

Two decades of Open Access Campaigns

A Retrospective Analysis

Jenice Jean Goveas, Lizzie Sayer, Megha Sud (International Science Council)

Abstract

The Open Access (OA) movement has gained momentum in the past twenty years, propelled by the Budapest (2002), Berlin (2003), and Bethesda (2003) declarations. This period has also witnessed several advocacy campaigns that challenged excessive profiteering of publishers and raised a voice for researchers' rights by attempting to revolutionise the scholarly publication system. This study aims to give an overview of some major campaigns and organisations advocating for open access and analyses their efforts through the lens of their objectives, outcomes, opportunities, challenges and achievements. The assessment reveals some missing pieces, which are key building blocks of the Open Science (OS) movement that were overlooked in the past, and require careful consideration for current and future advocacy campaigns. Such a mapping and understanding is crucial for sketching effective strategies to accelerate progress towards achieving genuine and universal open access.

Keywords

Open Access, campaigns, BOAI, Open Science

Introduction

Campaigns are a sequence of activities with a clear strategy that build towards achieving a common goal. [Advocacy is one of the strategies](#) to promote OA, complemented by policy-oriented and infrastructure development efforts at institutional, national, and international levels. The formal impetus for OA was gained through the 2002 Budapest Open Access Initiative (BOAI). It declared convergence of academia's willingness to freely publish research – an 'old tradition' – with 'new technology': the internet. In the [2 decades since BOAI](#), the OA movement has snowballed from a handful of organizations to a global issue with the launch of several campaigns and initiatives. The different policies and evolving business models, along with commercial publishers' own OA versions, have made the overall landscape quite complex. In this paper, we look at a few major OA campaigns through the lens of their objectives, outcomes and challenges. We analyse how growth of the movement has influenced the focus of OA campaigns over the years, amidst several bottlenecks, challenges and attempts to derail the objective of universal OA. This work is based on insights gathered through desk research, a survey and interviews of OA advocates.

Goveas, J. J., L. Sayer and M. Sud "Two decades of Open Access Campaigns: A Retrospective Analysis", presented at the 17th Munin Conference on Scholarly Publishing 2022. Published in *Septentrio Conference Series 1* (2022).
<https://doi.org/10.7557/5.6641>

© The author(s). Licensed under the [Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International](#) license.

Major Campaigns in OA

The early 2000s was an era where several campaigns used declarations to rally support for OA. Soon after BOAI came the Bethesda and Berlin Declarations and [several statements on OA](#). The Global South, striving for equitable representation through OA, witnessed the launch of [Redalyc](#); 2004 [Buenos Aires declaration](#) on information, documentation and libraries; and 2005 [Brazil Salvador Declaration](#) emphasizing role of governments in making OA a priority. International organisations like UNESCO, and funders like NIH and Wellcome Trust played a role in [the growth of OA movement](#). The number of OA journals increased, and the [Directory of Open Access Repositories](#) was launched. Several universities and academicians started endorsing OA mandates. A decade after BOAI, the crucial role of assessment was prioritised and the 2013 [San Francisco Declaration on Research Assessment \(DORA\)](#) was published.

Table 1: Overview of some major OA campaigns

Campaign	Objective	Mode of Action	Outcomes	Challenges
International Open Access Week Initiated by PLoS and SPARC (2008).	Advocacy, policy campaign, promotion, awareness raising and dispelling myths on OA and related issues	Advocacy, awareness raising and dispelling myths.	Celebrated annually for locally promoting OA knowledge resources.	Largely driven by librarians , needs to be further popularised among researchers, particularly in countries where OA awareness is largely limited to OA week.
Signature Campaigns	Open Letter (2000) by Harold Varmus, Patrick Brown and Michael Eisen	34,000 scientists from 180 countries signed	Sparked the foundation for Public Library of Science (PLoS)	PLoS then followed APC model which became exclusionary, inequitable and unsustainable - as waivers are not a solution.
	Cost of Knowledge (2012) Initiated by Tim Gowers	Academicians' boycott of Elsevier's journals and their high subscription prices.	<i>Collected over 20,435 signatures</i>	Several academics resigned from Elsevier's editorial boards. Built momentum for other campaigns. Launched OA journal Glossa
	Access2Research (2012) started by Michael W. Carroll, Heather Joseph, Mike Rossner & John Wilbanks	Academic journal publishing reform in the US	Gathered 25,000+ signatures in 2 weeks	<i>In 2013, White House ordered all US Federal Agencies with R&D budgets over \$100M to develop public access policies in 12 months.</i>

