



LSE Impact

Understanding impact and practice in academic research

[About](#) [Latest](#) [Submissions](#) [Follow Us](#)

Luigi Capoani

Marta Bisol

October 8th, 2026

From open access to open participation, why research impact starts before publication

0 comments | 17 shares

Estimated reading time: 7 minutes

*If open research is judged only by who can read the final article, it overlooks an earlier inequality: who has the networks, feedback and institutional support to shape research in the first place. **Luigi Capoani** and **Marta Bisol** discuss how one open network, the European Youth Think Tank, works to create more opportunities for early career research to engage different audiences with their research.*

The open access movement changed how universities, funders and readers think about research. It made a powerful claim: knowledge

produced for the public good should not be locked behind paywalls.

That claim remains essential. But it is no longer sufficient.

For research to have impact, openness must begin earlier than publication. The question is not only who can read a journal article once it exists, but who had the opportunity to ask the question, access data, receive feed-back, find collaborators, publish safely and translate findings into policy debate. We call this open participation: the capacity to take part meaningfully in the production, circulation and translation of research, not simply to access its finished outputs.

Open participation is not a substitute for open access. It is the next stage of the same argument. If research is a public good, its public value depends not only on the circulation of finished outputs, but also on the processes and infrastructures through which those outputs are produced.

When the barrier moves upstream

For many years the most visible barrier to research communication was the paywall. Open access shifted the cost of reading away from the reader. Yet in models based on article processing charges, the barrier can reappear elsewhere: not as a price to read, but as a **price to publish**.

The issue is not whether publication charges are inherently legitimate or illegitimate, but that the same charge has radically different consequences depending on a researcher's institutional position. A well-funded group may absorb it through a grant or publishing agreement; an early-career researcher on a temporary contract, an independent scholar or a small research community may not.

Cancer Research UK's decision to **stop funding open-access publishing charges** from October 2026, while continuing to support routes such as self-archiving and low- or no-fee journals, illustrates a broader shift: openness is increasingly being separated from the assumption that authors must pay to achieve it. The next question is therefore not simply whether outputs are open, but whether the path into research is becoming more or less open for different kinds of researchers.

Open science is bigger than open access

This broader understanding is already embedded in the **UNESCO Recommendation on Open Science**, which links openness not only to access, but also to equity, participation, shared infrastructure and more inclusive research practices.

A research system can therefore make more papers available online while still leaving many people outside the conversation that produces those papers. The barriers are often informal: knowing where to submit, how peer review works, which dataset is reliable, how to find a co-author, how to write for policymakers, or where to receive serious feedback before a draft is rejected.

Taken together, these resources form a kind of research capital: the knowledge, relationships and institutional familiarity that help researchers navigate the production and communication of knowledge. This capital is unequally distributed even when formal access to publications is equal.

For early-career researchers, these inequalities interact with academic precarity. The **OECD has identified the precarity of academic research careers as a structural challenge**. Short contracts, weak institutional

attachment and uncertain career pathways do not simply affect employment conditions; they can also reduce access to the networks through which opportunities, feedback and collaboration circulate.

Networks are also research infrastructure

When we speak about research infrastructure, we usually think about laboratories, libraries, databases, repositories or high-performance computing. These are indispensable. But research also depends on a quieter infrastructure: networks of trust, mentorship, feedback and collaboration.

Networks help ideas travel before they become publications. They allow a draft to be challenged, a method to be improved, a policy question to be sharpened and a young researcher to learn the unwritten rules of scholarly communication. Networks should therefore be understood not merely as professional advantages, but as part of the social infrastructure through which research becomes possible.

Our experience at the **European Youth Think Tank** offers one small example. Bringing together early-career researchers across countries and disciplines creates spaces for feedback, co-authorship and policy-oriented work that do not depend on belonging to the same university or research centre. Such communities do not replace universities, peer review or formal research funding. What they can do is reduce the cost of distance (geographical, disciplinary and institutional) between researchers and the conversations in which opportunities become visible.

The point is not to romanticise digital collaboration. Online networks can reproduce hierarchy, unequal visibility and weak quality control. But

designed carefully, they can create additional entry points into research conversations, especially for researchers who are not yet embedded in established academic networks.

Impact begins before publication

If participation begins before publication, impact often does too.

Research becomes useful through activities that precede or sit alongside the final article: sharing data and code, circulating preprints, discussing findings with practitioners, producing policy briefs and translating evidence for non-specialist audiences.

Research assessment reform already points in this direction: both **DORA** and the **Agreement on Reforming Research Assessment** call for broader recognition of research outputs, practices and forms of influence beyond conventional publication metrics.

For policy-relevant research, this matters especially because policymakers often need more than a final journal article. They need evidence that is timely, intelligible, transparent and connected to an identifiable policy problem. A dataset, a short explainer, a comparative table or a cross-disciplinary review can shape debate even when it is not the final academic output. If those activities remain invisible in evaluation systems, researchers have fewer incentives to do them well.

A practical test for open participation

Before calling a research environment open, institutions and funders should ask four questions:

- Can researchers without large grants or institutional publishing agreements still share their work credibly?
- Can early-career and independent researchers access serious feedback before formal submission?
- Are datasets, code, preprints, policy outputs and public engagement recognised as legitimate research contributions?
- Are cross-border and interdisciplinary networks treated as part of research capacity rather than as peripheral professional activity?

