



Coalition S

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Dear members of Coalition S,

With this letter we offer our feedback on Plan S. We would like to begin by making clear that we share many of the concerns that have led to Plan S (such as the staggering profit margins of commercial multinational publishers based on voluntary work by scholars and scientists; the loss of author copyrights; and the fact that so much of scholarly and scientific knowledge remains inaccessible behind pay walls), and that we welcome other – more sustainable, equitable, and accessible – models of academic publishing. We recognize that Plan S addresses some of the problems with the current model of academic publishing, yet we are concerned that Plan S as it now stands produces a different set of problems. Here below are our major concerns.

First, Plan S is based on, and caters to, one modality of research funding, namely publicly funded research, and more specifically research funded by national and European research councils and bodies. While this modality of research funding has gained importance, it is far from the only one. Measures that might be good or make sense in one funding modality, could be detrimental for research funded in a different way. A new model of academic publishing should be based on an array of different models of research funding.

Second, Plan S risks isolating scholarship in Europe from the rest of the academic world. Many high-quality journals and academic presses function in an international mode, and might not be able to change their publishing model on the



basis of the new requirements for authors within the purview of Plan S. At the same time, journals and academic presses based in Europe that will comply with Plan S risk becoming less attractive for scholars outside of Europe who do not qualify for the funds for article processing charges (APC) that the European publicly funding bodies will make available.

Thirdly, Plan S raises many questions when it comes to diversity in the pursuit of science and knowledge. As many authors will not receive or be able to pay APCs, the current plan puts researchers without an academic affiliation (of which, in times of increased precarity, there are many, notably many young researchers going through periods of unemployment in which they continue to do research, but in the new model would have a hard time publishing) as well as researchers from the Global South at a serious disadvantage. As others have pointed out, in exchange for open access as readers, many would lose the opportunity to publish as author. The decrease in diversity of researchers, moreover, could easily turn into a threat to theoretical, methodological, and epistemological diversity, which is crucial in the pursuit of science and knowledge.

Fourth, there are no clear plans or visions on how the distribution of APC funds would take place. What procedures will be put in place to decide which researchers and which journals would potentially benefit from such funds? There's a real risk that these funds would reinforce the more established journals, publishing houses, and researchers, at the expense of smaller journals and more junior authors. A plan that attends to this risk would need to be in place *before* something like Plan S can ethically be implemented.

Fifth, Plan S reiterates the importance of open archives and repositories. As many scholars have pointed out, the idea and practice of open access in relation to data, which is increasingly put forward as a requirement for publication, is not desirable across all research traditions and disciplines. New integrity and data transparency protocols are all too often premised on particular ways of doing research that are based on positivist and hypothesis-testing approaches and quite far removed from the practices, epistemologies, and ethics of ethnographic research. And while many of these protocols allow for exceptions when data is considered too sensitive or personal or difficult to anonymize, this set-up ensures a "default" mode of research and relegates much of the research *Ethnography* is interested in to the realm of *the exception*. As editors of *Ethnography* we dissent from the general direction and spirit of many of these new protocols. Unlike some social scientific journals, we will not request authors to make their data publicly available. Instead, we seek to continue debates on transparency, integrity, and research ethics in terms of their relevance for ethnographic and qualitative research.



Last but not least, despite the current feedback round, Plan S has been developed without adequate participation by researchers from across the broad spectrum of research traditions, disciplines, institutional contexts, and funding modalities. Many researchers throughout the academy have a vested interest in a new publishing model, and a transformation that considers the different ways in which we do research should come about in a more transparent participatory way.

The implementation of Plan S as it currently stands will effectively change academic publishing culture in Europe. Yet the plan is conceived with a particular model of research and funding in mind and its purview is a European context. As such, the implementation of Plan S as it now stands holds a real risk of homogenization, in which a wide array of ways of doing research and publishing is pushed into a “one size fits all” mold, driven by one particular model of research funding. Such homogenization in a European context is detrimental to the international character of the academy as well as to the diversity of researchers, ways of doing research, and research traditions within the academic world. In rightfully addressing the power of big publishing houses to shape the academic field, Plan S would create yet another kind of monoculture. There is no doubt that the current academic publishing model can and should be changed. But we believe it can and should be done in more inclusive and participatory manners.

Yours sincerely,

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