

OPEN ACCESS THE LAST TEN YEARS – HOW FAR HAVE WE COME?

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The 10th anniversary of ScieCom Info is a good point in time to stop up and think of the past (and the future). What have we accomplished during these years? Everything? Something? Anything? Nothing?

I've been following what later became OA since about 1995, but didn't start working in OA until 2006. And when you start looking back, you realize you never take the time to document and make a systematic overview of recent history. So when you need to write about it, you have to rely on an increasingly frailer and more distant memory ...

Ten years ago, OA journals had started up, but not in large numbers. At the start in 2003, DOAJ listed 350 journals, now it lists more than 10,000. Many humanities and social sciences journals started the transition to publishing free on the internet before the term Open Access was coined. These were either start-ups, or older paper-based journals converted to e-publishing, but they were generally scientist/scholar initiated, led, edited and owned. The commercial OA publishing started at the beginning of this millennium, with BMC being established in 2000, commencing APC-based publishing in 2002. PLOS started operations in 2003. Today, we can safely say, in general, that new journals being established are Open Access, and that it is within Open Access publishing growth comes. Commercial OA publishing now publishes a majority of the articles being published OA, and it is my belief that their share of the market will increase, even if the processes of converting existing, subscription-based HSS journals to OA only have started. There is still much to be done about the financing of HSS journals under an OA regime, and there is still much resistance to converting to a commercial model among both editors and authors. In Norway, the OA journals are mainly those who never had a chance as commercial ventures but have been

heavily subsidized by their owners, and OA has been a – good! – combination of cost savings and increased distribution and readership. Only recently have publisher-based journals started dipping their toes in the apparently hostile-seeming waters of OA, strongly urged on by Research Council policy statements and financing systems. During the next ten years – I believe – nearly all journals that intend to survive, will have converted to some OA model, though not necessarily all based on APCs. Every journal is different and needs a different approach. Paper-based journals will be nearly extinct, but being electronic will not necessarily mean being Open Access. The big question is not whether HSS journals will be OA, but whether the OA journals will be the existing ones, having converted to a new model, or new OA ones that have out-performed the older TA ones.

Repositories ten years ago mainly meant ArXive and some other subject-specific repositories to most of us, while institutional repositories were something the more fore-sighted institutions were thinking about. In Norway, the processes of establishing IRs started among the universities (there were only four, at that time) around 2004/2005, and they started operating 2005/2006. Munin, our repository, started operating in September 2006, but we had a ETD repository operating before then, probably from 1999. IRs have a broader scope than ETD repositories, so I think we can safely say that IRs started in Norway 10 years ago. Today, we have a magnificent infrastructure with nearly 60 repositories. Nearly all government Higher Education (HE) institutions have them; only 3 institutions do not have one. And they are all on the list of institutions that will disappear soon, if the ministry gets it will regards consolidation in the HE sector. The lack of an IR is, however, not the main reason for their disappearance ...

What we don't have in Norway, however, is content.

We are not alone, there are few IRs in the world that are impressively full of content, and none are overflowing. A recent report (Archambault et al. 2014) has a table on page 20 that suggests Norway is an outlier when it comes to average content per repository. (And the numbers look to me like the content number is overestimated, while the number of repositories is lower than the correct number.) We have less content per repository than the average country. And the average country is not that successful when it comes to filling repositories, either. So there is work to be done! Another problem is that much of what fills the repositories is “grey matter” – master’s and doctoral theses, reports etc. – not green, self-archived articles. Not that grey matter is uninteresting, but the real sought-after scientific and scholarly value lies in the self-archiving of peer-reviewed content, like journal articles. While we find in the literature numbers indicating that 20 % of all peer-reviewed content was available as gold or green OA in 2009 (Björk et al. 2010), Norway reached 8 % for the year 2013. Not impressive, to say the least. Some of the dismal numbers is due to how the numbers themselves are collected, but the reality behind them isn’t all that much better.

Financing APCs is an important part of making OA feasible, this has always been a problem with the APC-based journals. Gradually, funders have started making funds available for funding APC, but it has taken some time to get this functioning well, and more work – and money – is still needed. Institutional publication funds, set up to create a “level playing field” between OA and TA for the institution’s own authors, saw the day of light about 2005.



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In the Nordic countries, as far as I can tell, Lund university were first with their fund set up in 2008. The first Norwegian ones, at the University of Agder and the University college of Telemark, started in 2010. “My” own fund at UiT The Arctic University of Norway started in early 2011 and quickly became the larger Norwegian fund – until the University of Bergen started a fund, one even funding hybrid publishing, in 2013. All the larger HE institutions and most small and medium-sized now have a fund – and the rest will soon have ones. The Research Council announced in June this year that all HE institutions having a publication fund were eligible to ask for a 50 % refund of what they have spent, irrespective of whether the Research Council had funded the research or not. And no fund, no refund – so a clear message to get oneself a fund, if one hadn’t already done so. Except for, possibly, the UK, Norway is probably the country in the world that is best covered by publication funds.

A small summing-up: Norway has an impressive IR infrastructure with a nearly as impressive lack of content, we have processes that will move TA journals (or their content) to OA during the next 10 years, and we have a very good system for financing APC for the coming years. The work that has to be done for the coming years, is green OA advocacy and following-up. So, we’ll just have roll up our shirtsleeves and start the hard work!