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Heard on the Net

You Can't Always Get What You Want: PEERing into Open Access and Watching It All Come UnGlued

By Jill Emery (*Collections Librarian, Portland State University*)　　　　　　　<jemery@pdx.edu>

On 31 May 2012, the PEER Project ended. PEER (Publishing and the Ecology of European Research, <http://www.peerproject.eu/>) investigated the effects of large-scale, systematic depositing of authors' final peer-reviewed manuscripts (Green Open Access) on reader access, author visibility, and journal viability, as well as on the broader ecology of European Research. The project ran from 2008-2012. In the end, voluntary and mandatory self-archiving accounted for less than 1% of the total archiving performed. The publisher deposit of authors' final peer-reviewed manuscript accounted for 98.8% of the deposits into an archive. The usage presentation given by Dr. Ian Rowlands , CIBER, can be found here: <http://www.peerproject.eu/fileadmin/media/presentations/PEER_CIBER_Brussels.pdf>.

There is a disagreement about how to interpret the usage findings. David Prosser, from RLUK, reported this in a message posted to LIB-LICENSE on 29 May 2012:

"Interestingly, we heard today at a conference in Brussels on the PEER project that the project found:

1. No evidence of any harm to publishers as a result of embargoed green OA

2. Evidence of increased total usage through green OA

3. Evidence that green OA through the PEER project actually drives usage at the publisher site."

This message prompted a response from Michael Mabe, from STM, also to LIBLICENSE on 30 May 2012:

"As Chair of the PEER Project Partner Consortium I must remind David that the caveats made about the usage results don't allow him to characterize the results as he has in his last posting. The usage researcher Dr. Ian Rowlands was explicit at the beginning of his presentation about what the results DID NOT show and asked all commenting to respect that in any tweets or blog comments. Explicitly in the six month usage report that will be released in a couple of weeks, the CIBER group say:

'It is important in any communication regarding PEER usage findings to be clear about the specific aims (and limitations) of the experimental design. The specific aim is to model the impacts, if any, of the large-scale deposit of EU-27 authored materials. It is not an experiment with wider ambitions to model the impact of Green Open Access more generally.' "

The last of the conclusions that Dr. Ian Rowlands does make in his report is:

"What this research tells us is that the scholarly web is a complex environment, one in which digital visibility is king. Researchers make little use of the search facilities on repository or publisher sites, relying heavily instead on third-party gateways and general search engines. They do not choose to `log on' to repository or publisher databases, they are simply swept there by Google and other agents which are the scholarly equivalents of the remote control TV handset. All the channels are on, 24/7, and they're watching it all!"

Librarians should pay specific attention to this conclusion because it belies how important high quality metadata becomes in an environment where the searcher is most likely a software application and not a person.

On 23 May 2012, STM released a statement in support of what they are referring to: sustainable Open Access: <http://www.stm-assoc.org/publishers-support-sustainable-open-access/>.

Then, this article appeared in the *Journal of the American Society for Information Science and Technology* on 5 June 2012: "The hybrid model for Open Access publication of scholarly articles: A failed experiment?" written by Bo-Christer Björk, Department of Management and Organization, Hanken School of Economics, Helsinki, Finland: <http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1002/asi.22709/abstract>.

"The overall conclusion of this study must be that the hybrid experiment, at least in the case of the major publishers and with the current price level, has failed as a way of significantly adding to the volumes of OA articles, and that hybrid OA will remain a very marginal phenomenon in the scholarly publishing landscape." (Björk, p.8). Only time will tell if gold OA will prosper in the decade to come but from reviewing the current gold OA environment, Bo-Christer Björk indicates gold OA has not had a large impact.

Another study that is causing quite a bit of Interweb buzz these days is the May 2012 report released by the Association of Learned, Professional and Society Publishers (ALPSP) and the Publishers Association (PA) on the potential effect of making journals free after a six month embargo: <http://www.publishingresearch.net/documents/ALPSPPApotentialresultsofsixmonthembargofv.pdf>.

This report outlines the survey results that indicate that librarians would cancel subscriptions if the embargo limit was changed from twelve months to six months. The greatest impact noted would be on the social sciences publications. Part of what's really interesting about this study is the international scope of it and how the responses vary from different continents.

