



## *16<sup>th</sup> Berlin Open Access Conference*

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Harnack Haus, Berlin

- Check against delivery -

Dear colleagues from the scientific community:

Representatives from universities and research institutions, libraries, stakeholder networks, research councils - all in all more than 120 delegates from 40 countries and several international organizations!

And last but not least: Dear leaders of the publishing community,

A very warm welcome to you all!

A very warm welcome to the Harnack House, the central conference venue of the Max Planck Society. This house here has always been one of international exchange. It was built in the 1920s by our predecessor organization - the Kaiser Wilhelm Society. At that time, Berlin's scientific and cultural life was flourishing. The district of Dahlem had the nickname of a "German Oxford" and the scientists of the campus liked to come to this house here for meetings, conferences, lectures or lunch.

As we also have with us today the President of Stockholm University and Chair designate of the Nobel Foundation, Astrid Söderbergh Widding, I may add that indeed we call this House our "hub of Nobel Laureates" as people like Max Planck, Albert Einstein, Robert Andrews Millikan or Werner Heisenberg met in here. In particular, the Harnack House was also a kind of guest house of the Kaiser Wilhelm Society, where it accommodated international guests when they visited Dahlem for shorter or longer research stays and wanted to exchange ideas with their Berlin colleagues.

So there is hardly a better place - at least within the MPG - to host a conference like this! I think we had the same idea 20 years ago - when we formulated the "Berlin Declaration (on Open Access to Knowledge in the Sciences and Humanities)" in this very room here.

Allow me at this point - in view of the special anniversary of 20 years of the Berlin Declaration and also because it is my last time standing here as President of the MPG - to say a few words of thanks.

First of all, I would like to turn my attention to my colleague and today's Conference Co-Chair Ulrich Pöschl, because he participated in that very historic moment 20 years ago - not in his position as Max Planck Director,



but rather as a postdoc at the Technical University of Munich. Uli was a passionate advocate of OA from the very beginning.

Among other things, he founded several OA journals, and introduced the multi-stage open peer review process. OA has been a matter close to his heart for almost his entire scientific career. Here it also becomes clear what OA is, namely a movement. A movement that is supported entirely by the community - scientists at all career levels.

Also I'd like to thank our second Conference Chair and long-time OA veteran - if I may say so - Gerard Meijer. First of all, thank you for your kind introduction, dear Gerard.

Thank you even more for your own tireless efforts. You have often been a crucial driving force behind the discussions. The scientific community in Germany and the Netherlands, in particular, would not be in the place where we stand proudly today in our efforts to achieve open access if you had not stood up for the objectives of OA, time and time again. In both countries you played a central role in critical negotiations. This secured the means and opportunity for thousands of researchers to openly publish their research.

Ladies and gentlemen, Open Access is - as clear as the term may sound - a highly complex matter.

OA touches on central aspects of the science system, including not only the actual process of publishing, but also legal, financial, sociological and, not least, leadership issues for the management of research institutions.

One of the first co-signatories of the Berlin Declaration, the German Science and Humanities Council (Wissenschaftsrat) described this as follows:

“In a publication system where OA is the norm, a central task of scientific institutions is to ensure access to appropriate publication opportunities for all their researchers in the sense of academic freedom. Creating the right organizational and financial conditions for this must be a central element in their strategy, for which their management bears responsibility.” (Quote from “Recommendations on the Transformation of Academic Publishing: Towards Open Access”, January 2022).

The MPG and MPDL saw this change coming two decades ago and have made that commitment to their scientists. Instrumental to this effort was Ralf Schimmer in particular who worked for many years as Head of Information Provision at the Max Planck Digital Library.

It is largely thanks to him that the MPG has had its first contracts with fully OA publishers since 2004 and that we have been able to redirect our expenditure on subscriptions and Open Access publication costs in a holistic manner.

The white paper "Disrupting the subscription journals' business model for the necessary large-scale transformation to open access", by Ralf Schimmer and his colleagues in 2015, can rightly be called a decisive



impulse for the practical transformation of scientific publishing. And the insights from this paper are the foundations for the OA2020 initiative which brings us here today.

Finally, I would like to thank two people who are less visible for the public but in the end are essential for moving on. They keep the overview, connect and mobilize the community, prepare meetings like today's and also follow them up. They make the OA progress visible on all continents.

These people deserve our gratitude and I would like name today Colleen Campbell and Georg Botz. Honestly, without them we would not be here today. Thanks a lot Colleen and Georg!

Ladies and gentlemen,

More than ever, it is our responsibility to make knowledge freely available - especially scientific literature. Free access to it has been shown to be essential in the pandemic, and it is of course essential addressing the challenges facing our planet, especially the climate crisis. And let's look at the technology the world is currently talking about: chat GPT and other AI driven programs.

If we want such revolutionary systems to be sound and trustworthy, they must also get their fair share of training on high quality, but freely available scientific literature.

But as publishing is at the heart of the scientific enterprise and as it will always cost someone something, the core question of OA basically concerns the fair allocation of resources.

How do we answer this question?

When I became president of the MPG in 2014 my conclusion has been: "We do not need another declaration but we need to focus on the practical implementation, the engineering of the process."

And this happened! But along our journey we learned: there is not the one right answer but there many more routes to take to achieve the goal open access publishing.

And for that reason exchange between all of us is more important than ever; it makes conferences such as this one all the more a necessity!

The basic consensus on which we operate nowadays and on which we all agree is the shift from subscription-based to publication-based investments. This means indeed a major shift in publishing culture, a shift in mindsets, a shift in organizational structures.

Just a few day ago, the EU member states made another statement in support of OA, highlighting that – and I quote - "that immediate and unrestricted open access should be the norm in publishing research involving public funds, with transparent pricing commensurate with the publication services and where costs are not covered by individual authors or readers."



Now, in my view, the most important point that deserves special attention in the future is that of global equity.

Very recently, I met twelve African ambassadors here at Harnack House together with the President of the Alexander von Humboldt Foundation. We launched a new joint program for excellent science in Africa.

That was a beautiful, a festive moment, but precisely because it was so special, it also showed how far away we still are from true inclusivity in science.

So: The financially well-endowed scientific nations in particular must make an effort to use their weight and also draw attention to regions that are resource-limited. Science must not fail because of publication fees! We need to ensure global equity in open access, as inclusivity in science is good for science.

In other words, I could also say: The financial possibilities of individual researchers and institutions must not influence the quality of the editorial process.

Ladies and gentlemen, I think it is clear from all of this that if we want to move into the future, then the appeal for courageous decisions and for more balance in publishing is, on the one hand, an expectation we have of publishers. But it is also an expectation we must have for ourselves, the scientific community.

And this is all the more true if we think a little further ahead: from publishing as a final process to the roots of knowledge: at least in the empirical disciplines.

These roots are data - and also algorithms. It is still a long way to Open Science in a completeness worthy of this term.

But it is a desirable path and one on which the community can prove its seriousness in striving for high standards in the noblest way. Even though I will not be President of the MPG for a long time then, I can promise you: the MPG will always be involved in such a process.

But let's first lend our attention to the near future and to this very event today! I wish you an exciting conference. Enjoy it, take advantage of the opportunity to exchange ideas. The OA conferences have always resulted in great insights and concrete steps forward - so: Let's get started!