

THE FUTURE OF SCHOLARLY COMMUNICATION

Conclusions and Recommendations

UNICA SEMINAR
MADRID, OCTOBER 24/25, 2002

1. Summary

On the 24th and 25th October 2002, a seminar on the future of scholarly communication was organised in Madrid, under the auspices of the UNICA network organisation.

Hosted by the Universidad Complutense de Madrid (UCM) and chaired by Prof. Devroey, Director of the libraries of Université Libre de Bruxelles, the seminar was attended by 40 head librarians and academic decision makers from 16 UNICA member universities as well as from various Spanish universities and European library consortium organisations.

The first session was devoted to the **economical aspects and the financial challenges** that libraries are facing. The two successive speakers, Kristiina Hormia-Poutanen and Arnold Verhagen, insisted on the benefits of consortia, underlining their role in negotiating with publishers as well as in supporting development projects and monitoring usage and satisfaction. They believed that the current electronic journal pricing model based on print subscriptions could no longer be sustained, and that other criteria, such as usage statistics, would probably be applied.

The second session shed a different and complementary light on the subject, providing **alternative ways to face the scholarly journal crisis**. Fred Friend presented the initiatives supported by SPARC Europe, including open access developments and creation of new journals committed to low-cost or to open access. SPARC Europe actions also focus on raising awareness among academic authors and users and on encouraging institution-based repositories of copies of articles written by academic staff. Open access was also the motto of Jan Velterop and the key feature of the journals published by BioMed Central, an independent publishing house of peer-reviewed biomedical research. In this alternative model, the costs of publication are paid by the authors, or their institution. Whatever the model, whether open archives, repositories, low-cost journals or open access publication, the alternatives were believed to be essential factors to upset the current scholarly communication system and to reintroduce competition in the scientific publication market.

During the third and last session, Janet Lees and Robert Welham presented the activities of their respective associations, the European library cooperative *OCLC PICA* and the *Association of Learned and Professional Society Publishers*, as **practical examples of cooperation amongst and between libraries and publishers**. The services, the training sessions, the seminars that they organise provide real platforms for gathering librarians and publishers and for discussing hot topics.

In the closing conference, Sir Brian Follett provided a strategic viewpoint, at a national level. He further insisted on the **provision of a national research infrastructure** as a key element for the scientific information dissemination and for advances in research. He believed that the library collaborative networks required a strong cooperative and leadership, that they should be strongly supported by the universities, be based on a national strategy and firmly embedded in the national research infrastructure in order to bear on the Ministry's agenda.

Each plenary conference session was followed by a 90 minutes discussion in two parallel working groups, where participants shared experience and examples of best practice, raised questions and provided ideas. The aim to raise awareness in the scholarly communication issues and to provide a think tank on these topics, was clearly achieved. The conferences and the discussions brought a useful insight into the evolution of scholarly communication and into the role of libraries in this changing context; they provided an incentive to mobilise and to take action.

The participants wished the UNICA network organisation to act as a lever to **disseminate the conclusions and the recommendations of the seminar** towards the academic authorities of the UNICA universities, towards the national governmental and public research funding bodies, and towards the European Union commission.

This was felt to be essential and a major output of the seminar in order to raise awareness, outside the libraries' world, about the issues at stake regarding the future of scholarly communication.

2. Conclusions

The following conclusions highlight the important and recurrent issues that have been raised by the speakers and by the participants throughout the seminar, during the plenary sessions as well as in the working groups.

There was a major concern about providing **equal access to knowledge** as a key element to stimulate research and social progress in Europe. The specificity of Europe was underlined, i.e. the importance to **preserve its linguistic and cultural heritage diversity** that constitutes the richness of European arts, humanities and social sciences. In order to achieve this, strategies must be set up that include : scenarios for the "*Have Less*", whether they be libraries, publishers or countries, to face the economics of scholarly publication; a European digitising policy to fill the gap between paper and digital content and make printed heritage more widely and easily available (a "JSTOR" of European journals).

The debate on the **economics of scholarly publication** led to the following conclusions :

