

The Munin Conference on Scholarly Publishing

The short history

Leif Longva

Abstract

The series of annual Munin Conferences was born in 2006. This is a short history of how it happened, and how the conference has developed over the years, step by step, into one of the most important conferences in Europe within its scope. Scholarly publishing is an important part of, and a prerequisite for progress in research. The advent of the Internet has given options for dramatic changes in the process of publishing and the dissemination of research. This has given the Munin Conferences ample issues to debate over the years, and, most likely, the years to come.

In the beginning was Munin

On September 21st 2006 Munin, the open institutional repository of The University of Tromsø was launched with a seminar. At that time, having realized what a powerful tool the Internet was, Higher Education institutions all over the world were launching their open repositories, to disseminate research and student theses.

The development of the Munin repository was governed by a steering committee, led by Library Director Helge Salvesen. The steering committee discussed and decided what should be eligible to include in Munin. Like other institutional repositories, Munin was not meant to be a (formal) publishing channel. It was meant for dissemination of peer reviewed manuscripts, plus student theses. Nevertheless, the steering committee also discussed issues on scholarly publishing in their meetings. And there the idea was born to follow up the launching seminar with another seminar more focusing on publishing issues. The prime issue they wanted to raise was the newly launched system for counting publishing points at the Higher Education institutions, and letting these points to some degree enter the governmental financing model for these institutions.

Thus, the first 'Munin Seminar' was born: held November 23rd 2006 at the UiT campus, and running as an annual seminar/conference every fall since.

'Muninseminaret' was the name the first years. It was held strictly in the Norwegian language as a one day seminar in 2006 and 2007. In

<https://doi.org/10.7557/15.5508>

© [Leif Longva](#). This is an open access article distributed under the terms and conditions of the Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International license.

2008 and 2009 the seminar was still mainly in Norwegian, but with one or two invited keynotes given in English.



Library Director Helge Salvesen was the Munin Conference initiator, and chairing the Munin Conferences during the first years. © UiT, [CCO 1.0 Universal](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/). Personality rights are not licensed.

The Houghton reports and savings from open access

In 2010 the seminar was still a one-day event, but now strictly in English. And the name was changed into The Munin Conference on Scientific Publishing. One of the keynote speakers that year was professor John Houghton from Victoria University Centre for Strategic Economic Studies, Melbourne, Australia. He had done investigations and monetary calculations into the economic impact of open access to scholarly literature in several countries. One example was a calculated 160 million GBP savings and increased research efficiency in the UK from a switch to open access (<http://repository.jisc.ac.uk/6476/>).

With savings of this magnitude documented, an accelerated switch to open access could be anticipated. However, the traditional model of scholarly publishing has proven to be very resistant to change. The forces involved, and the motivations of the various stakeholders in scholarly publishing have over the years been debated and scrutinized in the Munin Conferences. And after 14 years, the debates have not reached a conclusion yet. There is still a need for the meeting and debating arena of the Munin Conference.

The Munin Conference was never a place purely for open access promotion. Several themes that do not primarily deal with the issue of open or toll access publishing have been raised over the years. Examples are: the peer review process, the publish or perish-pressure (quantity vs. quality in publishing), research data management, the impact factor, the DORA declaration, and pricing models

of licensed access. Nevertheless, the benefits of open and rapid access to research have been demonstrated repeatedly and from various angles at the Munin Conferences.

For those who have followed and attended the Munin Conferences over the years, it is clear that there has been a motion in the focus and in the topics. In the first years much focus was on demonstrating the benefits of open access, and the benefits and strengths of the two roads to open access: green and gold. Over the years, the number of voices within academia questioning the benefits of open access has decreased. So the conference has increasingly focused on the obstacles to open access in terms of stakeholders' agendas and researchers' incentives, financial and budgetary obstacles (including also predatory publishing) as well as various services supporting research and its dissemination. To a large degree open access is a prerequisite for the benefits of such services.

