

Promoting research careers or democracy?

Which is more important: a researcher's opportunity to promote his or her career or free access to research findings? Researchers take a fundamental decision on this each time they choose the publishing channel for their research.

Thousands of researchers from around the world are currently gathered at the Euroscience Open Forum (ESOF) 2014, held in the Carlsberg district of Copenhagen, to discuss research from all angles. The wide-ranging conference agenda includes a couple of sessions that put the role of researchers themselves in focus. The question, put simply is: what responsibility do individual researchers have to ensure the widest possible dissemination of their research publications?

Applying and reapplying knowledge

This is part of an ongoing debate in the Nordic Council of Ministers, the official inter-governmental body for cooperation in the Nordic Region. The issue is the compromise between the free sharing of research – Open Access – and personal considerations concerning a researcher's own career trajectory. As a publisher of research-based publications and a research funding agency, the Nordic Council supports the principle of Open Access as the best way of disseminating knowledge. The Council recently launched an Open Access policy, which entails that all Nordic Council publications are downloadable for free under a Creative Commons license and thus openly available for use in new, innovative ways. For knowledge needs to be applied and reapplied as much as possible.

Promoting research careers versus democracy

Most of the researchers attending the ESOF this year in principle support Open Access – at least as long as it has no impact on their career opportunities, which are primarily dependent on their individual scientific impact. This is predominantly a product of the scientific journal in which the researcher's work is being published. The publications with the greatest influence, or *journal impact factor*, are the ones that provide the greatest rewards in terms of promoting a researcher's career.

Much has changed since the 1960s when impact factor became an established concept, however, not least in the realm of science communication and journal publication. For example, the rise of social media has created an entirely new forum for sharing scientific findings. Information is being shared and promoted like never before. How can the impact factor of these new outlets be measured? And is it more or less significant than the traditional type of impact factor? Open Access implies a revamping of the conventional measurement methods.

In general, the researcher is subject to a system in which he/she must often make a choice between seeking leverage via a prestigious publication (and thus earning points for themselves and their institution) versus promoting open dissemination and free sharing of their findings through Open Access channels.

That researchers seek to advance their careers is entirely understandable. At the same time, the public authorities who use tax revenues to fund research must be allowed to require that the results of this

research are made freely available in one form or another. There are many variables to consider in this discussion, but much of the issue boils down to the choices a researcher takes in his or her daily activities. Is it better to support the existing structures or should one actively try to promote new and open methods for measuring the value of the research?

As part of the open *Science in the City Festival* during this year's ESOF, there will be a general debate on promoting research careers versus democracy at the Open Access, Open Bar, Open Mic event at Cafe Elefanten on Tuesday, 24 June from 16.30 to 18.00, where everyone wishing to voice their views will be treated to a beer.

Niels Stern, Senioradviser, the Nordic Council of Minister. Translated by Carol Eckmann.