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Enhancing Quality in Open Access Scholarly Publishing: From Proxies to Responsible Assessment

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ABSTRACT

Background and Objective: Despite significant progress in Open Access (OA) and Open Science (OS) over the past three decades, longstanding challenges in scholarly publishing—including the reproducibility crisis, market concentration, rising costs, inequality, and flawed research assessment policies—persist alongside emerging threats such as paper mills, hyper production, and uncritical AI use. This paper argues that OA alone is insufficient; a broader transformation encompassing research integrity, transparent peer review, open infrastructure, and responsible assessment is required.

Results and Conclusion: Diamond Open Access (Diamond OA)—characterized by no author or reader fees and community ownership—offers a relevant framework for addressing these intersecting issues. The paper examines the European Diamond Capacity Hub (EDCH), established in 2025, and its central quality alignment tool, the Diamond Open Access Standard (DOAS). DOAS provides a multidimensional framework for assessing journal quality through governance, funding, editorial integrity, open science compliance, technical infrastructure, visibility, and equity, rather than relying on journal reputation or proxy indicators. The EDCH also supports visibility through the Diamond Discovery Hub, capacity building via training platforms and tool suites, and community engagement through registries and forums. The paper concludes that Diamond OA, supported by shared standards and public infrastructure, demonstrates that openness, quality, and equity are mutually reinforcing goals. Aligning publishing practices with research assessment reform represents a necessary cultural shift for restoring trust in science.

What is "already known":	• The reproducibility crisis, market concentration, rising publication costs, business models are main still problems in Open Access movement. • New challenges have emerged, such as paper mills, hyperproduction, and the uncritical application of artificial intelligence in the authorship, editorial and peer review processes.

What this article adds:	• Diamond OA provides a particularly relevant framework for examining how openness, quality, and equity intersect. • By eliminating subscription fees & APC, Diamond OA removes cost-based exclusion. • DOAS articulates the quality of scientific journals through multiple dimensions, including governance, funding, editorial integrity, peer review, technical infrastructure, and equity, diversity, and inclusion. • DOAS shifts journal quality assessment away from reputation-based proxies toward a holistic evaluation of processes, values, and governance. • EDCH provides coordinated services and tools for a sustainable Diamond OA ecosystem. • Diamond OA proves that openness, quality, and equity are mutually reinforcing, not conflicting, objectives.

1. INTRODUCTION

Almost three decades since the emergence of the Open Access (OA) movement and more than a decade of Open Science (OS) initiatives, many longstanding issues in scholarly publishing remain unresolved. At the same time, new challenges continue to appear. While more than half of the articles published in scholarly journals are now publicly available [1], major problems persist, including the reproducibility crisis, market concentration, rising publication costs, business models that encourage inequality, and research assessment policies that privilege journal prestige over the intrinsic quality of research [2,3]. At the same time, new challenges have emerged, such as paper mills, hyperproduction, and the uncritical application of artificial intelligence in the authorship, editorial and peer review processes.

In this context, open access to publications alone is not sufficient. Openness should include the research process and OA to publications need to be understood as part of a broader publishing environment that includes research integrity, the management of complex editorial processes, transparency in peer review, open technical infrastructure, and responsible approaches to research assessment. Diamond Open Access (Diamond OA), defined primarily by the absence of fees for both authors and readers and by community ownership, provides a particularly relevant framework for examining how these elements intersect [4].

2. DIAMOND OPEN ACCESS IN A GLOBAL CONTEXT

The rapid growth of Diamond OA has been accompanied by increasing international involvement. A key milestone was the Diamond Open Access Conference held in September 2022 at the University of Zadar, which brought together diverse stakeholders to operationalise the Action Plan for Diamond Open Access [5]. Subsequent global summits in Toluca (2023) and Cape Town (2024) further reinforced Diamond OA as a shared, international effort aimed at building a scholarly communication system that is equitable, sustainable, and community-governed. The upcoming Global Summit in Bengaluru (2026) continues this course.

Diamond OA has particular significance for researchers in the Global South, where financial barriers to publishing remain a major obstacle to equitable participation in scholarly communication. By eliminating both subscription fees and article processing charges, Diamond OA removes cost-based exclusion that disproportionately affects researchers from under-resourced institutions and regions [2]. Unlike APC-based open access models, which risk shifting inequalities from readers to authors, Diamond OA enables publication decisions to be based on scholarly merit rather than ability to pay.

