

## An offer the journal couldn't refuse

### *How a Danish collaborative project paves the way for DOAJ inclusion*

*By Claus Rosenkrantz Hansen (CBS Library), Jesper Boserup Thestrup (Royal Danish Library), Rasmus Rindom Riise (Royal Danish Library), Rie Karen Marie Iversen (Royal Danish Library) and Solveig Sandal Johnsen (Royal Danish Library)*

#### **Abstract**

The article describes a two-year project (running from 2021 to 2022) that worked on getting Danish Open Access journals indexed in the Directory of Open Access Journals (DOAJ). The project was run in partnership by Copenhagen Business School (CBS Library), Royal Danish Library and Aalborg University Library, in close collaboration with DOAJ. All of the journals that participated are hosted on the libraries' Open Journal Systems (OJS). In this article the authors demonstrate some of the challenges the journals and the project group faced in the inclusion process and in the assistance the project provided, as well as learning outcomes and perspectives.

#### **Keywords**

Directory of Open Access Journals, DOAJ, Open Journal Systems, OJS, Academic Journals, Journal Index, Bibliographic Database, Inter-institutional Project, Journal Editors, Open Access, Open Science, Creative Commons, Copyright

## Introduction

What should a small nutrition research journal do if it wants to make a greater impact in the world and increase its numbers of readers and citations? Perhaps it has become an Open Access journal in the hopes of growing its readership and thereby its citation count. The journal's editor-in-chief (EIC) is, however, not entirely satisfied. The download statistics show that the number of readers has increased, but it is not quite the increase that the EIC had hoped for. She wonders what can be done. It must be something about the visibility of the journal. The competition for readers is fierce, and the small journal disappears among the competitors – the large commercial research journals.

The journal's EIC has heard from colleagues down the hallway that there are a number of journal databases and indexes that are beneficial for small research journals

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because they help making the journals more visible. But the EIC doesn't know where to start, because which databases are suitable for a small nutrition journal?

One day she talks to a researcher from another university. The researcher is a former EIC at another journal and is familiar with a database called Directory of Open Access Journals (DOAJ)<sup>1</sup>. The researcher says that DOAJ is a journal directory, which contains a lot of Open Access journals and is known for its practices and high standards of indexing. Therefore, it is the obvious place for a small, ambitious research journal to be indexed.

The EIC is looking at the possibilities of being included in the directory, but at the same time she has become a little confused and jittery about the whole procedure – after all, what does an associate professor of nutrition know about long-term storage, metadata sharing policies, reproducibility and not least mysterious abbreviations such as DOI<sup>2</sup> and CLOCKSS<sup>3</sup>?

At the same time, she has no doubts: DOAJ is the right place for the journal to be admitted. But the EIC's job is new, and there is a lot of work to keep track of, with manuscripts to be sent for peer review and finished articles to be forwarded to the graphic designer, and the new layout to be decided upon. So before long, DOAJ is forgotten in the pile of ongoing cases, and soon the notes about the directory have completely disappeared among the many papers on the desk.

One day, however, she gets an offer she can't refuse. The offer comes from a Danish project that aims to make Danish Open Access journals compliant with DOAJ's indexing requirements so these journals will be visible in this well-reputed and globally known directory. The route to indexing is not straightforward though, and there are several potential challenges. This article describes some of the challenges the project encountered in the work to make these journals DOAJ-compliant as well as the learning outcomes and perspectives. Throughout this article, readers will follow the EIC of the nutrition journal in her DOAJ indexing journey.

## The Danish project

The project was inspired by a similar project in Finland (2019–2020) by the Federation of Finnish Learned Societies (Mitchell and Pölönen 2020). This project cleared the way

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<sup>1</sup> [DOAJ](#) is an independent, non-profit and community-driven index of Open Access journals committed to ensuring quality content is freely available online for everyone. DOAJ's mission is to increase the visibility, accessibility, reputation, usage and impact of quality, peer-reviewed, Open Access scholarly research journals globally, regardless of discipline, geography or language. According to [DOAJ's website](#) (accessed: April 14, 2023) “19,200 journals” are currently indexed in DOAJ.