Developing the conference

The model of the Munin Conference was developed further during the planning of the 2011 edition. Until then, the conference was organized with invited speakers only. But now the committee decided to announce a Call for presentations and posters, leaving the final program much depending on the response to this call. Two keynote speakers were invited to set the tone of the conference. And the conference was expanded into a one-and-a-half day event to allow time for a good number of presentations from the open call. This was an exciting and also a daring move – how would the scholarly community respond? Would there be many abstract submissions to the call, or just a barren few? Would the conference and the call be interesting for the international community of scholars with an interest in publishing issues? Tromsø is after all, located far north, and all presenters – except for the invited keynotes – would have to cover their travel costs themselves.

By the deadline of the submission period, the organizing committee could conclude that the move had been successful: the entire one-and-a-half day conference program was filled with exciting presentations. The conference has since moved on to fill two entire days with high quality presentations. From 2011 on, the Munin Conference has also included a session of poster presentations.

Pay-to-publish

As mentioned, the benefits of open access to research have been clearly demonstrated. However, publishing costs do not disappear with open access. The issue of how to finance open access publishing is still being debated heavily – also at the Munin Conferences over the years.

Pay to publish is a common model, at least among the commercial publishers. The shift from paying for access to paying for publishing does imply a new set of concerns. Funding for such a financing model

is not easily available for all; it is a special concern within the humanities, where researchers commonly have limited funds available for such payments. This was a key issue in John Willinsky's keynote talk at the Munin Conference in 2012. John Willinsky is professor at Stanford University School of Education, and is founder of the Public Knowledge Project, which has developed new tools to simplify publishing. Article publishing charge (APC) or book publishing charge (BPC) will not work in the humanities, Willinsky argued.

The funding issue of open access publishing is also very much a concern for research communities in low-income countries. This was a main issue in the keynote talk of Arianna Becerril-García (from Universidad Autónoma del Estado de México) at the Munin Conference in 2019, focusing on scholarly-led, non-profit cooperative publishing initiatives in the Latin America.

It is safe to say that debates about funding models for open access publishing and various associated useful services have not reached a conclusion yet. Here is plenty of questions to be asked and scrutinized at Munin Conferences to come.

An important conference

From 2013 onwards the conference has followed this model of a two-day event with a combination of invited keynote speakers and presentations selected from submitted abstracts from the calls. However, 'scientific publishing' in the name of the annual event has been replaced with 'scholarly publishing'. This change was made following comments that 'scientific' may be understood as covering the STM subject areas only. This was never the intention of the Munin Conference Committee, but rather a nuance of the English language that had slipped the awareness of the committee.

The Munin Conference has truly grown into an important conference on the topic of scholarly publishing. The development in the number of attendants shows this clearly. The first couple of years the seminar attracted approximately 40–50 persons, mainly from the library sector plus Norwegian academic governing bodies and the Research Council of Norway. But already by 2008, the conference had more than 100 attendants, and the number kept rising in the following years – perhaps, not purely because of the northern lights and the wales in the nearby fjords, but also because of the quality of the conference and the timeliness of the topics raised. By 2018 the conference had grown out of the auditorium where it had been located for the preceding ten years, and had to move into the larger auditorium normally used for the big events.



Opening speech for the 13th Munin Conference on Scholarly Publishing 2018. © UiT, [CCO 1.0 Universal](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/).

The way the Munin Conference has developed over the years is rather impressive. It is now safe to say that it is one of the most important conferences on scholarly publishing and related topics in Europe. This claim is backed not only by the growth of attendees, but also by the list of keynote speakers the conference has been able to get hold of over the years. (See list of keynote speakers at the end.)

The Munin Conference has always had a goal to attract researchers and graduate students to attend the conference (together with librarians, research administrators, funders as well as publishers) – the researchers are, after all, key stakeholders in the issue of publishing. The number of researchers attending the conference, as well as the proportion of attendants being researchers, has indeed increased over the years, but still less than 10% of attendants are researchers.

