



Implications of Europe's Plan S for *Atherosclerosis*



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Recent visitors of our journal's website, as well as authors having submitted manuscripts to *Atherosclerosis* since December 2018, will have noticed that *Atherosclerosis* got a sister journal named *Atherosclerosis: X*. The two journals have the same aims and scope and are handled by the same editorial team. However, the new mirror journal of *Atherosclerosis* publishes Gold open access only and is available by online access only. *Atherosclerosis* will continue to be a hybrid journal, which is subscribed and offers Gold open access publication as an option to authors who want this and are willing to pay the article publishing charge (APC). APC will be lower for publications in *Atherosclerosis: X* (€2,100) than in *Atherosclerosis* (€3,200), fee waivers are available for the first batch of papers accepted for publication.

The two journals are handled via the same website, by the same Editorial Office Manager, Editor-in-Chief, Co-Editors, Associate Editors, and Editorial Board Members. Currently, the authors decide after completion of the review process and acceptance of their manuscript whether they want to publish their work in *Atherosclerosis* or its mirror journal *Atherosclerosis: X*. Later on, authors will choose at submission between publication in *Atherosclerosis* or *Atherosclerosis: X*. Also then, Editors and Reviewers will remain blinded towards the authors' choice. Thus, the entire review process will remain equally strict and objective, independently of the targeted journal and hence payment of APC.

After publication of the first number of accepted papers, *Atherosclerosis: X* applies for inclusion in PubMed Central (PMC), the free archive of biomedical and life sciences journal literature at the NIH/NLM. Upon inclusion in PMC, abstracts and citations to these archived papers will also be published in PubMed.

Applications for inclusion in Science Citation Index/Social Sciences Citation Index, Scopus and any other relevant citation indexing databases will be made as soon as possible. However, initially *Atherosclerosis: X* will not have an Impact Factor or CiteScore.

Reading about the large similarities between *Atherosclerosis* and *Atherosclerosis: X*, you will wonder on the need and future of the novel mirror journal. It must be seen in the context of cOAlition S or Plan S, which was launched in September 2018 by the European Commission, the European Research Council, and several national funding organisations in Europe [1,2]. By 1 January, 2020, cOAlition S aims to implement its commitment that "... scientific publications that result from research funded by public grants provided by participating national and European research councils and funding bodies, must be published in compliant Open Access Journals or on compliant Open Access Platforms." The ten key principles of cOAlition S include the

statement that "*the 'hybrid' model of publishing is not compliant with the ... principles*" of Plan S. If Plan S is realized, funders joining cOAlition S will not allow publication of scientific research in hybrid journals like *Atherosclerosis*, even if they are made available for open access by APC payment or publication of accepted manuscript versions in open archives or repositories.

The publication of Plan S has elicited considerable controversy [3–6]. Not only publishers of subscription and hybrid journals oppose but also the scientific community has raised substantial concerns. Most, if not all scientists, want to make the publications of their research findings most widely available to everybody and, in principle, support the goal of an open knowledge society. However, they also have several arguments and fears that question the mandatory open access publication policy of Plan S:

- Generally, Plan S limits the academic freedom of scientists.
- The quality and rigor of the review process may be compromised by generating financial incentives and biases towards accepting scientifically poor or little relevant papers (as already happening in increasing numbers of predator journals).
- Limited affordability may exclude a substantial number of scientists from publication of their work in high impact open access journals, especially if their publishers substantially rise the APC after the loss of their income from libraries subscribing to their journals.
- If the most influential journals such as Nature, Science, Cell, Lancet or New England Journal of Medicine continue as subscription or hybrid journals, scientists working in countries following Plan S, notably in Europe, will be handicapped in the competition with scientists working outside of cOAlition S, for example in America or Asia. This may limit the attraction of high caliber scientists to European research institutions.
- There are already several ways of making research freely available. Following requests of the US National Institutes of Health, many American high impact journals make their publications freely accessible after 6 months. Several universities and research institutions make pre-publication versions of manuscripts of their co-workers freely available in repositories, which can be retrieved by web-based search machines including PubMed (e.g. ZORA: Zurich Open Repository and Archive).
- Many prestigious scientific societies publishing their own journals will lose revenues needed to finance their dissemination activities.

The ongoing controversy, as well as lack of feasibility, may prevent the realization of Plan S in 2020, as intended by the initiators of

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cOAlition S. Of note, 85% of all scientific journals were published as subscription or hybrid journals in 2016. It may become practically difficult to replace a substantial proportion by pure open access journals within the forthcoming two years. Nevertheless, following the example of the Melinda and Bill Gates Foundation, several important research funding agencies have defined their vision of an open knowledge society as well as strategies for realization. The shift to mandatory open access publication may take longer than two years and happen less dogmatically as announced by cOAlition S, but politics will push science towards this direction. In this regard, the release of the purely open access mirror journal *Atherosclerosis: X* is an investment into the future of our traditional journal *Atherosclerosis*, which will celebrate its 50th anniversary in 2020.

With 2019, a novel three year-term has started for the Editor-in-Chief and the Co-Editors. Unfortunately, Professor Gerald Watts (Perth, Australia) has stepped back as Co-editor. With his strong opinion, he very much contributed to the current shape of the journal. Of note, together with Kosh Ray (London, UK), he edited a special issue of *Atherosclerosis* on Familial Hypercholesterolemia. We are very grateful for his previous work and future support as Associate Editor. With three new Co-editors, the journal aims to strengthen the expertise and scientific networks beyond lipids: Ziad Mallat (Cambridge, UK), Christoph Binder (Vienna, Austria) and Florian Kronenberg (Innsbruck, Austria). All three have already served as Associate Editors.

Finally, I thank all Authors, Co-Editors, Associate Editors, Editorial Board Members, and Reviewers, who make the success of *Atherosclerosis* possible. No matter how the open access discussion will develop, *Atherosclerosis* and *Atherosclerosis: X* will aim at publishing high quality articles. To this end, we need Authors who highly estimate the journal and submit excellent work, Reviewers who assess these submissions

with critical but objective expert reviews, and Associate Editors and Co-Editors who conclude this process with the right decisions. Only thereby, we will be able to provide the readers of our journal with some high quality information on recent advances of atherosclerosis research.

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