

Collaboration to Unlock Access : Presentations at the LIBER Conference in St Petersburg

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OPEN ACCESS OPPORTUNITIES THROUGH COLLABORATION

The opportunities provided by open access to journal literature have generated much interest and discussion. LIBER's approach to this important topic at the St Petersburg Conference was through the theme of collaboration. Each group of stakeholders in scholarly communication, from author through to reader, has an interest in open access. If open access is to be achieved it has to be through collaboration between authors, funding agencies, publishers and librarians working together in the best interests of readers of academic literature. The benefits to individuals and to human society to be gained from open access are described in this quotation from the Budapest Open Access Initiative:

"An old tradition and a new technology have converged to make possible an unprecedented public good. The old tradition is the willingness of scientists and scholars to publish the fruits of their research in scholarly journals without payment, for the sake of inquiry and knowledge. The new technology is the internet. The public good they make possible is the world-wide electronic distribution of the peer-reviewed journal literature and completely free and unrestricted access to it by all scientists, scholars, teachers, students, and other curious minds. Removing access barriers to this literature will accelerate research, enrich education, share the learning of the rich with the poor and the poor with the rich, make this literature as useful as it can be, and lay the foundation for uniting humanity in a common intellectual conversation and quest for knowledge."

Since calling the meeting which developed the Budapest Open Access Initiative, the Open Society Institute has continued to support discussion and action to implement the two strategies leading to open access identified in Budapest, and the open access session at the LIBER Conference was supported by a grant from OSI.

MEETING THE FUNDING AGENCIES' NEEDS AND EXPECTATIONS.

Dr. Mark Walport's presentation was given from experience as a distinguished researcher in rheumatic diseases and as Director of the Wellcome Trust, a major funder of medical research. Dr. Walport described how he personally and the Wellcome Trust corporately came to support open access to medical literature. Each year billions of dollars in public

and charitable funds are spent on medical research, research which needs to be widely accessible if it is to benefit human and animal health. The current system where most research is published in journals requiring the reader or a library to pay a subscription is failing both the science community and the general public, as shown by a study published by the Wellcome Trust.[1] Dr Walport illustrated the effect of the current system with two examples, an article funded by the Wellcome Trust to which he – as Director of the Wellcome – could not gain access without paying a subscription, and a statistic that only 40% of research funded by the UK National Health Service is immediately available to NHS staff. A second report published by the Trust [2] provides evidence that an open access model can deliver high-quality peer-reviewed research over the internet at a cost that is significantly less than the subscription model.

How will publishers respond to this challenge? A few publishers are treating open access as an opportunity, and Dr Jan Velterop's presentation described the work of BioMed Central in publishing a large number of open access journals. BioMed Central is a commercial publisher aiming to make a reasonable profit while improving access to the research it publishes. Dr Velterop described how open access could enable taxpayer-funded research to be used to its full potential, using new techniques such as text-mining and data-mining which only work well when there are no access or permission barriers. BioMed Central is confident that their business model is viable in the long-term.

Theresa Velden, Executive Director of the Heinz Nixdorf Centre for Information Management, described how the Max Planck Society has joined international efforts to maximize the impact of research and to exploit the connectivity of the Internet to build a global knowledge base. The Max Planck Society has been instrumental in forming an international coalition around the Berlin Declaration on Open Access to the Knowledge of the Sciences and the Humanities. As a leading funder of fundamental research the Society has recognized open access as a key to increase quality and excellence in research. Theresa Velden's presentation complemented those of Dr Walport and Dr Velterop, each speaker reaching the same conclusion about the value of open access to research from their different perspectives.

THE LIBRARIANS' PERSPECTIVES

Two distinguished librarians presented two very different perspectives on open access. Ann Okerson of Yale University Library took a broad view of the open access movement, placing it in the context of a variety of approaches to the improvement of access. Ann described six "flavors" of access: partial open access, delayed open access, open access for developing nations, author-pays open access, creating institutional repositories and self or e-print archiving. Declaring herself not to be a believer in the full ideal of open access, she nevertheless stated that "most of us do, I am sure, share the

desire to see the broadest possible access to the best possible information. If we do not achieve utopia, we can still take pleasure in reaching a better place." Ann's prediction of the future for better access was therefore a mix of various improvements in an increasingly diverse world.

By contrast Lars Bjornshauge, Director of Lund University Libraries, presented the practical steps Lund and other Swedish universities are taking to encourage open access not only in a Swedish context but as part of the global open access movement. The most visible of the Swedish developments is the Directory of Open Access Journals, now listing over 1200 journals with searchability at article level across more than 300 journals. The Directory is funded by the Open Society Institute and Lund University Libraries with support from SPARC and BIBSAM. The Swedish librarians have also been leading an initiative to encourage support for open access from their universities and funding agencies. Like colleagues in other countries, Swedish librarians are finding considerable interest in open access which they are working to turn into practical support from their academic colleagues.

CONCLUSION : NOT YET!

It is customary to end any journal article with a "conclusion". In the case of this summary of the open access presentation at the LIBER St Petersburg Conference, there is no conclusion as yet. The debate continues. Strong commitment to open access is being expressed from funding agencies and researchers. Some publishers are making a commitment to open access. Some librarians are taking positive action to support open access. The best of what is being achieved is being done on a collaborative basis, such as the Berlin Declaration or the Lund Directory. Good though the progress has been in such a short period of time since the Budapest Open Access Initiative, the goal of widespread open access has not been achieved as yet. Will the future be the kind of mixed environment described by Ann Okerson or will the future be the full open access scenario anticipated by the other speakers at this interesting and challenging session?

NOTES

1. An economic analysis of scientific research publishing. A report commissioned by the Wellcome Trust. Compiled by SQW, January 2003.
http://www.wellcome.ac.uk/doc_WTD003181.html

2. Costs and business models in scientific research publishing. A report commissioned by the Wellcome Trust. Compiled by SQW, April 2004.
http://www.wellcome.ac.uk/en/doc_WTD003185.html

WEB SITES REFERRED TO IN THE TEXT

Berlin Declaration on Open Access to the Knowledge of the Sciences and the Humanities. <http://www.zim.mpg.de/openaccess-berlin/berlindeclaration.html>

BIBSAM. <http://www.kb.se/bibsam/>

BioMed Central. <http://www.biomedcentral.com/>

BOAI - Budapest Open Access Initiative. <http://www.soros.org/openaccess>

DOAJ - Directory of Open Access Journals. <http://www.doaj.org/>

Lund University Libraries. <http://www.lub.lu.se/index.html.en>

Max Planck Society. <http://www.mpg.de/english/portal/index.html>

OSI - Open Society Institute. <http://www.soros.org/>

SPARC, the Scholarly Publishing and Academic Resources Coalition.
<http://www.arl.org/sparc/>

Wellcome Trust. <http://www.wellcome.ac.uk/>