

Open Access in the crosshairs

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Many years have passed since the scholarly communication system has become increasingly challenged by a bunch of idealists or troublemakers, depending on the point of view. The pioneering Budapest Open Access Initiative (BOAI) and Berlin Declaration officially started a world-wide movement, which quickly turned out to be more than a fad: namely to unlock publicly funded research outputs hitherto only accessible via (often obscenely expensive) journal subscriptions.

The traditional subscription-based model has definitely shown its age, and its thick walls have been continuously under fire for almost two decades now.

In the beginning, two main ways were proposed to achieve the lofty goals of Open Access (OA). Researchers could either self-archive (versions of) their publications in public repositories (later called Green OA), or they could avoid such a detour and publish right-away in OA journals (later to be known as Gold OA). This triggered avalanche would sooner or later, but inevitably catch all possibly involved stakeholders: researchers, publishers, research managers, policy-makers, libraries, funders.

In the beginning, Green OA seemed to be more promising, resulting in an industrious development and launch of a multitude of institutional and disciplinary repositories. However, the corresponding policies (if adopted in the first place) are mostly weak and rarely go beyond sheer recommendations. Moreover technical infrastructures are still often insufficient (usability problems, lack of standardized interfaces, uncertain sustainability). Last but not least, researchers hate bothering with publishers' self-archiving

policies and copyright issues. They particularly hate spending extra-time on depositing the same stuff in different systems without appropriate recognition.

And that is why Gold OA has become the object of desire within the last years. But of course this road is bumpy and winding as well. Green OA is not without cost, but Gold OA is far more expensive. Many OA publishers, particularly in the Sciences, rely on so-called Article Processing Charges (APCs), fees to be paid up-front instead of subscriptions in retrospect. In the meantime the term Gold OA does not only include real OA journals, but also hybrid journals, which are traditional subscription-based journals with the option to make single articles OA for a fee. As long as closed access and OA journal content coexists in parallel, hybrid publishers are more than happy about two separate revenue streams: regular subscriptions and APCs. This grievance is generally known as "double dipping" and currently addressed by committed librarians, who have already successfully negotiated the first "read and publish" and "offsetting" deals with major publishers in order to avoid paying twice for the same content. As worthy of praise such deals might be, they will hardly motivate hybrid publishers to flip their journals to real Gold OA in the foreseeable future.

The European Union aims for reaching 100% OA of scientific publications by 2020 (Enserink, 2016).

According to recent studies (Bosman and Kramer, 2018; Martin-Martin et al., 2018; Wohlgemuth et al., 2017) we are light-years away from this more than ambitious goal, since Green OA is comparably insignificant, and

annual Gold OA growth rates are modest at best. It is very unlikely that the forthcoming 30+ months will bring earthshaking changes.

The so-called transition period will depend on a multitude of variables, and its duration is therefore almost impossible to predict. So why would the European Union set such an unrealistic goal? And why would we put (almost) all of our eggs in the OA publishing basket, despite of the slow Gold OA uptake and high associated costs? Many repositories are already there, and many more are to be launched. It's too bad that repositories have never enjoyed their deserved popularity due to the beforehand mentioned reasons. However, would it not be wise to revisit the benefits of the Green Road? To be fair, there are many "ifs". But if repositories were backed by strong policies, were more usable and sustainable, more interconnected with other systems (like CRIS, bibliographic databases, other repositories, etc.) and more visible, enhanced with metrics data and equipped with customer-oriented research-supporting services (like copyright advice, long-term archiving, professional promotion of research output via social media channels, etc.), would they not be an attractive alternative to the currently hyped Gold road? Yes, "there is much room for the growth of Green OA", as put in a nutshell by Martin-Martin et al. (2018).

All roads lead to Rome, finally. Hopefully. The journey might only take much longer than anticipated.

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