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EDITORIAL

The situation of Open Access initiatives in Europe

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Academic journal publishers are currently riding an enormous success wave. That academic publishing is really big business should take no one by surprise, nevertheless, a rundown of the numbers may provide some perspective on its magnitude. Take, for example, Elsevier, the Amsterdam-based publishing powerhouse: According to 2017 data, the publisher has been reporting yearly profit margins that reach upwards of 36%, something that companies with considerably larger mindshare, such as Apple, Starbucks, or Disney, are struggling to even come close to. Several factors are at play here: Good management, solid business practices, a strong paywall system, but perhaps less obvious is access to a constant stream of public expenditure. Of note, about a third of the total global research budget is spent on publishing and communicating research results. However, this has not always been the case.

In times before the Internet, the deal between national or private academic institutions and publishing houses was relatively straight-forward: For a fairly low price per article, the institutions could gain access to a large number of journals. As time passed, however, and for a variety of reasons (e.g., increasing number of journals), publishers started to increase prices, so much so that in early 2012, one of the world's wealthiest academic institutions, Harvard University, issued an internal memo warning that the $3.5m bill – representing the yearly amount due to publishers – is not sustainable, citing in some cases an increase of 145% over the previous six years. Furthermore, the memo also encouraged the faculty members to stop submitting to paywalled journals, and start making their research freely available via Open-Access alternatives. This was a warning shot to everyone, as the issues at hand were not isolated to Harvard alone. Pricing hikes were observed worldwide. For example, even if the exact numbers are not precisely known because the contracts are – for the most part – confidential, the increase in overall costs was estimated by librarians in Germany at the beginning of 2017 to be about 5% per year, with almost 60% of the yearly library budgets being allocated to the top three publishers (Elsevier, Springer Nature, and Wiley). This trend of increased pricing has put more pressure on national research budgets, which, in turn, must be defensible and approved yearly. Therefore, allocating large amounts of financial resources to libraries has been increasingly difficult to justify to national authorities.

Money, however important, is only part of the problem research institutes are facing. The paywall system developed to counter the consequences of rapid Internet adoption, and the issue of free labour that is provided by authors, peer-reviewers, and editors, are considered to be just as crucial to research

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institutes, if not more so. Within the existing status-quo, academics donate and invest taxpayer subsidised, valuable work hours, know-how, and information in the research process, whose end-product (i.e., the research report) will not be accessible to the vast majority of the paying population due to publisher paywalling. This is, in fact, the fundamental issue, and the main motivating force behind what was to come, for, why should research sponsored by taxpayers end up behind a paywall? There are several additional minor arguments along this main contentious point, such as the natural desire for a bigger impact factor (which is innate to research – why research at all if not for the benefit of all?), and a derivative of it; a moral argument of providing researchers from low income countries free access to new and relevant information, thereby speeding up global development rates.

Academic bodies argue, "Reform is needed," and one proposed solution is to move to a full (or a flavour of an) Open-Access model. Open Access (OA) literature has been defined as "digital, online, free of charge, and free of most copyright and licensing restrictions" (Suber, 2012), and includes almost all types of scholarly communication: preprints, articles, books, book chapters, and datasets.

European universities and libraries have been pushing for contract re-negotiations with publishers for some time now, partly because there is a strong shift in European OA mandates on an inter-governmental level. For example, in 2016, the European Competitiveness Council (formed by the ministers of science, innovation, trade, and industry from the Union States) called for a more aggressive stance on adopting OA policies. The initial plan suggested full OA for European research institutes as early as 2020. Although overly optimistic, it has definitely impacted subsequent policies, as demonstrated by the heavy emphasis on OA in the next long-term EU research and innovation programme, Horizon Europe (2021–2027), for which the Commission is proposing a budget of €100 billion. Among several new features, Horizon Europe includes OA as one of the main pillars, as "…the principle of 'open science' will become the modus operandi of Horizon Europe, requiring open access to publications and data. This will assist market uptake and increase the innovation potential of results generated by EU funding." The plan is to make it sustainable through a combination of policies, hardware solutions, and research aid, known as the European Open Science Cloud (EOSC).

These international developments, coupled with various national stances on science budgeting, provided academic institutions with the motivation and leverage to stand up for contract renegotiations, something they have been vigorously doing for at least two years now – with some remarkable outcomes.

