional leadership of the University of Oslo should also be mentioned, both as a caution regarding possible bias in the story told and to point out that this ‘insider’ perspective could also be seen

as a strength, given that the institutional leadership perhaps has a broader overview of the many possible factors and events that shape the decisions made.

## **Implications of Open Access Policies and the Plan S Initiative Higher Education in Norway**

### ***The Norwegian Publishing Landscape – an Overview and Recent Changes***

In Norway, academic publishing became part of the funding system for higher education from 2006 onwards. In the funding system for higher education institutions, academic outputs in the form of journal articles and scholarly books have been one of several performance indicators in the funding system. Accountable to a national certification register of academic journals and publishers, higher education institutions are economically rewarded based on the number of articles (author shares in case of co-authoring), the quality of the journal/publisher, and whether there is a higher increase in publishing output compared with other institutions. Since its establishment the Norwegian system has also inspired similar systems in countries such as Finland, Denmark, Belgium (Flanders), Portugal and Poland (Aagaard et al. 2015). National governments and intermediate government bodies have been directly engaged in the international and especially the European research policy agenda, although policy downloading – adaptation of European policies – from the EU is routine in the Norwegian higher education system (Karlsen 2015). Key national actors have also been present and at times acted as key policy entrepreneurs in developing the OA agenda, not least the Research Council of Norway (RCN) (Smits and Pells 2022). A major factor in the Norwegian case of OA is the role that the then director of the RCN played in the European arena (Smits and Pells 2022). As the RCN is the only research council in Norway and in most areas has the monopoly on the distribution of research funding in the national competitive arena, its initiatives are important in Norwegian higher education. Hence, when the then director pushed for OA publication and the Ministry eventually made it a requirement, this decision had a huge impact on the direction that the whole national system for research would take. The RNC director's central position at the European policy arena through CoAlition S strengthened his position as a 'policy entrepreneur' in the domestic setting.

While the publishing indicator was introduced as part of the funding system for higher education, the system has also had unintended effects, not least impacting the individual academic, as the scores in publication points have been applied to other settings such as individual promotion, career-assessment processes, etc. The system has been criticized as being too focused on metrics and too much inspired by EU-driven governance reforms (Karlsen 2015), although it has also had its supporters, who advocate that sharing the findings of research projects and activities is closely aligned with key values and obligations for academic staff in developing a well-functioning science system (Carling et al. 2018). Hence, one could argue that the

publishing indicator was designed in a way that matched the norm set of scientific research (cf. Merton 1973).

Nevertheless, the success of the introduction of the link between the national funding system and establishing an indicator for academic publishing comes at a cost. In 2019 alone, the combined costs related to subscriptions and article processing charges were 482 million NOK – an increase of over 7% from the previous year (Karlstrøm et al. 2021).

The overlapping incentives related to funding and individual career development, and the matching of these incentives with academic norms, are probably important factors driving the rather rapid increase in the total volume of academic journal articles and books in Norway after the introduction of the new system, although a general increase in the funding level of the sector most likely has contributed as well (Aagaard et al. 2015). An evaluation of the publication indicator in the funding system found not only that the system increased the research output in the form of articles and books but had little impact on the share of international collaboration and research impact. More updated and longitudinal data have demonstrated that, over time, citation rates for Norwegian academic journal articles have increased to currently 20% above world average, and with a continuing increase in the number of articles and books produced. Hence, if citations should be regarded as a proxy for academic quality, the indicator seemed to have boosted both the quantity and the quality of Norwegian research output.

However, in the last decade, more attention has also been given to open access to articles, and between 2013 and 2020 the share of open access journal articles increased from 39% to 82% of all articles involving Norwegian academics in the higher-education sector (Karlstrøm et al. 2021). Hence, currently, the overwhelming majority of scientific articles with Norwegian authors/co-authors are published as open access. In the first part of this period, most of the growth was related to green open access articles (repositories), while hybrid and transformative agreements have strongly increased in the latter part of the period (Karlstrøm et al. 2021).

Transformative agreements – so-called publish-and-read (PAR) agreements – were launched in Norway in 2019 and since then have covered all the larger international publishing houses and more than 10,000 journals (Sivertsen 2022). These agreements have had a substantial impact on open access. In 2020, University of Oslo researchers authored or co-authored 5642 articles, and 1700 of them were published in ‘pure’ OA journals. The effect of the transformative agreements has been a further boost in open access articles, but they have also had the effect that so-called diamond open access articles have been reduced in favour of hybrid articles (Sivertsen 2022). For those publishers not included in the transformative agreements, the trend is that gold options – i.e. where the authors have to pay an article-processing charge (APC) – are increasing rapidly. New ‘mega-journals’ are also becoming popular outlets for Norwegian authors, especially journals from the Switzerland-based publishing house MDPI (Sivertsen 2022). The latter development may be worrisome as some of the journals may represent challenges with respect to the quality of the review process. An example is that the journal *Sustainability*



recently was removed from the certified Norwegian register of academic journals and books as an outlet qualifying for reimbursement in the national funding system.