<sup>2</sup> DOI is an abbreviation for Digital Object Identifier. DOIs are unique handles to identify digital objects such as research publications, research data etc.

<sup>3</sup> [CLOCKSS](#) stands for Controlled LOCKSS and is a non-profit organization that provides services on long-term preservation of digital scholarly content such as journals' publications.

for the Danish project, and by the end of 2020, an agreement was made with DOAJ to initiate the project in Denmark, running from January 2021 to December 2022<sup>4</sup>.

The project group consisted of members from three different Danish university libraries: Aalborg University Library, Copenhagen Business School’s Library (CBS Library) and Royal Danish Library<sup>5</sup>. Throughout the course of the project, the project group has worked closely in collaboration with Dominic Mitchell (Operations Manager) and Paula Marjamäki (Managing Editor) from DOAJ. They were both ready to help and readily answered all the questions that the project’s members encountered along the way.

The overall project aim was clear: In collaboration with DOAJ, the three institutions should work together on getting Danish Open Access journals indexed in DOAJ and thus strengthen the journals’ reputation and impact as scientific Open Access journals - an impact that the small nutrition journal would greatly benefit from.

## Selection of journals

There are many small scientific journals in Denmark, and thus in order to keep the number of journals workable, the project group chose to focus on Open Access journals that are hosted on the three institutions’ Open Journal Systems (OJS)<sup>6</sup>: [Journals.aau.dk](https://journals.aau.dk), [CBS Open Journals](https://cbsopenjournals.com) and [tidsskrift.dk](https://tidsskrift.dk). Despite providing Open Access to their content, not all of the 224 journals on the three OJS servers had actual ‘DOAJ potential’, e.g. because the journals were inactive, or they operated with embargo periods (which makes them inadmissible), or they were non-peer reviewed outlets in the form of dissemination magazines, yearbooks and the like. The project selected 58 journals that had potential for DOAJ inclusion. In order to get an overview of how the resources could best be used, DOAJ assessed how ready each journal was to be indexed. DOAJ marked each of the 58 journals with one of the three following level indicators: ‘H’ for high DOAJ potential, ‘M’ for medium DOAJ potential and ‘L’ for low DOAJ potential. Only 3 journals were marked with ‘H’, 23 were marked with ‘M’ and 32 with ‘L’.

The next step in the project was the outreach to the journal editors – and here we are back to the offer the professor with the small nutrition journal got.

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<sup>4</sup> Read the project report – [Stegger Gemzøe et al. \(2023\)](#).

<sup>5</sup> In addition to the authors, the project group consisted of Alexandra Fogtmann-Schulz (Royal Danish Library), Anna Stegger Gemzøe (Aalborg University Library), Gertrud Stougaard Thomsen (Royal Danish Library), Kasper Bruun (Royal Danish Library) and Steffen Lind Christensen (Aalborg University Library)

<sup>6</sup> OJS is an open source publishing platform developed by the Public Knowledge Project (PKP). It is one of the most widely used non-commercial systems for publishing peer-reviewed Open Access journals. OJS has been used in Denmark since 2007.

## Informing materials and workshops

*The EIC of the nutrition journal sat together with the other members of the editorial board and looked through the information material sent from the Danish DOAJ project. The material answered many questions, but they were still left with a few questions...*

The project group did several things to reach out and support the selected journals. One of them was to identify needs and make informing materials about the advantages of being indexed in DOAJ. As part of this, five good reasons for admittance to DOAJ were identified and described. The five reasons, speaking directly into the needs of the small nutrition research journal, were:

- 1) prestige
- 2) standards and practices of DOAJ
- 3) funding support
- 4) visibility
- 5) increased internet traffic and international coverage

The project also launched a website<sup>7</sup> containing the five good reasons together with guidance materials, instructions for DOAJ application, as well as Danish translations of the DOAJ criteria. All the informing resources were made in close collaboration with DOAJ.

