Higher Education Policy

Special Issue Call for Papers

Disputed openness: universities, epistemic inequality and market forces in open science in the era of artificial intelligence

Guest Editors:

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Introduction

Open science aims to make research processes, outputs and benefits more transparent, accessible and inclusive (IAU, 2024; Maedche et al. 2024; Peters, 2021; Umbach, 2024). These principles are also outlined in the UNESCO Recommendation on Open Science (UNESCO, 2021).

This encompasses open access to publications and data, collaborative methods, citizen science, and the recognition of diverse research outputs, such as books, technologies, software, exhibitions, and digital media, beyond journal articles. Here, science is understood in its broadest sense to cover not only the natural and formal sciences, but also the social sciences, humanities, and arts-based research.

A key rationale for open science is the principle that publicly funded research should be publicly accessible, and enable broader societal benefit through the transformation of scientific knowledge into public goods that can drive innovation, inform policy decisions, and contribute to addressing collective challenges. While few people outside academic circles regularly engage with scholarly work and publications, greater accessibility enables a wider range of individuals, including practitioners, educators, journalists, and community organisations, to benefit from and engage with knowledge that has traditionally been restricted by paywalls.

Despite its potential, the implementation of open science is often constrained by a university model characterised by competition, marketisation, audit cultures and digitalisation. This impacts the neutrality of the scientific endeavour as it is embedded within uneven power structures that determine which knowledge is recognised, disseminated and valued.

Artificial intelligence is adding new layers to this landscape through its integration into Academic publishing systems, both in terms of data generation, analysis and evaluation. In fields that rely on large-scale data processing and simulation, AI enables new forms of scientific enquiry, but it also raises concerns about opaqueness, standardisation and epistemic bias.

Rationale

Open science is often presented as a transformative agenda that promotes ideals such as inclusion, accessibility, transparency and collaboration (Grahe et al., 2020). In practice, however, these ideals are increasingly influenced by market-driven dynamics (Uygun Tunç et al., 2023), commercial infrastructures (Mirowski, 2018), and global inequalities (Arancio, 2023; Demeter & Istratii, 2020). The current model of open science has emerged from scholarly movements, policy mandates, funding agencies and publishing interests, as part of broader transformations in higher education.

Crucial questions remain under-examined: Who pays for open science? Who profits from it? What role do dominant academic publishers play in shaping the infrastructures and costs of openness? How does the current system privilege researchers in ressource-intensive institutions or countries? How does it impact those in under-resourced settings, with precarious employment conditions or in non-STEM disciplines? How do different models of Open Science impact epistemic injustice considering both language, geography, discipline and status. To what extent are AI tools reshaping what is published, cited and valued, but also how research is conducted and prioritised. Do such systems democratise access to knowledge and enhance research capacity, or do they introduce new forms of exclusion, automation and dependency on corporate infrastructures?

This Higher Education Policy (HEP) special issue invites scholarly contributions that critically examine the promises and contradictions of open science. Contributions should pay particular attention to how financial interests, policy frameworks, geopolitical asymmetries and disciplinary hierarchies are embedded in current models of openness.

We are particularly interested in analyses of the policy and governance dimensions that influence how universities interpret and implement open science agendas. This includes examining institutional, regulatory or structural constraints preventing higher education institutions from engaging openly with societal stakeholders or fostering dialogue with alternative knowledge systems, particularly when such engagement challenges dominant epistemologies, disciplinary boundaries or funding models.

We also welcome critical perspectives on the role of artificial intelligence in shaping scientific practices, infrastructures and research governance within higher education systems. Contributions analysing the institutional and systemic conditions that shape the adoption, implementation and transformation of open science policies and practices within universities are also encouraged.

Submission

We welcome contributions from a variety of disciplines, including higher education studies, science and technology studies, critical data studies, digital sociology, and policy analysis.

Manuscripts should:

- Be no longer than 7,000 words (excluding references).
- Clearly articulate their conceptual, theoretical and/or methodological foundations, and be embedded in the relevant academic literature.
- Offer critical and contextually grounded insights into the interconnections between(e.g.) open science, university governance, epistemic inequalities, STEM dominance, and emerging technologies such as artificial intelligence.
- Demonstrate scholarly rigour and aim to advance our understanding of higher education policy or governance, whether at the national, supranational, or institutional level.
- Go beyond narrow or anecdotal case studies by offering analytically rich contributions that engage international audiences.
- Strive to challenge established narratives and propose alternative approaches to building more diverse and inclusive knowledge systems within higher education.
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- Adhere to the HEP submission style guide.

Timeline:

- Abstracts (1000 words) due: 20 October 2025
- Notification of abstract acceptance: 5 December 2025
- Full manuscripts due: 30 June 2026
- First peer review period: July-September 2026
- Revised papers due: 1 December 2026
- Second peer review period: December 2026 - January 2027
- Expected publication date: April-May 2027

References

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