3. INSTITUTIONAL PUBLISHERS AND THE EUROPEAN DIAMOND CAPACITY HUB (EDCH)

Academically driven institutional publishers play a crucial role within the Diamond OA ecosystem. They sustain disciplinary diversity, foster multilingualism, and enable the dissemination of locally relevant research. Despite these contributions, such publishers are often disadvantaged by research assessment systems that rely heavily on journal-level metrics as proxies for the quality of published work [6,7]. These practices tend to privilege reputation over process, marginalise valuable scholarly contributions, and perpetuate existing inequalities

Addressing these limitations requires quality frameworks that move beyond proxy indicators and make editorial and publishing practices transparent, comparable, and assessable. Therefore, the European Diamond Capacity Hub (EDCH)[1] was established in January 2025, building on the work of the European Commission-funded DIAMAS[2] and CRAFT-OA[3] projects. EDCH aims to support Diamond OA publishers and service providers through coordinated services, shared resources, and community collaboration [8]. While primarily focused on the European Research Area, many of its components are designed to be applicable beyond Europe.

The EDCH brings together a set of complementary services designed to support a coordinated, distributed, and sustainable Diamond OA publishing ecosystem. These include (1) quality alignment, (2) an authoritative list of Diamond OA journals, (3) training opportunities, (4) curated resources and guidelines, (5) spaces for community exchange, (6) collection of best practices, and (7) shared publishing tools. Taken together, these services aim to strengthen publishing practices while respecting disciplinary, linguistic, and institutional diversity.

4. DIAMOND OPEN ACCESS STANDARD (DOAS)

A central element of EDCH's quality alignment is the Diamond Open Access Standard (DOAS)[4], providing a comprehensive framework for defining and operationalising quality in Diamond OA publishing [9-12]. Rather than relying on insufficiently transparent quantitative indicators, DOAS articulates the quality of scientific journals through multiple dimensions, including governance and ownership, funding and sustainability, editorial governance and peer review, compliance with the principles of open science, technical infrastructure, visibility and communication, and equality, diversity, inclusion and belonging. Seven DOAS core components have different focuses:

1. Funding and sustainability - Transparent, fee-free publishing models supported by public or community funding
2. Legal ownership and governance - Public or non-profit ownership, clear missions, and accountable governance
3. Alignment with Open Science - Open licenses, rights retention, FAIR data, and repository use
4. Editorial management and integrity - Transparent peer review, editorial independence, ethics and integrity policies
5. Technical infrastructure - Secure, interoperable, open-source publishing platforms
6. Visibility and communication - Discoverability, indexing, transparent usage metrics
7. Equity, diversity, inclusion and multilingualism - Inclusive editorial practices, accessibility, linguistic diversity

By making these dimensions explicit, DOAS enables journal quality to be assessed as a combination of processes, values, and governance structures, rather than inferred from journal reputation alone. Additionally, a self-assessment tool has been built to provide an intuitive user experience for Diamond OA publishers and Diamond OA service providers to analyse their level of compliance[5]. A detailed operationalisation of DOAS with concrete journal examples is provided in Table 1.

5. VISIBILITY, CAPACITY BUILDING, AND COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

Visibility remains a key challenge for many Diamond OA journals, particularly those produced by small institutional publishers that are underrepresented in commercial indexing services. Within EDCH, this challenge is addressed through the Diamond Discovery Hub (DDH),[6] which provides a reliable index of Diamond OA journals that meet clearly defined criteria, including the existence of persistent identifiers, transparent assessment procedures, open licensing, the absence of author- or reader-facing fees, openness to all authors, and community ownership. Thanks to its high level of interoperability, the DDH enhances journal visibility not only within the academic community but also beyond it.

[1] European Diamond Capacity Hub (EDCH) available at https://diamas.org/
[2] DIAMAS (Developing Institutional Open Access Publishing Models to Advance Scholarly Communication) project available at https://diamas.org/diamas
[3] CRAFT-OA (Creating a Robust Accessible Federated Technology for Open Access) project available at https://www.craft-oa.eu/
[4] Introducing DOAS: The Benchmark for Diamond Open Access Quality available at https://diamasproject.eu/introducing-doas-the-benchmark-for-diamond-open-access-quality/
[5] DOAS Self-assessment tool available at https://diamas.fecyt.es/
[6] Diamond Discovery Hub (DDH) available at https://ddh.diamas.org/en

Capacity building comprises another core pillar of EDCH. Stakeholders involved in diamond scholarly publishing have the opportunity to acquire the necessary knowledge and skills through a dedicated toolsuite[7] and training platform[8]. The toolsuite offers structured resources on diamond publishing, ranging from concise introductions to more detailed guidelines describing specific workflows and practices, supported by concrete examples. The training platform is designed to support editors and other publishing professionals at different stages of experience, enabling them to understand, adopt, and practically implement quality standards.

