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25 years of interactive open access publishing: An interview with current and former EGU Publications Committee chairs Barbara Ervens and Ulrich Pöschl

Eduardo Queiroz Alves · March 6, 2026 · Open Access, Publications · No Comments

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internet, EGU was already flipping the script on the black box of scientific publishing. By launching the first interactive open-access journal, they moved the scientific conversation from behind closed doors into the open air. Today, that experiment has grown into a powerhouse portfolio of 20 journals and a vibrant community of over 50,000 peer-reviewed articles.

Today, I sat down with current and former EGU Publications Committee chairs Barbara Ervens and Ulrich Pöschl, to discuss how this interactive approach builds trust, supports early-career scientists, and stays ahead of the curve in the age of AI.

Hello Barbara and Ulrich. Thank you so much for your time and for agreeing to answer a few questions of mine! Firstly, I want to know, why is this year an important milestone for the EGU Publications?

Ulrich: Hello Eduardo, and thanks for having us! This year, we celebrate 25 years interactive open access publishing to reflect on the success of the European Geosciences Union as a pioneer and trailblazer in open science. In 2001, [Atmospheric Chemistry and Physics](#) was launched as the first scientific journal with transparent peer review and public online discussion. Since then, the EGU portfolio has grown to [20 interactive open access journals that have published over 50,000 high-quality peer reviewed scientific articles and 250,000 interactive comments](#) and replies from authors, reviewers, and the scientific community.

Despite global initiatives and declarations promoting open science, [a large fraction of publicly funded research is still locked behind subscription paywalls](#), and peer review continues to take place behind closed doors in most journals. As a result, readers can neither assess whether publications were rigorously reviewed by experts, nor can they learn from the exchange between authors and reviewers as an integral part of the scientific discourse. At a time when science and scientific expertise are increasingly questioned, transparency as provided through public peer review is essential for building and maintaining trust in science.

Barbara: [The EGU model of interactive open access publishing](#) removes access barriers and enables efficient integration and use of scientific results and discussion in research, education and innovation. It was the first and continues to be one of the most successful examples of open access publishing and open peer review in the global scientific community.

How does interactive open access publishing benefit science and humanity?

Barbara: Open access fosters scientific research, education and innovation, but we do more than just providing access to the final published journal article. We understand publishing and peer review as a process that is central to the scientific discourse and progress. There is great value in opening and documenting this process, during which scientific knowledge is assessed, refined and validated.

Therefore, manuscripts are first published as preprints or discussion papers, allowing rapid dissemination and discussion of new findings. The manuscripts are publicly peer-reviewed, whereby dedicated referees, authors, editors and other members of the scientific community can contribute to the discussion. Readers can follow how a manuscript evolves in response to this feedback, gaining insight into the reasoning, debate and evaluation that define scientific progress.

Ulrich: This transparent exchange is important in scientific discourse, as it reveals not only what we know, but also how well we know it, and where the limitations are. Accordingly, the complete documentation of this process, including all manuscript versions, referee reports, community comments and author responses, is of high educational value and frequently used in our community, e.g., in various journal clubs. Early career scientists learn how to engage constructively with criticism, how to respond professionally, and how manuscripts are improved through review and revision. Beyond training, this openness facilitates evaluation, strengthens accountability, encourages more careful writing and reviewing, and therefore, contributes to higher-quality and more trustworthy scientific literature.

How do the EGU publications go beyond traditional scientific journals?

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open science framework. This framework includes the interactive community platform [EGUsphere](#), twenty interactive [open access journals](#) covering the full width of geosciences, the interdisciplinary highlight compilation EGU Letters, and the Encyclopedia of Geosciences. EGUsphere is an integrative open access platform for the posting of preprints, comments, conference abstracts and presentations. Here, all preprints entering the public peer-review process in an EGU journal are published as discussion papers. In addition, EGUsphere accepts preprints that may not yet be ready or not even intended for peer-review and publication in a scientific journal. Thus, EGUsphere combines the features of traditional preprint servers and the discussion forums that EGU had introduced in 2001 for public peer review (e.g., Atmospheric Chemistry and Physics Discussions). EGU Letters comprise concise highlight journal articles that are of comparable quality, interdisciplinary relevance, and visibility as in traditional high impact journals, and the Encyclopedia of Geosciences contains comprehensive review articles.

Barbara: Instead of having separate journals for special papers, EGU Letters and the Encyclopedia of Geosciences rely on the transparent expert peer review and editorial decisions in the disciplinary EGU interactive open access journals to distill and highlight particularly important papers. This interactive multi-stage open peer process supports both scientific rigor and the broader dissemination of knowledge in ways that few other publishing models currently achieve.

How do you respond to criticism or skepticism about open access publishing?

Ulrich: The value of open access publishing is widely recognized, but some researchers and stakeholders still raise concerns about the costs and quality of open access journals. At EGU, we address and resolve these concerns by demonstrating that open access is not only compatible with, but actually instrumental for, maintaining meticulous peer review and high scientific standards at moderate costs. Unlike commercial publishers, EGU is a non-profit organization that keeps publishing costs as low as possible, and any revenues generated are re-invested into union activities that benefit the scientific community, such as early career scientist support, conferences and other scientific initiatives. EGU also applies a generous waiver scheme to ensure that authors from low and middle-income countries or anyone without dedicated funding, can publish without financial barriers. This makes the EGU publications truly inclusive, fair and financially sustainable, showing that high-quality open access publishing can be both affordable and responsible.

Looking ahead, what are future developments you envision for the EGU publications and scientific publishing as a whole?

Barbara: The EGU publishing portfolio will continue to evolve and grow to meet the changing needs and demands of the global scientific community. This includes new publishing venues for emerging research areas such as the recently launched journal Earth Observation and plans for a journal dedicated to mathematical methods that may follow later this year.

At the same time, we continue to explore ways to further improve the publishing process by responsibly leveraging new technologies, while maintaining transparency, integrity, trust and community involvement. In particular, the rapid development of AI-based tools presents both challenges and opportunities for scientific publishing. AI can be a helpful assistant for all involved parties: authors, reviewers, editors and readers. For example, AI tools can help to improve clarity and check technical aspects without replacing guidance and judgment by human peers. Scientific publishing will continue to fundamentally rely on expert evaluation, critical thinking and scholarly debate. More broadly, we expect that transparency in peer review will become standard across the global publishing landscape. Publicly sharing peer review reports helps counter concerns about poor editorial practices or excessive commercial interests in scientific publishing. Some publishers, such as Springer Nature, are following our example and have begun to mandate that peer review reports accompany published papers. This is an important positive step but does not yet fully live up to the EGU interactive open access publishing model, where the scientific discourse is fully transparent, traceable, and open to contributions from the global community.

Ulrich: To conclude, we can both confidently say that EGU publications are well positioned to meet current and future demands of the scientific community, while continuing to serve as a role model for transparent, community-

25 years of publications EGUsphere open access peer review publications



By **Eduardo Queiroz Alves**

Eduardo Queiroz Alves is the Editorial Manager at the European Geosciences Union. He supports the executive editors of EGU journals, the EGUsphere coordinator, and the Publications Committee, while collaborating with Copernicus Publications to develop inter-journal initiatives and promote the EGU publications. He holds a PhD in Archaeological Science/Earth Sciences from the University of Oxford in the UK and is passionate about open access communication.

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