

Carbon beats gold: Diamond Open Access is the future #1

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Published July 13, 2026

Citation

Willighagen, E. (n.d.). In *chem-bla-ics*. chem-bla-ics. <https://doi.org/10.59350/bsnp5-68v45>

Keywords

Openaccess

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Thirty years ago, researchers were struggling getting access to literature they wanted to read. I remember PhD candidates visiting friends at nearby universities for a meetup, and while there, for the copying machine in the remote library. Faster and cheaper than inter-library loaning. Scholarly journals were still printed on paper and distributed to university libraries. That was expensive. Therefore, many libraries provided only access to a subset of journals.

Then the internet came. Big publishers started sharing offering digital-only subscriptions. This would lower the cost and therefor the prize. That was the idea. But the big publishers remained expensive publishers.

Then open access came. The idea is that journal article would have a open license, often CC-BY or similar. This meant that researchers could share articles with colleagues and students without additional cost. The idea was that this would lower the cost of the journals. After all, libraries could reshare the articles, and contribute in funding the distribution of the knowledge. But the big publishers insisted to be the only source of the PDFs, and they remained expensive publishers.

Then came the article-processing charge (APC) model. The authors would contribute for the publishing and distribution process. For some years, new publishers showed, organized by and for scholars, keeping the APC close to the cost of production and distribution. The APC was estimated at somewhere between 50 and 600 euro per article, likely more now, after the inflation of the last five years. But scholars did not trust these publishers. Second, publishers saw a market and a business model in APC-based publishing. Libraries were pressured to keep access to big publishers that realized that if scholars wanted to keep publishing there, they could charge higher APC based on popularity. New expensive publishers entered the market, some with good intentions, some with bad intentions. And among all the confusion, the big publishers remained expensive publishers.

This is where we are now. Because sharing knowledge was a great idea, we want to keep the license, but we need to drop the financial incentives: we need to drop the APC.

Enter the world of [diamond open access](#), where science is published under an open license, and neither the reviewers, not the readers, nor the authors pay, all key stakeholder in the exchange of scientific knowledge. And no tax by publishers.

Can we do this? More and more people think so, and diamond open access is gaining traction.