Equally important is the strong emphasis placed on community engagement. Through a registry of institutional publishers[9] and a forum primarily intended for journal

editors[10], a space for knowledge exchange, collaboration, and mutual support is provided. The registry aims to establish a network of institutional publishers in order to strengthen their positions, promote their services and practices, and establish collaboration. The forum, oriented towards individuals, facilitates meetings, cooperation, sharing of experiences, and the establishment of partnerships. Through the forum, participants also take part in discussions on shared challenges and possible solutions.

[7] Resources and guidelines available at https://toolsuite.diamas.org/
[8] Training platform available at https://training.diamas.org/
[9] Registry (https://registry.diamas.org/)
[10] Forum (https://forum.diamas.org/)

Table 1. DOAS core components with description and examples (modified from Consortium of the DIAMAS Project, 2025) [10].

Core Component	Short description (information is publicly available at the publisher's or journal's website)	Examples from different journals
1. Funding	1.1 Diamond OA Model - No fees are charged to authors for publishing or readers for reading. 1.2 Sustainability - The publisher is directly or indirectly funded by public funds or other sources of revenue according to the annual plan. In-kind and voluntary contributions are acknowledged. 1.3 Editorial Independence - Editorial operations related to content and review are independent and free from influence from the publisher or the funding body.	"*The Journal is published by the University of Zagreb, Faculty of Food Technology and Biotechnology, Croatia. It is an official journal of Croatian Society of Biotechnology and Slovenian Microbiological Society, financed by the Croatian Ministry of Science and Education.*" (Food Technology and Biotechnology, https://www.ftb.com.hr)
2. Legal ownership, mission and governance	2.1 Ownership - The ownership statement is present, and the owner must be a public or non-profit organisation whose mission includes conducting or promoting research and scholarly work. 2.2 Governance - Mission statement, goals or scope are present. The scholarly community provides input on strategic direction and decision-making. Procedures for the selection of members of editorial bodies and roles and responsibilities of the publisher, editorial bodies, owners and publishers towards authors, reviewers, readers and the scholarly community, journal and owners, publisher, and the public are defined. 2.3 Relations with Service Providers - Transparency of the workflow and the use of service providers and relationships with them.	*"Glossa: a journal of general linguistics is a Diamond Open Access journal owned and controlled by the linguistics scholarly community (see Governance), with no financial barriers to publishing for authors."* *"The foundation Linguistics in Open Access (LingOA), a nonprofit foundation ('Stichting') under Dutch law, is the legal owner of the Journal's main title, Glossa."* (Glossa: a journal of general linguistics, https://www.glossa-journal.org)
3. Open Science	3.1 Open Policies - The open access policy is available at the publisher or journal level, including compliance with OA mandate, FAIR research data and metadata, availability of research protocols and methods and use of free/open source software. 3.2. Authors' Rights, Intellectual Property Rights, and Licensing - Rights retention policy is in place, describing the content ownership and reuse rights. All contributions are published under an open licence (preferably CC-BY), and users' rights, conditions of reuse, and redistribution of content and metadata are clearly described and labelled in human and computer-readable form. 3.3. Repositories - Dissemination of the article preprint version at any time, the Author Accepted Manuscript (AAM) version after acceptance, and/or the Version of Record (VoR) after publication is allowed in an OA repository of the authors' choice.	*"Users are allowed to read, download, copy, redistribute, print, search, and link to material, and alter, transform, or build upon the material, or use them for any other lawful purpose as long as they attribute the source in an appropriate manner according to the CC BY licence."* (Peristil, https://hrcak.srce.hr/en/peristil) *"Glossa requires authors to make all data, stimuli, and data analysis scripts associated with their submission openly available at the time of submission, in accordance with the FAIR principles (Findable, Accessible, Interoperable, Reusable). All original research submitted to Glossa must include a data availability statement. Data availability statements should state where data supporting the results reported in the article can be found, with links to publicly archived datasets analyzed or generated during the study." (Glossa: a journal of general linguistics,* https://www.glossa-journal.org/site/journal-policies)
4. Editorial management, editorial quality and research integrity	4.1. Editorial Bodies - Editors-in-Chief and/or Editorial Board have full responsibility over the entire editorial content. The composition and constitution of its editorial bodies is publicly displayed. There are established procedures to facilitate communication between the editorial bodies and the publisher. Continuous training and education of journal editors and authors is provided. 4.2. Peer Review - All submitted manuscripts undergo a rigorous evaluation process before and/or after publication that is in line with accepted practices in the relevant discipline. This evaluation process can involve peer review or another type of evaluation by more than one competent person who has no conflict of interest with the author(s), and it is described in detail. Manuscripts being reviewed by a closed circle of people who are well acquainted with each other or work in the same institution are minimised. 4.3. Editorial Quality - Clear guidelines for authors and reviewers, a manual of style, a suitable layout, copy-editing and proofreading procedures, languages of submissions, and publishing timelines are available. 4.4. Research Integrity - Guidelines for authorship and/or contributorship, research and publication ethics, conflict of	*"The core structure of EuJAP is composed of an Editor-in-Chief, Editorial Board and Advisory Board.* *In EuJAP, the EDITOR-IN-CHIEF is appointed by the Dean of the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences in Rijeka (University of Rijeka) based on a proposal by the faculty members of the Philosophy Department.* *The Editor-in-Chief (EiC) is fully responsible for all the content published in the journal. EiC is free to appoint additional assistant editors, associate editors, managing editors, and administrative assistants to help them run the journal in its multifarious activities. In addition, EiC nominates members of the editorial and advisory board from a pool of established and recognized experts to help them actively shape the journal's publication policy, represent the scope of the journal, and guarantee and maintain the quality of its publications."* (European Journal of Analytical Philosophy, https://eujap.uniri.hr/publication-ethics) *"The Journal operates under a double-anonymized peer review model (see NISO Peer Review Terminology)."* (Poslovna izvrsnost – Business Excellence, https://hrcak.srce.hr/upute/upute_recenzenti_Poslovna_izvrsnost_-_Business_Excellence.pdf)