C o p y r i g h t s	Publish with Power: Protect your rights (2022) by cOAlition S	Enable researchers retain, assert intellectual property rights	Awareness activities, free online resources.	Provide templates, tools, user guides to enable rights retention by authors. (ongoing).	Obstruction by publishers, Fear and inertia among researchers to change particularly due to complexity of laws. Misinformation
	Author rights retention (2020) and 2022-Project Retain by SPARC Europe	Reform copyright policies for improved use of copyrighted material, and uptake of rights retention and open licensing to enable open sharing of scholarly work.	Policy research for evidence	Report- Publisher Copyright and Licensing Policies in Europe investigates policy changes, provides guidance for change towards OA. (ongoing)	Unwillingness of scholarly societies to accept OA.
	Preprints in Progress (2016) by ASAPbio	catalyze support for preprints, foster best practices for discoverability, reuse, and interoperability of preprints Encourage reviewers to post comments on preprints.	Awareness activities, collaborative efforts, trainings, guides #PublishYourReviews initiative	Funders updating policies to accept preprints; publishers indicating agreement to accept papers deposited as preprints.	Lack of recognition for preprints in research assessment beyond North America/ Europe/Australia, disparities in preprint adoption. Misconceptions on quality and research integrity.
	Electronic Information for Libraries (EIFL) funded 34 OA campaigns (2011-2013)	Enable OA repositories & OA transition through institutional mandates & policies, OA awareness	workshops, websites, repositories, e-learning courses, publishing platforms, radio interviews, case studies	Botswana – 11 OA journals Poland – OA e-learning course Kenya – ‘ Knowledge Without Boundaries ’, 10 university OA policies & 10 repositories. Zimbabwe – institutional mandates & national OA policy	Impressive first-time achievements towards increasing access to research literature in developing and transition countries.

Insights from the review of campaigns

It can be argued that to be successful, a campaign needs to have clear goals, realistic objectives, resources and sustainable funding for multiyear periods at the outset. But many of the earliest OA campaigns differed in this regard. Several campaigns, including the BOAI, began with goals that may have seemed unclear or unrealistic when the campaigns were launched. Voluntary efforts and passion for opening science superseded the role of resources/funding in steering many campaigns. Campaigns of the early days focused on creating awareness and familiarizing stakeholders of the STI (science, technology and innovation) ecosystem with OA as a concept. They were successful in this objective with significant growth in the number, quality, popularity and editorial strength of freely and openly available publications. Campaigns have now become more data driven, informed and goal focused with diverse approaches. Social media is used extensively not only to popularise OA but also to tap its potential for disseminating research findings. OA advocates have become savvier and more watchful of opponents' moves towards commercial control of research mechanisms and business models that exclude authors on economic grounds. There is emphasis on [equity in Open Access](#) with the 2021 OA week theme of '[building structural equity](#)'. Increased realisation that a rigid approach to OA cannot foster equitable participation indicates the need to focus efforts on developing new models and systems rather than undermining the existing ones. PeerJ's model of [flat lifetime membership](#) publication fees; PLoS' [Community Action Publishing model](#) and Global Equity model offering uncapped publications through a single, annual institutional fee are some examples.

