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Open Access in Theory and Practice

CoLIS 2019 workshop

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Summary

This workshop will focus on two phenomena and explore the relationship between them: firstly, open-access (OA) publishing and dissemination of research outputs as part of scholarly communication; and, secondly, the interactions of theory and practice (and, theorists and practitioners), in the Social Sciences and Humanities (SSH) in general and Library and Information Science (LIS) in particular. It will explore the ways and the extent that theory and practice have interacted in the development of OA approaches to scholarly communication, and discuss what this reveals about the nature of the OA phenomenon and the relationship between theory and practice.

The workshop will discuss the findings of an 18-month research project running from January 2018 to July 2019 (funded by the UK's Arts and Humanities Research Council) investigating these issues. It will include a detailed discussion of the theoretical foundations of the study, a systematic review of the literature, and analysis of empirical data gathered during the research. The empirical data comprises 38 interviews with practitioners and policy makers associated with OA (funders, publishers, OA service providers, consultants, librarians and OA advocates) as well as researchers, about their views on the extent to which theory has been helpful in explaining OA and has been used to inform action by practitioners. The workshop will be of interest to a similar profile of participants: those working on OA research and implementation, as well as those interested in the theory-practice relationship.

The research discussed in the workshop aims to contribute to the understanding of the relationship between theory and practice, an ongoing focus for debate and policy. It will do so as part of contributing to a better understanding of OA itself, including the views of some of its key implementers, on the ideas which shape their perceptions of OA. The workshop will cover these areas by focusing on following themes: the nature of theory in LIS and SSH, the theory-practice 'gap' (as it is often characterised), theoretically-informed (and other) understandings of OA, the way in which OA policy and practice have been formed in relation to theory and other factors.

The workshop will focus on five main issues:

1. How existing theory has been used, or new theory developed, in relation to the phenomenon of open access;
2. The extent to which practitioners (including policymakers, information professionals, publishers and others involved in implementing OA) been influenced by or have themselves influenced theoretically-informed accounts of OA in their attitudes, policies or activities relating to OA;
3. The nature, purpose and role of theory as perceived by researchers (particularly those who have incorporated theory or generated theory in their research on OA), practitioners and policymakers (involved in implementing OA);

4. What the (perceived) relationship between theory and practice tells us about OA as a phenomenon and movement;
5. What it tells us about the relationship between theory and practice in general, and how the relationship between them may be studied, for LIS in particular and SSH more widely.

Outline

The workshop will be divided into the following sessions:

1. Welcome and introduction

This session will introduce the main focus of the workshop: the theory-practice relationship, particularly in the context of OA. It will briefly define key concepts, such as 'theory', 'practice', and 'open access'. It will discuss ways in which the theory-practice relationship has been discussed in different contexts, particularly relating to theory and practice in areas relevant to SSH. The session will also provide a brief overview of the current 'state of the art' of OA developments as a context for the workshop as a whole.

2. Theory and the theory-practice 'gap'

This session will discuss in detail different conceptions of 'theory' – what it is and what it is for. It will interact in particular with various typologies of theory in SSH developed, for example, by Gregor (2006) and Reynolds (1971). It will examine the extent to which theory needs to underpin robust research, and how different research approaches have developed 'theory', 'models' and 'frameworks' as ways of analysing and explaining reality, as well as predicting developments or prescribing actions. This session will go on to analyse ways in which the relationship between theory and practice have been discussed in SSH. The main contours of the debate around the 'theory-practice gap', prominent in a range of applied fields (including management, nursing, and education) will be discussed.

3. The uses of theory in open access

Theory has been used in a range of ways in relation to open access, both in terms of using pre-existing theory and also generating theory as part of studies of OA. This session will provide a systematic review of the literature on OA which uses or generates theory, exploring the different theories used to investigate OA, the specific aspects of OA they have been applied to, why and how they are used, and nature of theories generated as a result of OA research. As well identifying commonly used theories, the session will provide an overview of work done by different types of authors (e.g. researchers, librarians and consultants), in different research paradigms, and on different aspects of OA. The session will also identify some key themes to emerge from the analysis.

4. The theories and practices of open access in perspective

This session will report empirical research involving interviewing key actors in the scholarly communication space about their perspectives on the theory-practice relationship. Participants include practitioners and policy makers (funders, publishers, OA service providers, consultants, librarians and OA advocates), as well as theorists, drawn from the UK and internationally, with a variety of perspectives on OA and the theory-practice relationship. As well as researchers, practitioners will include those who themselves have published on questions of professional practice in general and OA in particular, some whom have made use of theory. Others are those who have not made use of theory

and those who have not published at all, but are prominent in their professional domains, particularly in aspects of OA implementation.