	interest, misconduct, and use of artificial intelligence are available.	
5. Technical service efficiency	5.1. Publishing infrastructure - A digital publishing platform supports online submission, editorial, and publishing workflows and is well maintained, updated, regularly backed up and protected against security threats. An archival and digital preservation policy which is consistently implemented. 5.2. Interoperability and metadata - The publishing platforms support widely adopted metadata exchange protocols (OAI-PMH, API) and the most usual metadata schemas. Persistent identifier (e.g. DOI) exists and is registered for each published item. 5.3. Collaboration - Publishing infrastructure is based on free and open-source software, with publicly available code.	*"This journal uses Open Journal Systems 3.4.0.4, which is open source journal management and publishing software developed, supported, and freely distributed by the Public Knowledge Project under the GNU General Public License. Visit PKP's website to learn more about the software."* (Acta Adriatica, https://acta.izor.hr/ojs/index.php/acta/about/aboutThisPublishingSystem) "Open Archives Initiative Protocol for Metadata Harvesting (OAI-PMH) is a protocol that defines a mechanism for the collection of metadata, which provides an important feature of digital repositories - interoperability. OAI-PMH includes two types of participants: data providers who expose metadata about resources, and service providers who harvest metadata and build upon a new service. HRČAK has implemented OAI-PMH interface since the beginning in 2006. (HRČAK Portal of Croatian scientific and professional journals, https://hrcak.srce.hr/en/interoperabilnost)
6. Visibility, communication, marketing, and impact	6.1. Presence - Technical measures are taken towards improving the visibility in search engines (general and academic). Discoverability of the published content is improved by inclusion in relevant discovery services and aggregator databases, and by submitting the journals to abstracting and indexing databases. 6.2. Communication - Reliable channels for communication and dissemination of published content to academia and society at large are established. 6.3. Analysis - Comprehensive, accurate and reliable metric indicators detailing content usage (e.g. article-level metrics: visits, views, downloads, citations), along with publication-level metrics, altmetric indicators, and geographical distribution of visitors are available.	"*Statistics cover journal's web page visits, issue web page visits, article (bibliographic records) web page visits and full text (PDF) downloads. The sum of these visit numbers give the total visits for the journal.*" (HRČAK Portal of Croatian scientific and professional journals, https://hrcak.srce.hr/en/posjecenost) *"The journal Croatian Operational Research Review (CRORR) is reviewed/indexed by: Current Index to Statistics, Current Mathematical Publications, Mathematical Reviews (MathSciNet), Directory of Open Access Journals (DOAJ), EconLit, EBSCO host, Genamics Journal Seek database, Hrcak, INSPEC, ProQuest, Scopus, Web of Science Core Collection / Emerging Resources Citation Index, SCOPUS, Zentralblatt fuer Mathematik/Mathematics Abstract, MATH on STN International (CompactMath)."* (Croatian Operational Research Review, https://hdoi.hr/crorr-journal/?page_id=18)
7. Equity, Diversity, Inclusion and Belonging (EDIB), multilingualism and gender equity	7.1. EDIB and Gender - The policy that sets principles, commitments and actions for promoting EDIB in terms of linguistic, gender, cultural, academic, geographical, organisational, economic backgrounds and disabilities within its governing and management bodies, editorial staff and boards, as well as reviewer pools and author's pool, including a Gender Equity Plan (GEP), is in place. 7.2. Accessibility - Website is accessible under the terms of applicable international, national or local laws and policies, providing use by people with disabilities. 7.3. Multilingualism - Supporting multilingualism by publishing abstracts in at least two languages, providing a plain language summary alongside the traditional abstract, publishing full texts in more than one language, either bilingual, simultaneously as separate documents in the same journal, or sequentially in other journals, providing multilingual websites, providing support for human translation and language-check services to authors, integrating integrate a computer assisted translation (CAT) tool/solution, and offering metadata in English if the language of the text is not English.	*"We accept submissions in Italian, Croatian, and English, accompanied by abstracts in both English and Italian. We might exceptionally consider papers in other languages."* (SPONDE, https://morepress.unizd.hr/journals/index.php/sponde/about) *"Journal of Central European Agriculture (JCEA) is scientific journal from the field of agriculture published by nine National Editorial boards from Central European countries. JCEA publishes manuscripts in English and native languages of member countries."* (Journal of Central European Agriculture, https://jcea.agr.hr/en/instructions)

