



“Repositories are no competition”

As of 2020, 100 per cent of all publications from SNSF-funded research were meant to be available in open access mode. The SNSF will not achieve this goal. The President of the Research Council, Matthias Egger, sets out some of the reasons.

In 2019, only 50 per cent of the publications were open access. Hasn't the SNSF been active enough?

We have been promoting open access for a long time and made it a requirement for researchers in 2008. We have informed regularly and created favourable conditions, but that isn't enough.

Why?

One important reason concerns scientific journals. Some journals do not allow authors to provide open access to their article after six months at the latest. That is why the SNSF sent an open letter to the larger publishers at the end of 2019. There is no reason why articles should not be available in a digital repository within this six-month timeframe. A repository is merely an archive, whereas a journal is a platform on which researchers share their knowledge – I can't see any competition there.

There is no such problem with open access journals. Their articles are immediately available free of charge. But what to do if there are no journals of this kind?

That might be the case in a few subdisciplines. But our experience shows that applicants are able to find an open access journal in every discipline. Of course, there isn't always the same amount of choice. And for this reason, one ought to promote alternative forms of publishing under the national open access strategy. One example of this is the conversion of subscription-based journals into open access journals.

Are there any other reasons why the SNSF is falling short of its goal of 100 per cent?

Many researchers forget to make their article publicly accessible even if the journal allows it. They don't include open access in their plans from the outset. Now it has to be part of the publication process by default.

Some open access journals came into being because researchers took the initiative, for example “sui generis” for law. Its editor, Daniel Hürlimann, is one of the SNSF's open access ambassadors. Another example is “21: Inquiries into Art, History, and the Visual”. Co-editor Beate Fricke is also an SNSF ambassador.
www.sui-generis.ch
www.21-inquiries.eu

How can the SNSF contribute?

We are expediting this change of thinking with different measures. They include publication grants for articles in open access journals, as well as for open access books and book chapters. What's more, in summer 2019, we began contacting researchers whose publications were not freely accessible and findable.

The EU's Plan S is also aimed at achieving 100 per cent open access. But the SNSF didn't sign it.

We support Plan S, but we offer our applicants more options. They have six months to store their publication in a public repository. The goal of Plan S, however, is to make all publications available immediately.

What changes with open access to government-funded research?

Private and public sector players are able to implement the results more rapidly. Thanks to the published information, the public can participate in scientific debates; and there is more critical reflection of research. This in turn leads to new questions and methods. All this makes science more impactful.

Grants for open access publications

By keeping administration lean and providing comprehensive funding, the SNSF makes it easy for researchers to publish their results in an open access format. For more information, please refer to the open access website: <https://oa100.snf.ch>

Agneta Bladh's view

To foster trust must be a goal of science

Many people in Europe and around the world are doubtful of research findings – be it on climate change or on other topics. What can scientists, research institutions and funders do to win their trust?



Agneta Bladh, a former Swedish State Secretary, is the president of the International Advisory Board of the SNSF. She also chairs the board of the Swedish Research Council.

Delivering high-quality research is of course a central requirement. However, it is just as important that people have a basic trust in science. How can such trust be nurtured?

Good communication

I'd like to start by taking a look at communication. How many researchers are able to provide an interesting glimpse of their work in a few easily understandable sentences? Many would like to communicate, but can't manage to find the time – or maybe the merit system does not sufficiently incentivise communication.

The European Researchers' Night is an initiative aimed at improving communication. Another such initiative is the Swedish Researchers' Grand Prix; to win it, researchers need to present their work not only understandably, but also as crisply and inspirationally as possible.

Should funding organisations also finance good interaction between people in academia and in society at large? Yes, of course. Funding promising communication projects, as the SNSF does, is an important step forward. As are the networks between researchers and potential users envisaged in its multi-year programme 2021–2024. But we are open to other ideas as well.

Responsibilities, both internal and external

Trust can also be fostered if the research community respects certain values. Scientific freedom comes with responsibility – an aspect that is rarely mentioned by scientists. The Magna Charta Universitatum, which embodies the basic values guiding higher education and research, has been the yardstick for the past 30 years. It is due to be updated in September 2020 in Bologna. Integrity and responsibility will be among the subjects contemplated in the new document.

For me, academic responsibility has two aspects. On the one hand, there is the responsibility that we have towards the outside world. This involves science responding to society's needs and engaging in dialogue with the public. On the other hand, we are responsible to ourselves. For pursuing excellence and preventing misconduct, for example, or striving for openness and equality.

The SNSF expects the projects it finances to meet the highest standards of quality and integrity. It conducts finely tuned selection procedures involving panels of respected experts and thousands of peer reviewers around the world. This enhances credibility. In spite of this, my view is that more effort is needed inside and outside academia to foster trust.

Generating ideas for the SNSF

Since 2018, the International Advisory Board has provided ideas and recommendations aimed at helping the SNSF develop its role and strategy in the long term. Alongside Agneta Bladh, the other members of the Advisory Board are: Caroline Bassett (University of Sussex), Pearl Dykstra (University of Rotterdam), Frank Miedema (University of Utrecht) and Willi Paul (Consenc). Together, they possess a wealth of experience of different aspects of science.