

Slovenia in the Coalition S: Nuts and Bolts of the Transitioning Towards Open Science

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Background. In September 2018, the Slovenian Research Agency, together with ten other EU research-funding organizations, became a funding member of a group of public bodies, dedicated to a goal to facilitate and enhance a transition towards open access of scholarly publishing by 2020. “The Coalition S” was formed with the cooperation of the European Commission and the European Research Council. The cornerstone of this joint action is the Plan S, a document, consisting of ten key principles for accelerating the transition to full and immediate open access (OA) to scientific publications.

Less than a month later, in early October 2018, The Agency for Quality Assurance in Slovenian Higher Education (NAKVIS), which is entitled to set standards for appointment of the researchers, sent a proposition to amend the Minimum Standards for the Appointment of Higher Education Teachers, Researchers and Faculty Assistants at Higher Education Institutions (NAKVIS Standards). Moreover, in September 2015, three years before the Coalition S, The Government of the Republic of Slovenia adopted the National Strategy of Open Access to Scientific Publications and Research Data in Slovenia 2015–2020 (the Slovenian OA Strategy). The Action Plan, based on Slovenian OA Strategy, followed in May 2017.

Study rationale, objectives & methods. The purpose of the study was to analyse all mentioned strategic and regulatory documents that focus on diverse aspects of accessibility and quality assessment in scientific publications, published by researchers at Slovenian research (and higher education) organizations. The objective of the study was to examine, to which extent these documents support the effort of an individual Slovenian researcher to publish in OA journals.

Findings clearly indicate that proposed NAKVIS Standards for appointment of researchers, specifically criteria related to the impact of papers, published by an individual researcher, to a large extent contradict the standards, which were set in the Plan S and also do not follow the Slovenian OA Strategy. Consequently, Slovenian researchers are caught between two stools, without a clear indication as to which of the following should be their priority when choosing a journal for a publication: a) accessibility of their research for scientific community and wider public (guaranteed by a publication in reputable OA journals) or b) proven/measured impact of the research (proven by traditional indicators, such as impact factor, and guaranteed by journals that use conventional closed access or hybrid business model).

Conclusions. While study results are encouraging in respect to a raising level of awareness of the importance of the OA to the scholarly communication by Slovenian regulatory bodies, they also indicate that for sustainable development of science and to encourage innovation, stakeholders need to unify standards and set clear goals.

Keywords: innovation and research policy, research outputs, accessibility, quality assurance, quality standards