Complex editorial tasks also require appropriate software solutions. The Diamond OA community tend to rely on open-source publishing platforms, such as Open Journal Systems (OJS) and Janeway, which support technical efficiency and interoperability. Collaboration with the Public Knowledge Project (PKP), responsible for OJS development, has led to efforts to align the software more closely with DOAS recommendations, further integrating quality standards into everyday publishing workflows.

For small institutional publishers, it is easy to engage with the EDCH. Although it was designed and developed as part of two European Commission projects and with a European focus, EDCH remains open to all publishers and editors who want to improve their knowledge of Diamond OA. This refers especially to the living toolsuite bringing together articles and descriptions of best practices on how to run a Diamond OA journal, training modules and the forum. Furthermore, EDCH is expected to evolve, both through EDCH Task Forces and through National Capacity Centres (NCC), justifying the motto "for and by the community.

6. IMPLICATIONS FOR THE RESEARCH ASSESSMENT REFORM

The development of OA and OS is closely connected to the ongoing reform of research assessment. International initiatives such as the San Francisco Declaration on Research Assessment (DORA), the Leiden Manifesto, and the Coalition to Advance Research Assessment [13] call for a shift away from journal-level metrics toward qualitative, contextualised evaluation supported by the responsible use of adequate indicators [6,7,13]. Frameworks such as DOAS align well with these principles by providing concrete criteria through which editorial quality, openness and integrity can be recognised and rewarded. The qualitative aspect of the reform centers on the peer review process, as the primary quality assurance mechanism. The transparency of peer review policies, selection of reviewers, the public accessibility and constructiveness of feedback, and the recognition of reviewer contributions are increasingly recognised as essential elements of a trustworthy peer review system [14,15].

7. CONCLUSION

As discussed during the seminar in Tehran, improvement in scholarly communication requires closer alignment between publishing practices and research assessment systems. Diamond Open Access and Open Science are demanding paths that require sustained commitment and public investment. Open access without quality safeguards risks exploitation, while quality frameworks without assessment reform lack incentives for widespread adoption. Supported by shared standards and public infrastructure, Diamond OA demonstrates that openness, quality, and equity are not competing goals but mutually reinforcing ones. Moving beyond proxy indicators towards accountable, transparent, and context-sensitive evaluation represents not merely a technical adjustment, but a necessary cultural shift for restoring trust in science and ensuring its relevance for both academia and society.

8. DECLARATIONS

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8.2. Conflict of Interest

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

8.3. Authors Contributions

Conceptualization, ST and AM; methodology, ST; software, ST; validation, ST & AM ; formal analysis, CM; investigation, ST & AM; resources, ST & CH; data curation, KH; writing-original draft preparation, ST, AM, CM & KH; writing-review and editing, ST, AM, CM & KH; visualization, ST & KH; supervision, KH; project administration, ST .

8.4. Using Artificial Intelligent chatbots

No AI chatbots or tools were used in this research

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