

Paradoxes of Open Access

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The Received View

Open Access is a publishing model that provides immediate, worldwide, barrier-free access to the full text of research articles without requiring a subscription to the journal in which these articles are published. Accordingly, readers are allowed to copy, use, distribute, transmit and display the work publicly and to make and distribute derivative works, in any digital medium for any responsible purpose, subject to proper attribution of authorship.

In this model, the publication costs are usually covered by the author's institution or research funds. These Open Access charges replace subscription charges and allow the publishers to make the published material freely available to all interested online readers. At the same time, authors who publish in Open Access journals retain the copyright of their article.

Other than their cost-recovery model, Open Access journals are no different from traditional subscription-based journals; they undergo the same peer-review and quality control as any other scholarly journal. Moreover, Open Access allows for maximum visibility, uptake and use of the published material.

The Gold Road

- Authors (or their institutions) pay a fee (ASC and/or APC) to publish their articles open access on peer-reviewed journals
- Key/core journals and (hybrid or full) authors-pay OA: the “Springer Connection”
<http://www.springer.com/gp/open-access/open-access-funding>
- Springer Compact Deal (2016-2018): university libraries and research institutions pay for (local) authors to publish OA...with Springer!
<http://www.liber2015.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2015/03/Springer-Compact.pdf>
- Supporting “gold” OA = feeding *private* publishers with *public* money? In addition to unsustainable subscription costs?!

By the way: beware of predatory OA!

- Proliferation of “fully OA” journals (frequently based in emerging countries) adopting the authors-pay solution
- Using the OA *aura* to recruit young contributors (“heterodox” and/or unfunded researchers) and collaborators (i.e. volunteers)
- Low-ranked journals, sometimes with questionable reviewing process and opaque editorial policies (ASC, APC, hardcopy additional fees, etc.)
- *We Can Publish It For You...But Not Wholesale!*

A Silver / Bronze Road?

- *Directory of Open Access Journal*: 67% of fully OA journals do not ask authors for publication fees (<https://doaj.org/oainfo>)
- BUT: usually small (even if rigorous and not predatory) journals based on volunteer collaborators → low ranking, despite their scientific quality!
- High ranking and academic “prestige” actually related to *industrial-scale scientific production* (i.e. to large-scale publishing houses)
- If they want to become key/core journals and “stay in the market”, they are forced to adopt the authors-pay solution

The Green Road

- Sharing on *institutional repositories* (e.g. *arxiv*, *SSRN*, *pubmedcentral*) articles previously published on traditional peer-reviewed journals
- *Registry of Open Access Repositories* (<http://roar.eprints.org/>)
- Republication only possible when publisher's *embargo* expires
- Non-homogeneous editorial policies concerning “green” OA
<http://www.sherpa.ac.uk/romeo/>
- The Green Road does not question neither subscription-based nor hybrid journals: authors should retain rights on their own articles!

A Pragmatic Compromise

- Dealing with the *Berlin Declaration on Open Access to Knowledge in the Sciences and Humanities* (2003)
<http://openaccess.mpg.de/Berlin-Declaration>
- Supporting the Green Road (not the Gold one) from an institutional perspective
http://www.researchresearch.com/index.php?articleId=1354635&option=com_news&template=rr_2col&view=article
- Republication on OA repositories: *mandatory* for research outcomes funded with *public* money, *strongly recommended* in general (apart from secrecy issues)
- International agreements with academic publishers to make them more and more “friendly” with the Green Road → standard and homogeneous editorial policies

The Publish-Or-Perish Trap

- Current evaluation/selection criteria for *scientific quality* (or even *excellence*) and their strong supporters among policy-makers: key/core journals and publishers, bibliometrics, academic “prestige/expertise”, career opportunities
- Paradoxically enough: less pragmatic and more radical views on OA seem to be an issue for *senior stakeholders*, rather than for *junior scholars*!
- *Humanities and Social Sciences* (lower publication rate, “slow science”): Green Road and public archives as good solution for *authors*, especially with no financial support from Universities and research institutions...
- Max 2 years of editorial embargo sounds reasonable to publish on top-ranked journals, avoid fees, and deal (afterwards) with OA...less for journal *subscribers*!
- *Physical and Biomedical Sciences* (higher publication rate, “fast science”): frontrunners of the OA movement against subscription-based and hybrid journals

In-House Journals: A Possible Solution?