[BOAI is now signed](#) by over 6567 individuals and 1424 organizations. In 20 years, OA has moved from the periphery to the centre stage of scholarly discussions. The scholarly landscape has changed significantly with China, Latin America, India and several African countries contributing large quantities of OA articles.² A significant development was the [CLACSO-UAEM-Redalyc agreement](#) for OA to over 700 Iberoamerican journals, promoting OA to knowledge as a human right and its management as a commons by the scholarly community. Lobbying at national levels has been successful with [over 1100 OA policies](#) adopted by universities, institutions and funders. [Scholarly Publishing and Academic Resources Coalition](#) (SPARC), [OA Australasia](#) and the [Chinese Academy of Sciences](#) have been actively advocating for OA policies and repositories in their respective regions. The [White House's Office of Science and Technology Policy 2022](#) plans to make federally funded research outputs publicly available without embargo. OA is evolving as an integral part of the larger OS movement, referenced in the 2021 [UNESCO Recommendations on OS](#). Increased numbers of researchers support OA which is a positive change, but a [significant segment still carry perceived concerns](#) regarding submission process, plagiarism, copyright violation and misconceptions of OA as low-quality publishing that can adversely impact their careers³. The need to create campaigns that not only spark the interest of the scholarly community but benefit society at large is being felt. E.g.- Creative Commons, SPARC and EIFL's global campaign promoting OA for climate and biodiversity research and OA week 2022 theme – 'Open for Climate Justice'. We observe a transition from the ideology of 'OA for the sake of being open' to 'Open in order to accelerate progress towards solving global challenges'.

OA At the Crossroads – The Big Dilemma

As the movement grew, the Global North largely opted 'gold OA' route resulting in a shift from 'pay to read' to 'pay to publish', whereas Global South researchers lacked resources for this transition, accelerating exclusion and threatening the global understanding of OA. In 2018 the European consortium cOAlition S launched Plan S to lead OA and explore different financing models for scholarly communication. However, to date its strategy for business models centres on transformative agreements and Article Processing Charges (APCs) that exclude many authors on economic grounds, and are not transparent about the real costs of publication. A 2018 study reveals [extremely skewed involvement of countries](#) in the OA movement with 76.5% of OA-initiatives from only 20% of countries dominated by the US and UK.⁴ Plan S is also criticized for [coercive undertones](#) that have increased inequities where financing gold OA undermines non-profit publishers better suited for the Global South.

Although no movement can be perfect from the start, concerns have been raised of the OA movement's [unwillingness to accept criticism](#) and [willful ignorance of unintended consequences](#). Some such systemic problems include:

- **Ignoring commercial framing of OA.** *Although APCs were introduced in 2001, they weren't foreseen to become a problem that [encouraged predatory publishing](#) operating under the guise of OA, [tarnishing the image of OA journals](#). Increased commercial investments in scholarly workflow services and acquisition of community supported infrastructures has enabled Corporates own and manage key levers of the research mechanism, strengthening their dominance in determining standards of quality and integrity. It has serious exclusionary and neo-colonial impacts for southern researchers, perpetuating greater inequality. [Decontextualizing OA from its historical and political roots, can make it as exploitative as the system it is trying to replace](#). Campaigns need to focus on scholar-centric non-profit open infrastructures.*
- **Reforming Research Assessment** *was not made a priority: Overreliance on inappropriate metrics and emphasis on quantity over quality often penalize OA practitioners instead of incentivizing them. Even today OS has not penetrated academic hiring.⁵*
- **OA being coersively mandated** *caused backlash among some scholars. The insistence on the CC BY license without addressing Intellectual Property issues increased resistance among researchers.*
- **Corporate actors as pseudo-OA activists.** *It is ironic that campaigns which aim to liberate scholarly publishing from the grip of commercial publishers instead put them at the centre of policy decisions for designing OA⁶.*
- *An open and online world creates new tasks and costs in addition to obviating old tasks and costs. Early OA campaigns gave little thought to the funding, implementation and sustainability of the free online content and services proposed.*

In addition, commercial publishers perpetuate the myth that APCs are the only form of OA and sideline Diamond/platinum OA models in policy debates. Despite widespread pressures, over [two-thirds of OA journals do not charge APCs](#) and remain mission driven, running on voluntary efforts with a commitment to scholarly commons.