In general, those journals experiencing the highest growth in articles from Norwegian authors are not those that are certified as being ‘a leading journal’ in the Norwegian register for academic journals and books. Hence, in a recent study, Sivertsen (2022: 16) concluded that despite existing transformative agreements, it is the gold options based on APCs that are evidencing the highest growth rate. A similar conclusion has been reached in another recent study by Wenaas and Gulbrandsen (2022: 19), which argued that current gold open access publication patterns correlate negatively with the journal rankings in the Norwegian register for journals and books. In fact, the overall consequences of the PAR agreements have had the exact opposite effect to part of the stated government ambition with OA policy, that is, to curtail the market power of private for-profit publishers, in particular the ‘big five’ (Open Science 2023).

However, the Norwegian government has also taken steps to stimulate open access journals embedded in diamond options and has taken the initiative to financially support 28 Norwegian journals in smaller disciplines within the social sciences and humanities (the NÅHST initiative) (UiO 2023). The 28 journals covered can be seen as a way to support Norwegian-language scientific journals, as the international market for scientific publishing is becoming more competitive.

Interestingly, the PAR agreements have also contributed to changes in the organizational ecosystem set up to fund and negotiate academic publishing in Norway. In the national setup for developing and implementing OA policy, the institutional level was given a key role in interpreting how to advance towards the 2024 target. The national consortia negotiating with the major publishers were used to push for changing the commercial regimes for scientific publishing. Traditionally, the ‘ordinary’ team of advisors to the negotiators (the Council for Negotiations, i.e., ‘forhandlingsrådet’) consisted of chief university librarians/University Library Directors. As such, the organizational setup was rigged to conduct the negotiations *within* the regime based on ordinary subscription agreements. However, entering into the new transformative agreements, an entirely different kind of organizing was established. The council and the government agencies that had the task of conducting negotiations with the publishers, the negotiation teams and council, were injected with university rectors representing the major research-intensive universities. In other words, policy development and implementation were directly embedding the institutional leadership level. The principles for the negotiations were codetermined by Universities Norway – the interest organization for Norwegian universities. This was an attempt to clarify the ambiguity of government policy. The process of negotiations became the practical link between the national and institutional levels. In practice, the university level of the four oldest universities became the bridge between policy and practice as well as the main interpreter of Plan S locally. The university leadership of the two oldest comprehensive research universities was active in voicing strong arguments against Plan S as top-down government policy, especially regarding the speed and processes of Plan S.



### ***University Responses to Open Access and Plan S – the Case of the University of Oslo***

Attempts to deliberately change the scientific publishing regime are of consequence for a comprehensive and research-intensive university. As the leading research university in Norway (26,000 students and 7000 employees) with approximately 5000 to over 6000 journal articles every year published in international journals, the effect and reception of the government policy for OA was met with very mixed reactions. This is hardly a surprise, considering the diversity of publishing practices and norm sets that thrive in various parts of the university.

Still, practices associated with OA policy and strategies were no strangers at the University central level. The requirements for archiving accepted publications (pre-print versions) was a demand the University of Oslo established quite early on, years before Plan S. Given that the performance-based funding regime featured the research publications indicator, reporting scientific publishing was already institutionalized. Champions of the Open Science agenda were also found much more broadly and radically within the University of Oslo, and in the different arenas, both normative and practical research policy issues were discussed.

Diverse interests regarding Plan S were not only found within the university but also in the environment related to Universities Norway – where the institutional leadership of the University of Oslo was represented. This interest organization saw the whole ‘open’ agenda as a domain where the various units within Universities Norway, and not least the secretariat, could play a leading role. Conferences and working groups were established and tried to connect with the universities. Internally at the University of Oslo, most of the work had already been done in terms of having a repository and taking part in various efforts to discuss the future of OA. A major outcry, however, was prompted by the fairly sudden announcement by the government and RCN of the quantitative target of 100% OA publishing in the future (Carling et al. 2018). This triggered a major public discussion. As the government policy was seen as lacking legitimacy and no required analysis of possible consequences had been conducted by the Ministry for Higher Education and Research, critical voices grew stronger at the University of Oslo, and beyond. This debate engaged virtually the entire research community. Strong voices and positions were articulated, although the policy positions differed both between universities and between different private and public research organizations. For example, the University of Tromsø’s pro-rector for research actively promoted the entire Open Science agenda, while opposition came from the Institute of Peace Research, from the Political Science Department, and the Department of Economics at the University of Oslo. The quality, effectiveness, and legitimacy of the policy were heavily criticized (Carling et al. 2018; see also Kamerlin et al. 2021).

This polarization intensified during the autumn of 2018. The debate demonstrated the ambiguity of government policy goals, their feasibility, and the wishful thinking concerning what role such a small country could take, especially as the first mover. But the most impactful counterargument was the Government and the Research Council

of Norway's failure to pay attention to what this could do to the quality of research and the quality assurance system that had been institutionalized in the decades running up to the announcement of Plan S and the requirements issued by cOAlition S. The debate engaged 'the lab floor' and the regular professors opposing cOAlition S and Plan S. Hence, the discussions and attention to Open Access, which until then had been dominated by voices *promoting* OA policies (both within and outside the universities), were now challenged by strong spokespersons from within internationally leading research groups. Arguments launched by the latter group mainly reflected issues related to academic freedom (of where to publish), and the potential negative impact OA might have on scientific quality.