The conference has even been free to attend for all UiT-affiliated people, to lower the threshold for UiT's own scholars to attend. Every researcher is, of course, primarily occupied by doing their research, but the questions surrounding publishing and dissemination of their research – as core issues for how research most efficiently may build on previous research – should be of interest to any researcher.

The keynote speakers are the keys

Over the years, the Munin Conference has hosted an impressive list of highly interesting keynote speakers. A few of them are mentioned above. There are lots of others who deserve to be mentioned and praised here, but it would take too long to go through them. Please

see the list of keynote speakers at the end of this paper. The members of the organizing committee have been amazed how positively they all have responded to an invitation to speak, and also how well they have spoken of the conference on their return home. These exciting keynote speakers, and theirs and others' positive feedback to the conference, are always a major motivation factor for taking on the task of preparing the next year's conference.

The list of keynotes is definitely one of the most important success factors of The Munin Conference. The job to shortlist candidates in the preparation of each conference has been governed by a focus on what issue is hot at the time of the actual conference, avoiding to dwell on issues that are more or less out-debated. This has resulted in conferences with timely and exciting content.

The future of the Munin Conference

Will debating the publishing and dissemination processes, and all adjacent issues, ever be exhausted? And will the format of the Munin Conference still develop further?

The answer to the first question is negative, as far as I can see. The question of how to publish research and make it available to peers as well as the interested public is not likely to reach some final conclusion. There are just too many interested parties involved, each with their separate agenda. And there will be external events occurring, influencing the debate on what is the better way to publish and disseminate research. One such external event is the appearance of the corona virus, causing an epidemic that we are in the midst of at the time of writing. The pandemic has made health workers and medics urge for rapid access to the latest research findings on the virus, pinpointing how slow the process of publishing normally is.

Speaking of the corona virus: The pandemic has led to cancellations of numerous events worldwide as a result of infection control regulations, while some events have transformed into online events. And so also for the 15th Munin Conference, scheduled for November 2020. Details are not set at the time of writing, but it is decided that this year's conference primarily will be an online conference.

Whether this shift to an online event will become the normal conference mode for future Munin Conferences remains to be seen. Whichever way it will be, it is likely that UiT's current as well as future library directors may welcome exciting keynote speakers, presenters and attendants for many Munin Conferences to come.

The Munin Conference on Scholarly Publishing – the short history

Appendix: A complete list of keynote speakers in The Munin Conference on Scholarly Publishing 2006–2019

Keynote	Institution	Presenting	Year
Fyfe, Aileen	University of St Andrews	Mission or money? Trends in scholarly publishing since c.1850	2019
Jensenius, Alexander Refsum	University of Oslo	Experimenting with Open Research Experiments	2019
Becerril-García, Arianna	University of the State of Mexico	The value of the scholarly-led, non-profit business model to achieve Open Access and scholarly publishing beyond APC: the AmeliCA's cooperative approach	2019
Terry, Robert	World Health Organization's Special Programme for Research and Training in Tropical Diseases (TDR)	Research is born free and everywhere is in chains	2019
Logan, Corina	Max Planck Institute for Evolutionary Anthropology	I won't be #BulliedIntoBadScience	2018
Tennant, Jon	Open Science MOOC	Who should own public science? Preprints, power, and publishers	2018
Peters, Paul	Open Access Scholarly Publishers Association	Ensuring a Healthy and Competitive Market for Open Access Publishing	2018
Tsoukala, Victoria	European Commission	Open Science, Excellent Science! EC policies and initiatives in support of open science	2018
De Rijcke, Sarah	Leiden University	Towards best practices for authorship and research evaluation: Effects of performance metrics and the Leiden Manifesto	2017
Eve, Martin Paul	Birkbeck, University of London	A Matter of Distribution: APC Logic against Consortial Funding Mechanisms	2017
Gowers, Timothy	University of Cambridge	Perverse incentives: how the reward structures of academia	2017