Way Forward

The early OA campaigns were more 'bottom-up' and grassroots driven, with specific communities and early adopters doing outreach and motivating adoption of open practices. As the movement grew and matured, more steps were driven by funders and national bodies making it a more 'top-down' approach, and towards accepting OA as a norm. OA campaigns now need to focus on a participatory approach that involves policy-makers to achieve a 'scholar led' OA model. Change of attitude and research culture is slow and cannot be achieved by deliberate engineering. University and funder policies should not impose OA but give researchers the freedom to publish in journals of choice to reduce resistance, while incentivising and nurturing academicians as OA ambassadors. The OA movement needs to have realistic demands for researchers. The current scenario of research assessment would require supporting diamond OA models, and where they are not well established, green and gold OA could go together, so that a transition towards undoing a commercial model of OA happens without overburdening the researcher.

Future campaigns need to focus on holistic approaches that experiment with novel and equitable forms of OA ensuring research quality and integrity, that addresses copyrights and intellectual property issues. While the battle with legacy publishers may reach a stalemate, campaigns on preprints and open review are exploring disruptive alternatives to journal publishing. Achieving universal OA would not only require bridging the North-South gap but also increasing South-South collaborations. The momentum gained by OA campaigns must be channelled towards exploring innovative business models for OA, and providing researchers with increasing choices for disseminating their work. Finally, we should go beyond openness at the level of publishing to openness at every stage of the research cycle as OA is not just being able to read an output but being able to understand, replicate and enhance it.

Acknowledgement

We are grateful to the inputs received from Peter Suber, Ginny Barbour, Iratxe Peubla, Subbaiah Arunachalam, Roheena Anand, Heather Joseph, Devika Madalli, Dasapta Erwin Irawan, Shuai Yan, Yuehong (Helen) Zhang and Dominique Babini who were interviewed as background to this article, in addition to regular insights shared by the ISC's steering group on Scientific Publishing. The analyses and views are however solely of the authors and not endorsed by any of the above-mentioned individuals.

References

1. Heyman, T., Moors, P., & Storms, G. (2016). On the cost of knowledge: Evaluating the boycott against Elsevier. *Frontiers in Research Metrics and Analytics*, 1, 7. <https://doi.org/10.3389/frma.2016.00007>
2. Tennant, J. P., Waldner, F., Jacques, D. C., Masuzzo, P., Collister, L. B., & Hartgerink, C. H. (2016). The academic, economic and societal impacts of Open Access: an evidence-based review. *F1000Research*, 5. <https://doi.org/10.12688/f1000research.8460.3>
3. Tmava, A. M. (2022). Faculty Perceptions of Open Access Repositories: A Qualitative Analysis. *New Review of Academic Librarianship*, 1-29. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13614533.2022.2082991>
4. Moskovkin, V. M., Saprykina, T. V., Sadovski, M. V., & Serkina, O. V. (2021). International movement of open access to scientific knowledge: A quantitative analysis of country involvement. *The Journal of Academic Librarianship*, 47(1), 102296. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.acalib.2020.102296>
5. Khan, H., Almoli, E., Franco, M. C., & Moher, D. (2022). Open science failed to penetrate academic hiring practices: a cross-sectional study. *Journal of Clinical Epidemiology*, 144, 136-143. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jclinepi.2021.12.003>
6. Meagher, K. (2021). Introduction: the politics of Open Access—decolonizing research or corporate capture?. *Development and Change*, 52(2), 340-358. <https://doi.org/10.1111/dech.12630>