The strategy developed by the University of Oslo could be said to reflect both positions and was a tangible expression of how the university actively dealt with OA in a way that tried to match values, norms, and perspectives on the significance of scientific publishing. In this way the institutional response to Plan S embedded the identity of the university as a comprehensive research-intensive university, emphasizing the normative dimension as the main foundation of the OA strategy. As an illustration, the introduction to the strategy reads as follows (UiO 2023: 1):

The strategy builds on the research community's demand for quality assurance and academic freedom and research integrity. The main objective is to ensure these values in the further development of open publishing and open access to research result.

In summary, the polarized debate and the stark and coercive measures that the Plan S implied were in this way filtered at the University level through regular decision-making procedures, as well as through appointing working groups with strong research leadership representation. The normative mismatch that had become so obvious in the, at times, rancorous public debate, was translated into ideas that matched core value sets within the university.

Eventually, the institutional rights retention policy that had been pushed at the international, European, and national levels, was also introduced and adopted by the University Board. A major impetus was the fact that other universities had introduced it, despite the uncertain implications of practising such a policy. However, this was a risk that the university was willing to take, not least due to the previous consultations with other Norwegian universities.

Overall, the road ahead and ways of translating internal policy into practice are not settled. The ambiguities of national policy remain, as do the unpredictable actions of the commercial players. Policy ambiguity could provide the universities with the opportunity to define acceptable and effective ways of proceeding towards OA and to avoid becoming the pawns of an OA game where other actors call the shots. Some initiatives have been taken by the University of Oslo in this respect. With the ambition to stimulate more high-quality diamond options, the FRITT initiative is one example, including 21 journals supported by the university, with a service to set up new journals.

## Conclusions

While Norway is among those countries that have established transformative agreements, driving open access albeit with much higher costs, it is possible to identify a more global trend in academic publishing, where APCs (the ‘gold option’) are the dominant form of funding academic publishing. Such ‘gold’ publication options where quality cannot be guaranteed also drive a higher degree of concentration in the international market for scientific publishing (Sivertsen 2022). Thus, one could ask whether we are heading towards a situation where the ‘rich’ and the ‘rest’ are becoming even more separated.

Recent studies show that gold options currently dominate the market for open access and that APCs are gaining ground as the key financing mechanism. A recent calculation covering 12 large international publishing houses suggested that the income from APCs covering open access articles could be estimated to reach US\$2 billion in 2020 (Zhang et al. 2022). The major players in the market are buying up smaller publishing houses, increasing the concentration in the publishing market, and the gold option linked to new mega-journals is the winning combination. As such, it is not difficult to agree with Zhang et al. (2022) in their argument that while Plan S was initiated by national governments and the EU, it is the private market, where a limited number of key publishing houses dominate, that actually runs the development. Given the bleak global picture, what can smaller countries and individual universities do? The Norwegian case provides evidence that joint policy positions are needed and that academic values and norms need to be taken into account also regarding OA, especially as current OA policies seems to have a damaging impact on the peer review mechanism and scientific quality in general.

Returning to our theoretical point of departure, we can clearly see how our initial expectations do seem to carry some weight. Once the national ministry and the Research Council of Norway had issued guidance and ‘signals’ about open access, and turned it into ‘hard law’, the normative mismatch between the champions of OA and the parties became obvious. The debate was vocal and polarized, i.e., in terms of being for and against creating a situation where the universities had to act as negotiators – internally and externally. As such, Plan S is indeed an example of a ‘stone thrown into the water – with rippling effects’ as Smits and Pells (2022: 131) recently formulated it. If the idea behind Plan S was to shock and add speed to the process of OA, the plan has indeed succeeded.

Yet, the jury is still out with respect to the consequences. For the individual university, Plan S has probably driven open access issues higher on the institutional agenda – involving the institutional leadership more. As such, Plan S has contributed to stronger intra-organizational coordination and has elevated issues about scientific publishing higher on institutional agendas. Here, one could find evidence that universities are becoming more active players in the evolving publishing landscape.

At the same time, transformative agreements seem to be a hindrance for fully green options. In the case of the University of Oslo, the response to the policy had to deal with a considerable normative mismatch, with conflicting perceptions and assessments

of OA and Plan S within academic staff. Still, the policy ambiguity on the part of national authorities created some space for how to proceed in a way that is both effective and legitimate – suggesting some leeway for acting both within and outside the university. Individual actions taken by universities – exemplified by the FRITT initiative at the University of Oslo – are still probably too small and fragmented compared with the major impact of the dominant publishing houses. Thus, teaming up with universities nationally and transnationally in defence of OA approaches that are normatively compatible with the quest for scientific quality and values is imperative, as partly evidenced by the Norwegian case, although the capacity for such inter-organizational coordination could be questioned (Maassen et al. 2022). Existing meta-organizations at the European level, such as the Guild, LERU, and others, are nevertheless more important than ever as voices defending academic quality in the OA debate. If academic quality is absent, do we really need open access?

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