These questions do not remove the need for quality control. On the contrary, open participation requires rigorous standards, because widening access without feedback, curation and accountability can make the research ecosystem noisier rather than better. The aim is not to lower the bar, but to make the path to reaching it less dependent on pre-existing institutional advantage.

From reading to contributing

The achievement of open access was to change the question of who can read research. Open participation asks an earlier one: who gets a realistic chance to shape it?

A genuinely open research system should do both. It should make knowledge accessible once it is produced, while also widening access to the networks, feedback and infrastructures through which useful knowledge is created in the first place.

 *Enjoying this blogpost? Sign up to our **mailing list** and receive all the latest LSE Impact Blog news direct to your inbox* 

*This article gives the views of the author, not the position of LSE Impact or the London School of Economics. You are agreeing with our **comment policy** when you leave a comment.*

*Image credit: **Olga S L** on **Shutterstock**.*

About the author



Luigi Capoani

Luigi Capoani is President and Founder of the European Youth Think Tank (EYTT). He is a researcher in applied economics and Adjunct Professor of International Economics at Ca' Foscari University of Venice. His work focuses on international trade, industrial policy, regional economics, sustainable development and public policy, with particular interest in the links between economic research and policy design.



Marta Bisol

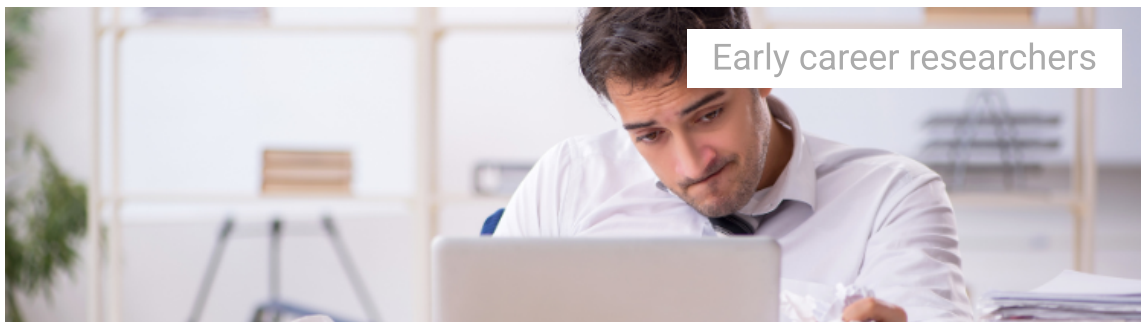
Marta Bisol is a Policy Analyst at the European Youth Think Tank (EYTT), with a background in policy analysis at Bocconi University. Her work focuses on European public policy, macroeconomics, international finance and sustainable finance. She is particularly interested in evidence-based policymaking and in translating economic and policy research into accessible analysis for institutional and non-specialist audiences.

Posted In: Early career researchers | Featured | Impact | Open Research

Leave a Reply

Your email address will not be published. Required fields are marked *

Related Posts



Early career researchers

Rejection in academia is structural not personal

JUNE 17TH, 2026

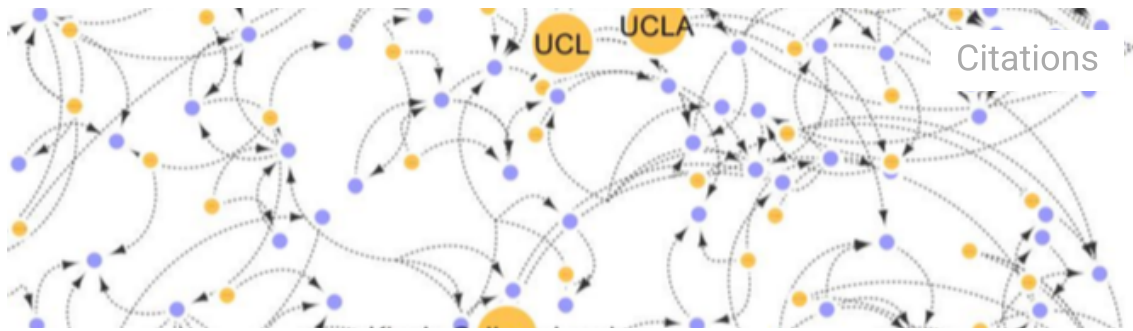
2 { ... }



A broader vision of open research is needed to include the arts, humanities and social sciences

FEBRUARY 26TH, 2026

3 {...}



Is who you know as important as what you know? Mapping the invisible colleges supporting academic prestige

OCTOBER 9TH, 2019

7 {...}



The visibility problem in academic policy engagement

Connect with LSE



About

Republishing

Submissions

Newsletters

Community standards



THE LONDON SCHOOL
OF ECONOMICS AND
POLITICAL SCIENCE ■

© 2026 London School of Economics and Political Science (LSE). LSE Blogs.

[Contact Us](#) [Privacy Policy](#) [Terms of Service](#) [Accessibility Statement](#) [Copyright Information](#)