



Helsinki Initiative of Multilingualism in Scholarly Communication

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ABSTRACT

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The Helsinki Initiative on Multilingualism in Scholarly Communication was launched in April 2021. It values multilingual scholarly communication, science communication and open access to scholarly knowledge. The long-term goal of the Helsinki Initiative is to ensure the continued availability of high-quality languages needed across the world for effective communication of research knowledge within and beyond academia.

The Helsinki Initiative arose from the joint effort of the COST-Action ENRESSH (European Network on the Social Science and the Humanities), Universities Norway, and three organisations from Finland: the Learned Societies, the Committee for Public Information in Finland, and the Finnish Association of Learned Societies. Signatories from over 70 countries agree that multilingualism in scholarly communication is an international and local concern.

Helsinki Initiative has three main goals:

1. to promote multilingual dissemination of research knowledge within and beyond academia
2. to ensure sustainable open access transition of non-profit scholarly publishers who make it possible
3. to promote language diversity and multilingualism in research assessment and funding systems

It is important to communicate research results to international expert audiences according to the needs of each discipline. However, if research is communicated exclusively in English, academia risks not fulfilling its responsibilities toward society. In addition to international excellence, science policy calls for Research and Open Science. Broad access to scientific knowledge and interaction between science and society should be communicated and used in multiple languages.

Why we need multilingual scientific knowledge?

According to statement by the European University Association supporting the Helsinki Initiative relevant for Europe, as its research is characterized by geographic, cultural and linguistic diversity and locally produced knowledge requires critical discussion and dialogue between the scientific conditions and different actors within society. The COVID-19 pandemic saw a widespread need not only between researchers, but also to reach decision-makers, professionals and citizens.

To cope with grand challenges and to meet sustainable development goals, we need both good research and communication. Research needs to be communicated in languages and formats suited for the diverse audiences. Especially in the life sciences, an important part of research is contextualised, creating a need for original research in the main language of the communities who are affected by this research. It is impossible to imagine that all news, let alone research, about French society, history and culture would be published only in foreign languages by foreign researchers.

A study of users of open access journals on the Finnish Journal.fi platform shows that articles in Finnish and Swedish) are vital for reaching important users of research both within and beyond Finland. 100% of participants in the survey, and the two largest groups were students (40%) and researchers (36%). Other experts, teachers, journalists, civil servants, entrepreneurs and politicians. Especially students were focused on articles available in Finland's national languages.

Why we need the infrastructure of journals and books in different languages?

The national journals and book publishers across Europe play a vital role in the scholarly ecosystem. They are the main outlets for publishing and critically discussing research results in researchers' own languages. Peer-reviewed journals and books are published in the local languages mainly by small-scale non-profit societies or research institutions, relying on voluntary work. Providing open access and continuing subscription fees is a real sustainability challenge for the scholar-led publishers in the European landscape.

It is of utmost importance that multilingualism for European scholarly publications is seen as a priority and the impact of Open Science policies and practices across Europe. Translation services and digital technologies are part of the solution for facilitating multilingual access to scientific knowledge. To promote and implement multilingualism needs also to address how to secure a sustainable infrastructure for publishing locally relevant research and developing scientific terminology in the different European languages.

Why it is important to address language biases in research and funding?

Ideally, language is a non-issue in assessment. Researchers should be recognised and rewarded for the impact of their research, despite the language of application or publication. In practice, assessment is far from language-neutral, and this is an issue with metrics as well as expert-assessment. Research on high-quality research is valued regardless of publishing languages, and that they can make a career. Researchers spend time on writing to policy-makers, professionals or general public, or act as editors or reviewers.

Because assessments steer research through distribution of resources, rewards, and merits, language bias may compromise equal opportunities for individual researchers and institutions. Intended or unintended consequences may lead to systemic undervaluation of SSH research compared to STEM fields in funding, and hinder relevant research and knowledge transfer beyond academia. To ensure the availability and transfer of knowledge in all researchers' and citizens' main languages, the global and European research assessment should address well-known language biases in metrics and expert-assessment.

Recommendation of the Helsinki-Initiative

1. Support dissemination of research results for the full benefit of the society.
 - Make sure researchers are merited for disseminating research results beyond academia and for society.
 - Make sure equal access to researched knowledge is provided in a variety of languages.
2. Protect national infrastructures for publishing locally relevant research.
 - Make sure not-for-profit journals and book publishers have both sufficient resources and the standards of quality control and research integrity.
 - Make sure national journals and book publishers are safeguarded in their transition to open access.
3. Promote language diversity in research assessment, evaluation, and funding systems.
 - Make sure that in the process of expert-based evaluation, high quality research is valued regardless of publication channel.

- Make sure that when metrics-based systems are utilized, journal and book publications in all languages are taken into account.

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