Keynote	Institution	Presenting	Year
		<u>impede scholarly communication and good science</u>	
Curry, Stephen	Imperial College London	<u>Zen and the Art of Academic Maintenance</u>	2016
Kingsley, Danny	University of Cambridge	<u>Reward, reproducibility and recognition in research – the case for going Open</u>	2016
McCabe, Mark J.	Boston University's Questrom School of Management, SKEMA Business School in Sophia Antipolis	<u>How Open Access Affects Competition in Scholarly Publishing Markets: A Tale of Good Intentions, Big Deals and Uncertain Outcomes</u>	2016
Hossenfelder, Sabine	Nordic Institute for Theoretical Physics	<u>Peer review and its discontents</u>	2015
Schekman, Randy	University of California, Berkeley, Howard Hughes Medical Institute	<u>Publishing the most important work in the life sciences</u>	2015
Shieber, Stuart M.	School of Engineering and Applied Sciences, Harvard University	<u>The role of the HE institutions in scholarly publishing and communication</u>	2015
Suber, Peter	Harvard University	<u>What is OA and where is it going – in a conversation on video link with Caroline Sutton</u>	2015
Boulton, Geoffrey	University of Edinburgh/Royal Society UK	<u>Open Data and the Future of Science</u>	2014
Brembs, Björn	Universität Regensburg	<u>When decade-old functionality would be progress – the desolate state of our scholarly infrastructure</u>	2014
Neylon, Cameron	PLOS – Public Library of Science	<u>Managing the Transition to an Open Scholarly Literature</u>	2014
Dechamp, Jean-François	European Commission	<u>The European Commission and Open Access</u>	2013

The Munin Conference on Scholarly Publishing – the short history

Keynote	Institution	Presenting	Year
Ferwerda, Eelco	OAPEN Foundation	Open Access in Humanities and Social Sciences	2013
Prosser, David C.	Research Libraries UK	What's 'Open' about Open Access? The Vital Role of Copyright and Licenses	2013
Pattinson, Damian	Public Library of Science	Megajournals and what they mean for the future of scientific publishing	2012
Willinsky, John	Stanford University	The Future of Scholarly Publishing is the Future of Scholarship	2012
Neylon, Cameron	Science and Technology Facilities Council UK	I need to publish more and read less! How new platforms will enable you to publish more effectively while reducing information overload	2011
Rasmussen, Martin	Copernicus Publications	Ensuring Availability and Quality of Research Data through Open Access and Public Peer-Review	2011
Houghton, John	Victoria University's Centre for Strategic Economic Studies (CSES)	Economic impacts of open access in Europe and the United States	2010
Mele, Salvatore	CERN	Open Access Publishing in 2010: what publishers offer, what researchers want – First results of the SOAP project	2010
Heber, Joerg	Nature Publishing Group	Peer review at Nature	2009
Hurum, Jørn	Natural history museum, University of Oslo	Why did we select open access for the publication of IDA? – and did it matter?	2009
Gasser, Urs	University of St Gallen / Harvard Law School	Comparing Open Access Policies of Selected Universities: Towards a Best Practice Model?	2008
Grimson, Jane	Trinity College Dublin	Scientific publication: following up on the recommendations of the European Research Advisory Board	2008

UiT goes open: Et festlig skrift til Stein Høydalsvik

Keynote	Institution	Presenting	Year
Hallén, Arvid	Research Council of Norway	Tilgjengeliggjøring av offentlig finansiert forskning	2007
Vigen, Jens	CERN	Ja takk, begge deler. Om å publisere som før, men nå i fritt leide.	2007
Boye, Erik	Rikshospitalet-Radiumhospitalet, Universitetet i Oslo	Tellekanter, publiseringsmarkedet og konsekvenser for forskerne	2006
Lundberg, Jonas	Medical Management Centre, Karolinska Institutet	Bibliometrics as a research assessment tool – impact beyond the impact factor	2006