From 2016 onward, Germany's Project DEAL – which represents a united front of more than 200 German libraries, universities, and research institutes – forced academic publishers into lengthy negotiations, with the purpose of advancing a new business model that includes open access and a fairer subscription system. For example, DEAL has been pushing for a so-called PAR (Publish and Read) model, in which all publications by the corresponding authors become open access the moment they are published (representing the Publish component), and all the institutions represented by DEAL obtain continuous access to the whole portfolio of the publisher (the Read component). Furthermore, DEAL has been pleading for a new pricing scheme, which would allow it to sink its costs from an estimated €4000 per paper (under the current subscription model) to a number ranging from €1300 to €2000 per paper. It is clear that the Publish and Read model promoted by German librarians addresses some of the criticisms levelled at Open Access systems, and meets the publishers at the halfway line. For example, one of the bigger challenges is the question of whether OA is a viable business model at all. Shifting fees from governments to the authors is clearly not helpful, and would only lead to increased publishing in so-called predatory journals, whose email advertisements even now are filling up researchers' email inbox. Platinum OA journals – where publishing costs are

supported by the publisher – are rare, and this would further put authors in an unfortunate bargaining position against the now ubiquitous governmental love affair with austerity measures.

These issues aside, negotiations ended in 2018, with Springer Nature and Wiley agreeing in principle (perhaps also because their current model already fits the project DEAL's price range goal), however, Elsevier declined, and thus DEAL chose to walk away from the table and lose access to Elsevier content. Sometime later, the Max Plank Society also abandoned negotiations, cancelling subscriptions to Elsevier. This is considered by some to be a serious blow because the Max Planck Society has over 14,000 scientists distributed over 84 institutions that publish over 12,000 articles a year, with about 1,500 in Elsevier journals alone.

Germany is not alone in this fight, with several European countries currently engaged in similar contractual disputes. For example, the Swedish government has been pushing hard towards a goal of immediate open access by the year 2026. The BIBSAM Consortium (an umbrella organisation for 85 higher education and education institutions from Sweden) has suffered the same outcomes as DEAL, choosing to terminate all contracts with Elsevier, starting July 1st 2018, because the publisher would not stop raising prices and would not allow open access publishing. As these words are written, in early 2019, The Norwegian Directorate for ICT, and Shared Services in Higher Education and Research (UNIT)' (which has the same goals of full, open access, but by 2024) was also unable to reach an agreement with Elsevier for 2019, and willing to lose access to a number of Elsevier published journals in the process. In one last example, the Electronic Information Service National Programme (EIS)—a similar Hungarian consortium, with the aim of reaching a read & publish agreement, with the goal of transitioning to a full open access model—has been also pushing for contract renegotiations. Again, Elsevier failed to address the minimum requirements of the Committee, and as of January 2019, all subscriptions were cancelled.

To sum up this update on the latest developments in the fight over OA, 2018 and early 2019 have been quite eventful, as there seems to be, perhaps for the first time, a definite willingness by European universities and libraries to adopt a more confrontational stance towards large academic publishers. The outcome of future negotiations is uncertain. However, it will be a long, difficult process before the major publishers will allow for a new publishing model.

In all fairness to the situation at hand, it is not only the publishers who will need to adapt. If we are to escape the closed ecosystem provided by paywall systems, academics also need to challenge their own set of perceptions. For example, publishing in high-impact journals is considered to be crucial for the tenure-track of the scientist. The logical sequence is that established journals publish better research, and thereby if accepted, the quality of the submitted research is somehow validated. Incidentally, these are mostly paywalled journals. However, recent evidence shows that a more nuanced perspective is warranted. Prestigious journals "…struggle to raise above the average reliability levels set by the other journals" (Brembs, 2018) and suffer from lower statistical power (Brembs, Button, & Munafò, 2013). Although this is not an argument against publishing in top-tiered journals, it should serve as a warning that the research is what counts, and not the journal per se, or its impact factor. So, we ought to be guided by this idea when deciding where we will submit our next research report. This, in turn, should also be accompanied by a more attentive stance on predatory open access publishing, and that can only be done through better education and transparency. For example, even if the now infamous Beall's List (a list of predatory OA publishers that was maintained by the librarian of the University of Colorado) is defunct, there are still good places to start your research, such as with the results published by Shen and Björk (2015).

And as a finishing note, the Psychology of Human Resources Journal – the official outlet of the Romanian Association of Industrial and Organizational Psychology (APIO), which is a "platinum" Open Access journal indexed by

PsychINFO, Proquest, ERIH +, EBSCO, Scopus, DOAJ and Copernicus – provides a wonderful opportunity for all researchers, young or established, to get their results in the open and benefit from all the advantages of a modern, open access, peer-reviewed journal.

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