Another initiative was to invite all of the 58 selected journals to a series of informative workshops. Dominic Mitchell and Paula Marjamäki from DOAJ were responsible for holding the workshops on the directory and the process of indexing. After that, the project group took over the organization of the workshops. This meant that the project group could increase the frequency of workshops and thus intensify efforts to get Danish journals indexed in DOAJ.

In addition to providing information on DOAJ to the participating journals, another purpose of the workshops was to give the editors the opportunity to ask questions that were relevant to their journals. An important takeaway from the project is that no two journals are the same: each journal faced its own special challenges in relation to being indexed in DOAJ. Some were in the middle of a transformation from being a traditionally published journal to becoming a full-blown Open Access journal. Others had to consider copyright policies, and a whole third group needed to formulate the journal's peer review process from A to Z. Therefore, the journals also brought very different questions to the workshops, just as they had very different needs for support and advice during the indexing and application process. Each journal was assigned one or more contact persons from the project group to help the journal reach its aims.

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<sup>7</sup> The project's website: [Danish Open Access journals and Directory of Open Access Journals](#).

Throughout the whole process, it was important that the journals did not feel alone with the work.

## Editors in unknown territory

*The nutrition journal was in the process of becoming DOAJ compliant, but progress was slow. There had been a change in the editorial board and important institutional knowledge had been lost. There was still a lot of work ahead to meet DOAJ's criteria...*

The actual application process to be included in DOAJ is relatively simple and does not cause major challenges: The journal fills in an application form on DOAJ's website, and subsequently the journal is assessed and validated by DOAJ's people. It is the actual work of becoming compliant with DOAJ's inclusion criteria that has proven to be the most difficult.

The majority of editors are deeply rooted in areas that are far from journal publishing and had problems understanding questions regarding topics like endogeneity, long-term preservation, copyright, and Creative Commons licensing.<sup>8</sup>

The project's experiences are not unique. In the study of Open Access Diamond journals, Bosman et al. (2021, p. 87) describe why some of their respondents are not registered in DOAJ: lack of knowledge about metadata and licenses, along with lack of time to complete DOAJ applications, are mentioned among the problems.

The project group learned that one of the challenges lies in the conditions for the editorial work itself. This was also one of the takeaways from one of our internal project group meetings, where the EIC of the [Journal of Business Anthropology](#), Kasper Tang Vangkilde, talked about the tasks and challenges as editor of a relatively small Open Access journal. According to Vangkilde, being an editor for a journal is extremely resource-intensive, while at the same time it may not always be particularly rewarding in relation to one's research career. This leads to relatively frequent replacements of the journals' editors, and thus many editors are “new in class” and have problems understanding the relatively technical terms DOAJ uses in the indexing criteria (particularly with respect to infrastructure and storage requirements). High editor turnover emphasizes the need for organized support – e.g. like the Danish project – which can assist the journals in the process of becoming compliant with DOAJ's requirements and act as a trouble-shooter for editors who would otherwise have had to give up.

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<sup>8</sup> Endogeneity is the proportion of articles authored by members of the editorial/advisory board or reviewers. According to the [DOAJ inclusion criteria](#), the proportion of endogeneity may not amount to more than 20 percent of the last two published issues.

## Copyright and licenses – a final challenge

*It was the issues of copyright in particular that were tricky for the small nutrition journal. Previously, it was the journal that held the copyright to the articles, but now the editorial board had finally agreed that the authors should retain the copyright. Then there was just the matter of Creative Commons licenses left...*

A major challenge for the journals in the project was decisions about copyright policies and Creative Commons licenses. In addition to DOAJ's requirement that a journal use open licenses, Creative Commons being the most popular, journals are also obligated to have a copyright policy and choose whether the author retains the copyright of their work or the copyright is transferred to the journal. In other words, a situation where copyright is shared between the authors and the journal is incompatible with DOAJ's recommendation on copyright policies. The journal editors had rarely, if ever, taken a position on this and typically did not know what the ownership of copyright means in relation to Open Access.

