



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 2019 to foster an environment that values multilingual scholarly communication, science communication and open access to scholarly publications in all languages. The long-term goal of the Helsinki Initiative is to ensure the continued availability of high-quality research published in all 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 for Research Evaluation in the Social Science and the Humanities), Universities Norway, and three organisations from Finland: the Federation of Finnish Learned Societies, the Committee for Public Information in Finland, and the Finnish Association for Scholarly Publishing. Signatories from over 70 countries agree that multilingualism in scholarly communication is an international, not just national or 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 publishing in different languages 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 best practices and traditions of each discipline. However, if research is communicated exclusively in English, academia risks not fully meeting all its missions and responsibilities toward society. In addition to international excellence, science policy calls for Responsible Research and Innovation and Open Science. Broad access to scientific knowledge and interaction between science and society is possible only if research is communicated and used in multiple languages.

Why we need multilingual scientific knowledge?

According to statement by the European University Association supporting the Helsinki Initiative, “multilingualism is particularly relevant for Europe, as its research is characterized by geographic, cultural and linguistic diversity”. The application of global and locally produced knowledge requires critical discussion and dialogue between the scientific community familiar with the local conditions and different actors within society. The COVID-19 pandemic saw a widespread need for multilingual communication 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 globalized and localized research communicated in languages and formats suited for the diverse audiences. Especially in the social sciences and humanities, an important part of research is contextualised, creating a need for original research in the main languages of researchers and citizens who are affected by this research. It is impossible to imagine that all news, let alone research-based knowledge, on Finnish or French society, history and culture would be published only in foreign languages by foreign researchers and publishers.

A study of users of open access journals on the Finnish Journal.fi platform shows that articles in national languages (in this case Finnish and Swedish) are vital for reaching important users of research both within and beyond academia. Total of 668 users participated in the survey, and the two largest groups were students (40%) and researchers (36%), followed by private citizens, other experts, teachers, journalists, civil servants, entrepreneurs and politicians. Especially students and users outside academia were focused on articles available in Finland’s national languages.

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

The national journals and book publishers across Europe play a vital role in the scholarly ecosystem by providing to the research communities outlets for publishing and critically discussing research results in researchers’ and citizens’ main languages. Peer

reviewed journals and books are published in the local languages mainly by small-scale non-profit publishers such as learned societies or research institutions, relying on voluntary work. Providing open access and continuing publishing operations without subscription fees is a real sustainability challenge for the scholar-led publishers in the European languages.

It is of utmost importance that multilingualism for European scholarly publications is seen as an integral part of implementation and the impact of Open Science policies and practices across Europe. Translation services based on artificial intelligence technologies are part of the solution for facilitating multilingual access to scientific knowledge. Nevertheless, action plans to promote and implement multilingualism need also to address how to secure a sustainable open access transition of journals publishing locally relevant research and developing scientific terminology in the different European languages.

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

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

Because assessments steer research through distribution of resources, rewards, and merits, language biases in assessment can compromise equal opportunities for individual researchers and institutions. Intended or unintended language priorities in assessment may lead to systemic undervaluation of SSH research compared to STEM fields in funding, and endanger production of local relevant research and knowledge transfer beyond academia. To ensure the availability and vitality of multilingual scientific knowledge in all researchers' and citizens' main languages, the global and European research assessment reform needs to 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 interacting with heritage, culture and 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 support needed to maintain high 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 the publishing language publication channel.
 - Make sure that when metrics-based systems are utilized, journal and book publications in all languages are adequately taken into account.

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