5. Making sense of open access in theory and practice

This session will bring together the different strands of the project and make sense of them in understanding OA in particular and the theory-practice relationship in general. As part of the discussion, it will consider the possible ways in which OA itself has been discussed as a way of addressing the theory-practice gap and assess its potential role in doing so.

Organizer(s):

Names and affiliations of the organizers

- Prof Stephen Pinfield: University of Sheffield (s.pinfield@sheffield.ac.uk)
- Dr Simon Wakeling: University of Sheffield (s.wakeling@sheffield.ac.uk)
- Prof David Bawden: City, University of London (d.bawden@city.ac.uk)
- Dr Lyn Robinson: City, University of London (l.robinson@city.ac.uk)

Format

The workshop will take the form of a set of facilitated discussions on major themes, each introduced by a short presentation by the workshop organizers. For each of the major themes, the initial presentation will be followed by a very short response from a discussant identified in advance, and not from the session organizing team, who will set discussion going. Discussion will be guided with the help of a briefing document distributed to participants in advance (which include references to key works on the topic including those produced by the organizers) allowing those involved to prepare. Discussion is expected to be a combination of small group and whole group interaction, but this will, of course, depend on numbers of attendees.

Outline structure (with indicative times):

	Theme	Leader	Timing
1.	<p><i>Welcome and introduction</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Working definitions of key concepts, such as ‘theory’, ‘practice’, and ‘open access’ • Overview of the theory-practice relationship in different contexts • Summary of the current ‘state of the art’ of OA developments 	SP	15 min intro + 10 min discussion

2.	<i>Theory and the theory-practice 'gap'</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Conceptions of 'theory' – what it is and what it is for (including various typologies of theory in LIS and SSH) • The nature of 'practice' and 'practitioners' (particularly relating to OA implementation), and the 'theory-practice gap' 	DB & LR	20 min intro + 15 min discussion
3.	<i>The uses of theory in open access</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Exploration of the use of theory to explain OA, based on the peer-reviewed and practitioner literature 	SP & SW	20 min intro + 25 min discussion
	Break		
4.	<i>The theories and practices of open access in perspective</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Overview of empirical findings of the research – including perspectives practitioners and policy makers (funders, publishers, OA service providers, consultants, librarians and OA advocates), as well as theorists 	SP & SW	25 min intro + 25 min discussion
5.	<i>Making sense of open access in theory and practice</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Summary and ways forward 	DB, SP, LR & SW	5 min intro + 20 min discussion

The workshop will be aimed those working on or affected by different notions of theory and the question of the relationship between theory and practice, in Library and Information Science (LIS) in particular, and the Social Sciences and Humanities (SSH) more generally. Since the workshop will frame this discussion with reference to open access (OA) and open science, it will also appeal to academic researchers and practitioners with an interest and/or involvement in OA. These different participants will be able to make a contribution to the session and it is hoped to attract a variety of them to attend in order to encourage the contribution of a range of perspectives in the discussion. The workshop will combine the findings of a current research project with the contributions of participants to identify key issues which may inform both future research agendas and practice-based activity.

Purpose, goals and expected outcomes

Using the research undertaken as a starting point, the purpose of the workshop is to enable better understanding, and highlight key issues raised, on the relationship between these two phenomena: firstly, open access as an approach to the publishing and dissemination of research, and, secondly, theory and practice (and, theorists and practitioners) in the Social Sciences and Humanities in general and Library and Information Science in particular. It is envisaged the workshop will identify and clarify key current challenges in this area of scholarly communication and highlight areas for future research. It will also contribute to wider discussions on the theory-practice relationship. We hope that it will attract people who might take part in future research collaborations, which may or may not involve the session organizers. The session will also help to identify actions relevant for practitioners in the area of policy and service development.

Value for R&D

Our research has uncovered widely varying perspectives on what theory is and on what value theory has in practice. Such perspectives can help inform the work of researchers interested in theory, theory generation and theory usage in research. Our work also makes a significant contribution to the question of the theory-practice relationship. This relationship is often characterised as a 'gap' – and the characteristics of that gap and how it might be narrowed are addressed by our findings. Whilst the research is focused on these questions in relation to open access publishing and dissemination specifically, the research has wider implications for information science, SSH, and the areas of practice associated with these disciplines.