During the project, the project group did not advise the editors on particular license choices or that the copyright should go to a particular party. Instead, the group informed the editors about how copyright and licensing affect each other. This gave the editors a lot to think about, and they usually had to spend some time in the editorial board reaching a final decision on the choice of license and copyright ownership. Because the journals in the project do not make a profit from publishing, and thus have no incentive to control the article, editors often reached the decision that the authors should retain the copyright to their articles.

Before applying for DOAJ indexing, the project group also recommended journals to be clear about the ownership or provenance of copyright to articles that were published earlier, and possibly, which license terms apply to these. This proved to be a major challenge for the journals' editors. As mentioned earlier, a high turnover on journal editorial boards is common, and this can make it a challenging puzzle for a current board to get clarity on copyright ownership of previously published publications. One model was to declare "all rights reserved" for the back catalogue, often with the authors as copyright holders, and then explicitly state that future publications from such and such a date would be published under a Creative Commons license.

One concrete example from our study is The Danish Journal of Archaeology (DJA), which was approved for indexing in DOAJ. On the journal's website, the copyright's provenance and license terms are described in detail:

Counting from volume 11 (2022), articles published in DJA are licensed under Attribution-NonCommercial-ShareAlike 4.0 International (CC BY-NC-SA 4.0). The editorial board may accept other Creative Commons licenses for individual articles, if required by funding bodies e.g. the European Research Council. With the publication of volume 11, authors retain copyright to their articles and give DJA the right to the first publication. The authors retain copyright to earlier versions of the articles, such as the submitted and the accepted manuscript.

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## The project in perspective

*One day the message appeared in the inbox: The nutrition journal had been included in DOAJ. The process had been long and sometimes a bit tortuous, but everyone in the editorial group agreed that they could now present a journal to the outside world that was on a completely different and higher level.*

During the life of the project, 15 journals were indexed in DOAJ. Out of 58 journals, this number may not seem ostentatious. It has proven to be quite resource-intensive work to make journals compliant with DOAJ indexing criteria, especially because only 3 out of the 58 journals had a high DOAJ potential. In many cases, the editors did not know anything about DOAJ, and did not clearly understand the benefits of being registered in different indexes. Moreover, they had problems understanding questions regarding topics like endogeny, long-term preservation, copyright and licenses. These problems are exacerbated by the high editor turnover rate mentioned earlier, and the concomitant loss of institutional knowledge. It was particularly time-consuming to support the editors in the copyright and licensing areas – in order for the editors to be able to make well-founded choices for their journals, the project had to enrich the editors with knowledge in this area.

The project has shown that research libraries will often be able to have both an initiating and a supporting role during a given inclusion process. The involved libraries could facilitate the process via an ongoing dialogue with both the editors and DOAJ.

There are also wider implications for the roles and responsibilities of research libraries in a future publishing landscape: with a research infrastructure under constant development and with the influx of new concepts, systems, and platforms, researchers are in need of new types of support. For instance, the Open Science agenda means that researchers are increasingly required to navigate a new publishing reality that is fundamentally different from the traditional one. They are met with demands for Open Access and transparency in relation to research data, Data Management plans, and more, and at the same time, they have to find their way in a myriad of publishing

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<sup>9</sup> [Copyright and license information](#) on the website of Danish Journal of Archaeology



platforms for preprints, datasets, etc. This means more and more tasks that are not directly related to research.

If researchers are to navigate this brave new world, they need to understand the terminology and the infrastructure associated with it, and that requires solid administrative support to help them on their way. Without it, these well-intentioned initiatives will run aground, as our project clearly shows: the journals needed help and support for the indexing process, as they lacked the knowledge and familiarity with concepts related to online research infrastructure. It is important that research libraries do not assume that Open Science initiatives are all that it takes – libraries have to assume the responsibility and provide support where required.

As exemplified by the case of the nutrition journal's EIC who let the DOAJ application disappear in a pile of paper, it is important to remind and inform journal editorial boards of the benefits of indexing, and to provide them with solutions to the challenges that they face. With the right support, the path to admission to DOAJ will be less problematic.

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