- Scientific journals as fully OA (no subscriptions, no fees) *house organs* of their Universities or research institutions/networks (UP as model)?
- Advantages: *institutional* publishing houses (ideally no-profit and no-loss), with editorial board, referees, reviewers, and editors belonging to their teaching/research personnel (i.e. already paid for their job)
- Problems: need for robust and constant *funding*, both public and private (to stay no-profit and no-loss) + institution/publishing house/journal ranking
→ *survival of the strongest* and concentration of academic power?
- Questions: is this way to “Total OA” *economically* sustainable and *ethico-politically* desirable? Does it question scientific *production* as large-scale *industrial* process? Is it good for *academic freedom*?

What About The “i-Tunes / Spotify” Model?

- Neither closed- nor open-access journals: a “third way”?
- Authors pay a (relatively) small fee to publish their papers, readers pay a little bit more to read them online (no more hardcopies)
- One can visualize single papers or streams of papers according to multiple browsing criteria
→ *toll access* with (relatively) cheap subscriptions?
- Download excluded (?): online journals as *article playlists*
- Advantages: *cloud publishing*, de-materialization of scientific production, (relatively) sustainable costs both for authors and readers/institutions
- Problems: papers embargoed (even permanently?!), profit margin for publishers + journal ranking = no guarantee for *equality* → prices are *market-driven*!
- Moreover: publishers would retain rights on *metadata* → the Gold Mine of the 21st century and their *main source* of profit!

Private Publishers vs. Public Evaluation?

- Publishing houses *de facto* acting as quality-certifying (private) institutions for academic production, mainly through the (double-blind) peer-review system: should we separate *evaluation* from *publication*?
- Circularities and potential interest conflicts between *private publishers* as scientific evaluators and *public evaluation agencies* relying on them!
- Proposal: public agencies (at national or international level? ERC as possible model?) reviewing papers before authors choose where and how (Green/Gold OA mandatory or just recommended?!) to make them appear...should publishers just publish (or perish)?
- Advantages: no-profit/no-loss, *formal* independency, evaluation of academic production \equiv evaluation of scholars/institutions \rightarrow same public agencies with (inter-)disciplinary panels
- Problems: the technocratic dream: *actual* independency and neutrality (both economic and political)? Paradoxes of *expertise*: how evaluators should be evaluated to be *enrolled* as such? Should they be chosen by former evaluators on the basis of their *scientific quality*?! ($\rightarrow \infty$)
- Threats: *bureaucratic* instead of *democratic* centralism (e.g. ANVUR!!!), long-term financial and logistic troubles to maintain such complex, maybe hypertrophic agencies...!

Open Access, Open Questions

- None of the proposed solutions seems to be able to overcome the difficulties raised by the other ones...maybe we need a combined strategy (e.g. Green Road + “fair” Gold Road + in-house publishing + free OA journals, where smaller scale does not necessarily imply lower quality!)
- The quest for an “Absolute OA” (free both for authors and for readers/institutions, independent from publishing houses, fully horizontal and democratic, etc.) appears quite utopian (at least now)...but a strong *regulative ideal* of “making science”!
- Can/should we ask academic publishers, especially if they are multinational corporations (but there are also cooperative publishers!) to turn back to their *early-modern* role of editors, typographers, and book-sellers, while the scientific evaluation of their products should stay elsewhere?
- How can we persuade policy-makers, experts, and academic stakeholders to make OA options *preferable* and *more valuable*, without threatening academic freedom? How can we make them evaluate *scientific quality* in a more comprehensive way, less concerned with “bibliometrics” and more with ethico-deontological issues?

OA: An Overview

<http://legacy.earlham.edu/~peters/fos/overview.htm>

<http://openaccess.eprints.org/index.php?/archives/1043-The-Green-Road-To-OA-And-Then-On-To-Fair-Gold.html>

<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Self-archiving>

<http://www.openedition.org/>

<http://www.edition-open-access.de/>

http://wiki.openarchives.it/index.php/Regolamenti_e_Policy_sull%27Open_Access

<http://www.roars.it/online/tag/open-access/>

<http://www.roars.it/online/sei-miti-da-sfatare-a-proposito-di-open-access/>