Fostering diversity, gender parity and transparency in the evaluation process of an Open Science funding program

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Abstract—*The Scientific Information program from swissuniversities focusing on questions related to research data management, digitalization and the best practices to foster open access and open science principles has greatly evolved from 2013 to 2020. This article puts into light the transition of this program from Scientific Information towards Open Access and Open Science, where diversity, gender parity and transparency are for instance at the heart of the new program's evaluation.*
Keywords—*Open Science, Open Access, Transparency, Diversity, Gender Parity, Evaluation, Reviewers, Research*

I. INTRODUCTION

This article articulates the transition into open science and how this process emulates the changes to implement diversity, gender parity and transparency in the evaluation process of this new program. In which direction did the program evolve over time? What is at stake behind this transition and why is it important for the Swiss academic landscape as a whole?

II. FROM SCIENTIFIC INFORMATION TO OPEN SCIENCE

A. A short history with regards to the Scientific Information previous programmes (2013-2020)

Scientific Information has been the focus of the two 4-years previous periods 2013-2016 (CUS-P2) and 2017-2020 (P5). The evaluation process has been set in 2013-2014 and maintained without major modifications until the end of P5. The objectives of these two programs was to provide researchers, professors and students at Swiss higher education institutions with an optimal environment for the use (search, consultation, processing, visualization, storage, dissemination, sharing, reuse) of all forms of scientific information needed for their work.

Near the end of the P5 program, the expert group met to share their lessons learnt. They made recommendations to the direction of the program on how to orient and adapt the assessment of proposals and projects in the context of open science. Open Science is calling for more transparency and integrity, as well as a more comprehensive and participative governance, in particular in the evaluation process, which is the focus of this article.

B. The Open Science Program from swissuniversities (2021-2024)

The new program focusing on open science has a first emphasis on open access thanks to the Open Access Strategy and Action Plan (2018-2024)[1]. In this latter document, the goal of 100% of publicly funded research publications freely available by 2024 is presented in more depth. One of the main objectives of the Open Access Action Plan is to foster and ensure synergies, economies of scale and collaborations among Swiss higher education institutions. The Open Science Programme of swissuniversities is now implementing this Open Access Action Plan for 2021-2024.

In order to do so, a call for projects was unveiled on October 19, 2020 in order to foster collaborations among Swiss higher education to tackle current challenges to concretely implement open access on a national level[2]. Some of the projects which are particularly welcomed in this bottom-up and top down approach call include the participation of Switzerland to international initiatives, the inclusion of open science criteria in research assessment, the setting up of shared services and e-infrastructures, as well as the promotion of alternative forms of publication promoting open

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[1] https://www.swissuniversities.ch/fileadmin/swissuniversities/Dokumente/Organisation/SUK-P/SUK_P-2/PgB_OpenScience_-_Implementation_Phase_A_2021-2024_published.pdf
[2] https://www.swissuniversities.ch/en/themen/digitalisierung/open-access/conference-open-access-in-action

access[3]. Diversity, gender parity and transparency are some of the elements that the program wanted to pay particular attention to during the process of implementing the new reviewing process for this Open Science Program. Another new dimension present in the Open Science Program includes the peer review process to foster transparency. All proposals' abstracts and assessments are now published on the website in order to highlight an Open Review approach[4].

In 2020, the Open Science Delegation has provided recommendations regarding potential candidates to compose the new reviewer's pool for this Open Science program. One of the main difference is the composition, profile and number of this pool of experts. Out of the 30 candidates, 8 are based internationally outside of Switzerland, 13 are women and 17 are men[5]. New members will in addition join this first initial selection by the end of 2021 helping to include an even more diverse profile and reach an equal gender parity balance. In order to comply with the Open Science Program "Proposal", the reviewers pool composition must respect at the very least the following criteria:

More than 25% women

- More than 25% international

- More than 50% users/researchers

- More than 25% with service or e-infrastructure management expertise (e.g. legal, financial, business models)

- At least 2 reviewers specialized in diversity questions

From librarians to researchers, from lecturer to lawyer, from head of open access to head of innovation management, the professional roles, expertise and ages of the reviewers is very eclectic reflecting the diversity of the Swiss academic landscape today. A new addition to their duties is not only to evaluate projects when the proposals are submitted, but also to provide intermediary and final reviewing to assess the quality of the implementation of the selected projects over time.

The election of the new President for this reviewers' pool reflects as well a transparent process. Once the diverse group of reviewers have participated to an introductory workshop and agreed to sign the reviewers' declaration, all were invited to present their applications as president if they desired to do so by highlighting in their cover letter their experience, expertise and motivation to fill this role for the year 2021. Two candidates presented themselves as strongly interested to fill the duty of this President's role. Therefore, the reviewers pool was able to vote confidentially for their favorite candidate[6].

Grant agreements, declarations and contracts are also part of this transition to an Open Science Program. This translates itself by the fact that all reviewers have to sign a declaration confirming their interest for their mission as reviewers, their engagement for the reviewing process at the different stages of the project while being very transparent regarding any potential conflict of interests. The President of the reviewers' pool has to sign a contract with the President of the Open Science Delegation in order to confirm the strong engagement and involvement with the Open Science program and its Open Science Delegation. In addition, leading house institutions from selected proposals must now sign a contract to express their strong commitment to meet the objectives of their co-funded project. This legal dimension will very likely bring a new kind of collaboration and engagement on the level of the applicants, their institutions, the Reviewers pool and its new President. The future will tell us how this transition has been beneficial and which aspects can be optimized in the following years.

III. CONCLUSION

This article has presented the major changes that took place in the transition from the Scientific Information program to the Open Science program from swissuniversities. Over time the program evolved into a more diverse, transparent and international evaluation process. What is at stake behind this transition is the reflection of the diverse and international Swiss academic landscape as a whole, which aspires to put into practice the principles of Open Science. Since this transition is currently being put into practice, the lessons learned from the previous experts' pool, the newly formed reviewers' pool and the community will continue to be taken into consideration in order to continue to optimize the evaluation process of this Open Science funding program.

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[3] https://www.swissuniversities.ch/en/topics/digitalisation/open-science/oa-call-for-projects

[4] https://www.swissuniversities.ch/fileadmin/swissuniversities/Dokumente/Hochschulpolitik/Open_Science/Newsletter/211_Result_of_the_call_deadline_15.01.21.pdf

[5] https://www.swissuniversities.ch/fileadmin/swissuniversities/Dokumente/Hochschulpolitik/Open_Access/OS_Program_Reviewers_16122020.pdf

[6] https://www.swissuniversities.ch/en/topics/digitalisation/open-science/about-us