On 1 May 2012, David Willetts, a British conservative party politician, wrote an article for *The Guardian: "Open, free access to academic research? This will be a seismic shift."* <http://www.guardian.co.uk/commentisfree/2012/may/01/open-free-access-academic-research>.

In this article, he reports that he has asked Dame Janet Finch, a respected academic in the UK, to produce a report setting out the steps needed to take all publicly funded research Open Access. If this initiative is enacted by the British government, research produced at higher education institutions in the UK will need to be published as Open Access content. This may change significantly the number of gold OA articles published by STM publishers. At the same time in the United States, an advocacy group, Access2Research, <http://access2research.org/> started a petition that met 25,000 signatures the weekend of June 2-3, 2012 which means that it will require an official response from the U.S. government.

The tides appear to be shifting in regards to opening up access to research. The question, posed to a panel of librarians at the last Spring 2012 STM Conference, now becomes are academic librarians ready for an Open Access environment? To see how the panel responded, you can view the video here: <http://www.stm-assoc.org/events/stm-spring-conference-2012/?presentations>.

The full answer to that question is murky. Librarians have begun some of the work needed to track local author publishing and to find new metrics for measuring the impact of research. Many of us have set-up institutional or digital repositories, started developing better metadata schemes for born digital content, and have been finding ways to work more directly with our research offices but there is still quite a bit more political work to do on behalf of librarians to insure we are fully ingrained in the scholarly agenda and development on our campuses. In addition, we will need to change our accounting processes and the tools used to account for paying article fees instead of subscription costs. It will be interesting to watch the Open Access movement continue and to see how librarians respond to facing the challenges of free access to scholarship.

The market on tools to track author publishing and altmetrics is becoming more competitive. In addition to Total-Impact and altmetric.com, one to watch in this arena is Plum Analytics: <http://www.plumanalytics.com/>.This tool is brought to us by some past members of the crack team who designed and developed Summon for Serials Solutions/ProQuest. According to this recent write-up, library beta-testing sites are currently being sought:

<http://www.thedigitalshift.com/2012/05/social-media/two-architects-of-library-discovery-tools-launch-an-altmetrics-venture/>.

Another way to track how librarians are responding to the new paradigms in scholarly research is to read this new Open Access journal: The Journal of Librarianship and Scholarly Communication (JLSC):

<http://jlsc-pub.org/jlsc/>.

From the about page for this journal: The *Journal of Librarianship and Scholarly Communication* is a quarterly, peer-reviewed open-access publication for original articles, reviews and case studies that analyze or describe the strategies, partnerships and impact of library-led digital projects, online publishing and scholarly communication initiatives. The journal is being published by Pacific University Library, a private undergraduate liberal arts institution with graduate and professional programs in education, optometry, and the health professions. The first issue has been published and is available; it contains very relevant articles on data citation, tenure factors for influencing faculty contributions to institutional repositories, and The Accessibility Quotient. This is definitely a publication worth reading and following.

Another new publishing paradigm launched in May 2012, is unglue.it <https://unglue.it/>. Developed by Eric Hellman, unglue.it is a way to crowdfund the publishing of digital books. Crowdfunding is a way to pool donations or pledges from individuals or organizations from around the world. Currently, there are numerous campaigns underway to support the free Open Access of various titles, but no books have been fully "unglued" yet. Ungluing a book results in a digital copy of a book that has been copyrighted using Creative Commons licensing. To learn more about the mechanisms used to make this happen, you can read their FAQ here: <https://unglue.it/faq/basics/>. There's an article with Eric Hellman in the Kindle Chronicles: <http://www.thekindlechronicles.com/2012/06/05/cross-post-from-kindle-nation-daily-my-interview-with-eric-hellman/>. It's an interesting project and Eric deserves credit for trying to find a way to fix the problems that currently exist for public libraries with digital books.

All-in-all, the scholarly publishing landscape is shifting both at the large scale STM level and at the grassroots level with projects such as unglue.it. It is becoming increasingly important for librarians to understand the scholarly output at their home institution and keep our eyes on the start-ups that will allow us to do our jobs better and with more appropriate tools. It's still too early to tell if libraries are about to be hit by a tsunami of readily available Open Access content or just continue to face ever-increasing aftershocks of an untenable scholarly economy. In either case, librarians should start assembling the needed tools to face a changing scholarly paradigm. ■