- The current way for libraries to face financial challenges is to join into **consortia**. Consortia provide many benefits besides price reductions, such as increasing libraries' visibility, strengthening libraries in front of publisher's aggressive pricing policy, creating a network of cooperation for activities other than licensing (archiving, lobbying...), etc. Consortia membership and organisation must be adapted to each country's size and needs. Cooperation should be developed between domain-like libraries as well. The participation of consortia into associations such as ICOLC¹ further extends the libraries network and is crucial to share experience and best practices, to discuss contract models for licenses and clauses to introduce etc. However, funding is required to help consortia support the extra-costs of electronic access imposed by the current license pricing policies based on paper subscriptions (paper subscriptions + e-fees, cross-access fees...).
- **Open access** is a way to challenge the current economic model. Besides improving the availability of research results, open access resources and institutional repositories increase the articles' impact and the researcher's visibility as well as promote the scientific production in one's country's own language and contribute to preserve the cultural diversity of Europe. The underlying idea is also that the results of research funded by public money should be publicly available. Authors should certainly not sign away their copyright to publishers.
- The **research assessment criteria** contribute to sustain the current economic model. The use of the journal impact factors in research assessment and the concentration of researchers on core journals have contributed to the over-inflation of journal prices. Core journals form an inelastic market that is now into the hands of a few commercial companies which are exploiting its highly profitable commercial potential. The authors' publication practices, sustaining highly ranked journals, continue to feed in this economic spiral. In order to ignite a change in the authors' behaviour, the academic community should revise the value of the impact factor as a research assessment criterion and take into account the peer-reviewed open access and alternative resources. Publication in open access archives, alternative journals and new economic model resources will reintroduce competition in the market. However, in the meantime the problem for libraries is to pay for the current prestigious high-priced journals and simultaneously support the emerging alternatives.

¹ International Coalition Of Library Consortia <http://www.library.yale.edu/consortia/>

Libraries need to **achieve greater visibility and political transcendence** in their institutions, in the world-wide academic community and in governmental bodies at national and European levels. This can be achieved by publicising widely the advantages of library networking and collaboration and the important issues at stake, such as : the danger of leaving the research results dissemination into the hands of private companies; the problem of the VAT rate applied to electronic products, including scientific journals, that further impedes on the research institutions' budgets etc . These issues must be raised and debated outside the libraries in order to raise awareness of university users and authorities, and gain their support.

The **roles of university libraries** need to be adapted in the changing environment. They should turn from "intermediary" to "facilitator", working closely with scholars to find their place in the e-learning and research environment. Their roles include selecting, organising, and preserving material; training users; facilitate access to information, eg. by means of portals, institutional repositories; and disseminate information.

3. Recommendations

Recommendations provide propositions of concrete support actions to be engaged by all concerned parties in order to drive a change in the current scholarly communication model :

Raise awareness of all the actors involved in the issues at stake: researchers, authors and reviewers, academic authorities, funding bodies, university presses, scholarly and commercial publishers, libraries. Libraries can contribute by informing their university community and their academic authorities, by providing data about library expenses for journals.

Develop library cooperation and dissemination of information among all the actors :

- **Among libraries** : join a consortium; build upon existing consortia organisations to set up new activities of cooperation and of lobbying at national levels (for IPR, VAT) ; support associations such as the Frankfurt Group (VAT); set up in each university an institutional repository based on the *Open Archive Initiative* standards; harmonise access to and preservation of Master thesis and dissertations in the framework of the process of Bologna.
- **With scholars** : set up an e-learning and research environment; advise authors about their copyright preservation; inform about the costs of journals; urge to publish in alternative journals, to support open access resources and to disseminate through institutional repositories
- **With academic authorities and with national and European governments and funding agencies** : provide them with statistical data on library expenses; advocate the citizen's opinion; request funding to support alternative resources as a way to reintroduce competition in the market; explore new forms of peer review; urge to revise the research assessment criteria in order to account for alternative and open access resources ; lobby in favour of a 0% VAT rate on electronic products as an exception for the education and research sector;
- **With publishers** : discuss new economic models and pricing policies based on usage; join discussion forum and associations like European ICOLC, SPARC Europe, ALPSP...

Urge the European Commission to strengthen the European scientific information market position by supporting low VAT rates and realisations such as:

- Provide a European portal to support universities in setting up institutional repositories and to facilitate access to Open Archives;
- Support consortia as positive forms of cooperation;
- Bear on the European scientific information market to obtain better prices and conditions.

By way of Yves Dumont, representative of the EU DG Research, the possible perspective of an **interest of the EU Commission** services in the economic and technical evolution of scholarly communication was expressed. The production and dissemination of information is a key element in the development of the European Research Area.

Various topics could be examined by the Commission, such as : the legal issues, with respect to the competition law; the IPR question; the fiscal issues relating to the VAT rate differences; the behaviour of authors in relation with research assessment criteria; and the intrinsic quality and sustainability of current initiatives. As a public actor, the role of the EU Commission could include : finance statistical data collection and an economic study of the market; examine legal issues and start the debate; stimulate exchange of best practices and bring researchers and publishers around the table; help increasing the visibility and credibility of alternative initiatives (eg. by means of a portal for the scientific community to manage e-publishing, by providing scientific credit to new journals...).

Professor Jean-Pierre Devroey, Chairman
Director of the Libraries, Université Libre de Bruxelles

Document prepared by Françoise Vandooren