

# hoi ik ben een titel

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Universal free online access of scientific journal articles is within reach if universities and funders mandate their authors to self-archive their refereed manuscripts in an institutional archive (IR), upon acceptance in the (subscription) journals of their choice. This form of open access (OA), known as *Green*, can be implemented unilaterally by the universities and funders at little cost. It should not be confused with *Gold* OA, meaning OA through *publishing* directly in an OA journal.

I claim that the Dutch government and the association of universities (VSNU), by focussing on Gold prematurely, have made deals that will needlessly slow down the provision of access and maintain or even increase the publishers' profit margins. Sustainable Gold access (including copyright reform) will follow once universal Green has been reached and publishers only provide the organisation of peer-review and luxury services like enhanced PDFs or paper versions.

Grassroots publishing initiatives, such as SciPost, politicize the community by offering a glimpse of a possible future. But if they are serious about subverting the publishing industry, they should, in addition to their innovative activities, put their full weight behind the optimal Green mandate.

## I. Introduction

The current accessibility of research journal articles is decidedly suboptimal. Journal prices have been rising at 2.5 times the rate of inflation the last couple of decades [1, 2], but even if all 28000 existing journals could be subscribed to at production cost, universities would not be able to afford them all [3]. This means that all researchers, even at the richest institutions, do not have full access to the output of their colleagues, and all researchers are denied the full impact of their research, since they cannot reach the entirety of their intended audience.

It is unbearable that this *access/impact problem* still persists, because with the advent of the Web, articles can be reproduced and spread at virtually no cost. Doubly unbearable, since the whole en-

terprise is funded with tax-payer money for the benefit of society.

The solution to the problem is, according to Stevan Harnad, closer to raincoat science than rocket science. In a haiku [4]:

It's the online age  
You're losing research impact...  
Make it free online

In other words, authors can continue publishing in subscription journals, but should as an extra administrative step *publicly self-archive* their refereed manuscripts. This practice, which Harnad has been advocating since 1994 [5], was laid out by the Budapest Open Access Initiative (BOAI) as the first strategy to be implemented [6]. It later came to be known as the *Green* strategy [7]. If it is universally adopted, the access/impact problem would be solved.

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Figure 1: Raincoat science by Judith Economos

Apart from public self-archiving (the “Green” road), the BOAI described a complimentary *Gold* strategy, namely to start a new generation of journals that provide open access to the material they publish. It is this second strategy that often has been misunderstood to be the *only* viable strategy of providing open access, by scientists, media and politicians alike.

This is very unfortunate, since the Green solution is by far the most cost-effective way of providing access [8] (10%-20% of what it presently costs to pay for Gold), can be decided on by universities and funders unilaterally, without having to convince publishers to alter their business model, and does not limit authors’ choices of journals in which they wish to publish.

Furthermore, it is plausible that once universal Green open access has been achieved, existing subscription journals will face significant cancellation pressure, because all their content is already available as self-archived manuscripts. Those journals would be forced to cut costs and change their business model, since the services they provide have been reduced to organizing peer-review and providing enhanced PDFs and paper versions of the articles. Thus, Green OA may leverage the transition to universal Gold [9].

In the rest of this article, I will first outline what

is currently understood to be the optimal Green open access policy. Then, I will show that official policy in The Netherlands seriously deviates from this consensus, needlessly slowing down the provision of access and maintaining or even increasing the publishers’ profit margins. Finally, I describe that, since change is most likely to come from below, it is of vital importance to the community that grassroots initiatives embrace the Green mandate.

## II. The optimal Green mandate

Apart from being beneficial to the community, self-archiving is also advantageous for researchers personally due to increased uptake and citation impact of their work [10]. Yet, the majority of scientists do not self-archive voluntarily. 62% of journals endorse self-archiving immediately and an additional 17% endorse self-archiving after an embargo period of six months or a year [11]. But estimates for the actual percentage of articles that is accessible in this way (be it from an institutional archive, a preprint server or the author’s homepage) are far lower. The authors of [12] find that in 2009 20% of all journal articles were openly accessible, of which 12% through self-archiving. In a subsequent study, the same authors find an unchanged 12% Green in 2014 [11]. The authors of [13] find 24% total OA (Green and Gold) in 2013. The study in [14] is an outlier, finding 48% total OA, of which 34% Green<sup>1</sup>, already in 2008.

These numbers include unrefereed preprint versions (about 15% in [11]), since the archived and published versions are mostly matched by automated title/author/abstract matching. Furthermore, archived manuscripts are scattered throughout the Web [15], and archived versions

<sup>1</sup>The authors also include articles published in *hybrid* journals – meaning subscription journals that offer the option of providing open access for an additional author fee – in this percentage, so the fraction of Green articles is presumably slightly lower.

that became available only after a (possibly long) embargo period are counted.

In the domain of Physics and Astronomy, where sharing preprints has historically played an important role [16], self-archiving is universally endorsed by publishers<sup>2</sup>. The preprint server arXiv, established in 1991, has become the canonical place to share manuscripts. But even in this field, self-archiving is not systematic, although the numbers are slightly higher. Estimates are that around 20% of papers that appear in Web of Science journals can be found on arXiv, possibly as an unrefereed (preprint) version [12, 18]. Some subfields, such as astronomy and high-energy physics, have around 70% Green, with the percentage in top journals approaching 100% [19].

If the benefits are clear, why do scientists refuse to self-archive? Harnad lists many possible reasons [20], the most prevalent being that (i) scientists think it is illegal, (ii) that it causes their papers to be less likely to be accepted, and (iii) that scientists are simply too lazy.

The solution is for universities and funders to *mandate* their researchers to self-archive. It is worth quoting Harnad's implementation proposal in full [21]:

- (1) All research funding agency OA Mandates need to specify clearly and explicitly that the deposit of each article must be in the author's institutional repository (so the universities and research institutions can monitor their own output and ensure compliance as well as adopt mandates of their own for their unfunded research output).
- (2) All mandates should specify that the deposit (of the authors refereed, revised, accepted final draft) must be done immediately upon acceptance for

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<sup>2</sup>This is an example of "proof by intimidation." Feel free to prove me wrong using [17]. In any case, physicists, along with computer scientists and mathematicians, have always freely shared their preprints and refereed manuscripts. E-mail and later preprint servers became natural tools to make this practice easier and were freely used, even before the issue of self-archiving ended up in publisher contracts [16]. Publishers have, to the best of my knowledge, never ordered anyone to take down a manuscript in these fields.

publication (not on the date of publication, which is often much later, variable, not known to the author, and frequently does not even correspond to the journal issue's published date of publication, if there is one).

- (3) All mandates should urge (but not require) authors to make their immediate-deposit immediately-OA.
- (4) All mandates should urge (but not require) authors to reserve the right to make their papers immediately-OA (and other re-use rights) in their contracts with their publishers (as in the Harvard-style mandates).
- (5) All mandates should shorten (or, better, not even mention) allowable OA embargoes (so as not to encourage publishers to adopt them).
- (6) All repositories should implement the automated "email eprint request" Button (for embargoed [non-OA] deposits).
- (7) All mandates should designate repository deposit as the sole mechanism for submitting publications for performance review, research assessment, grant application, or grant renewal.
- (8) All repositories should implement rich usage and citation metrics in the institutional repositories as incentive for compliance.

- estimating OA mandate effectiveness: MELIBEA score [22]
- fair use button [23]

### III. Current institution and funder mandates in The Netherlands

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## IV. Grassroots initiatives

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