City Research Online

City St George's, University of London

Citation: Priego, E. (2013). Open Access: Towards Fairer Access to Research. Paper presented at the Open Access Perspectives in the Humanities and Social Sciences, 24 Oct 2013, Senate House, University of London.

This is the unspecified version of the paper.

This version of the publication may differ from the final published version. To cite this item please consult the publisher's version.

Permanent repository link: https://openaccess.city.ac.uk/id/eprint/2827/

Copyright and Reuse: Copyright and Moral Rights remain with the author(s) and/or copyright holders. Copies of full items can be used for personal research or study, educational, or not-for-profit purposes without prior permission or charge, unless otherwise indicated, provided that the authors, title and full bibliographic details are credited, a hyperlink and/or URL is given for the original metadata page and the content is not changed in any way. For full details of reuse please refer to City Research Online policy.

City Research Online: http://openaccess.city.ac.uk/ publications@citystgeorges.ac.uk

Open Access: Towards Fairer Access to Research

Dr Ernesto Priego
Lecturer in Library Science
City University London

Originally published on the London School of Economics Impact of Social Sciences blog, 18 October 2013.
http://blogs.lse.ac.uk/impactofsocialsciences/2013/10/18/towards-fairer-access-to-research/

Also crossposted at *SAGE Connection*, and appears on the electronic and printed collection *Open Access Perspectives in the Humanities and Social Sciences* (LSE and SAGE, London, 2013).

Abstract

Practical and sustainable ways of increasing access to scholarly materials will require a more thorough transformation of the entire academic landscape, which includes publication, assessment and promotion. This article.emphasises that ultimately, open access advocates are fighting for the right of scholars at all career stages to ensure their work has more prospects of getting read, cited and 'reused'.

Open Access (OA) refers to the free access to and reuse of scholarly works. It represents a mechanism to increase the availability of scholarly outputs by eliminating the cost of access to the reader. There are currently two main forms of delivering OA: the 'Gold' model, in which the peer-reviewed, professionally copyedited 'version of record' is published on a journal or platform and is openly accessible (this means no paywll, but also an open license for re-use and re-distribution) and the 'Green' one, in which academic content is made available via institutional OA repositories or archives.

Most institutional repositories are not peer-reviewed, but authors are advised to use them to deposit versions of their published articles under the conditions allowed by their publishing agreements. Most of the times publishing agreements will only allow authors to deposit their published research (also called 'self-archiving') after a period of embargo, which can be lengthy, especially for a digital age. You can find out your publisher's copyright and self-archiving policies through SHERPA/RoMEO.

Since the financial sustainability of Gold OA publications does not depend on subscriptions paid by university libraries, many publishers have opted for Article Processing Charges (APCs) which are meant to be covered by the author, or, ideally, the author's research funder. Not all Gold OA publications

rely on APCs, and not all APCs are the same. Some Gold OA journals, for example, offer fee waivers to students or those not able to cover them for any reason, or offer memberships encouraging universities to cover their research staff's APCs. Any discussion on APC pricing should take into account that not all publishers are alike, and that independent, researcher-led publishers that are not legacy publishers are also part of the OA publishing sphere. There is also the need to keep clarifying that Gold OA does not always mean expensive/unreasonable APCs.

These two models, Gold and Green, offer two different ways to open access to research outputs that would otherwise only be available to those who are members of paying institutions. These models are not mutually exclusive as they offer slightly different content under different circumstances. Both, however, have in common the definite intention to enable access without cost to readers. I wish it were not perceived as a radical notion, but a transition towards fairer access to research for those both 'inside' and 'outside' academia. There is a need to seek practical ways in which publishing can be financially sustainable without it meaning simply inverting the current business model, in which publishers charge institutional libraries very dear subscription fees for bundles of journals.

Seeking practical and sustainable ways of increasing access requires a more thorough transformation of the academic publishing landscape, and this includes researchers and not only publishers. Awareness and clarity about the real costs of academic publishing would be a good start. This could be followed by the recognition that the research many researchers wish to cite is the peer-reviewed, professionally copyedited versions of record, and that access to this research needs to be timely and not after embargo periods during which other colleagues from wealthier institutions have already accessed it months ago.

We need to emphasise that Gold OA is completely compatible with institutional repositories. In my opinion a Green-only option that leaves the paywalled business model uninterrogated fails to tackle what I perceive as the biggest obstacle to fairer (legal) access to knowledge. Mandating Green OA *is* a positive step in the right direction, but it might merely provide a temporary palliative to what still keeps most (version of record) research inaccessible by many on a timely and sustainable fashion.

There are still many questions, fears and interests of all sorts defining the current debate around open access outside STEM fields. Funding allocation works differently across fields, and in spite of recent policies for many scholars funding to publish in 'Gold' Open Access journals published by for-profit entities that rely on hefty Article Processing Charges remains a distant dream.

Not all scholars are equally invested in the mechanics, politics and economics of academic publishing. In my experience as both an attendant and presenter at lectures, conferences and workshops there are still varying degrees of confusion about copyright and the perceived dangers of openness, creating

legitimate concerns that need to be dealt with relevant evidence. The general feeling I get is that we are far from seeing a general consensus on how academics should embrace the values of Open Access. Maybe aiming at such consensus is not realistic as no size might really fit all, particularly when fields in the humanities and social sciences are often very different from each other, presenting different scholarly cultures.

A glance at the scholarly blogosphere provides evidence that some academics feel they are being bullied into Open Access, forced to share outputs through methods they feel might jeopardise their career prospects. Perhaps this is the most important case that Open Access advocates need to make: there is a need for an urgent transformation of the traditional systems of publication, assessment and promotion that still privilege (at least in the humanities) printed matter and subscription-only journals. These systems were once defined in times when transparency, openness, wider access and nearly-instant dissemination channels did not exist or were significantly different.

Open Access advocates are fighting for the right of others to access research that had traditionally been paywalled from the general public, and for the right of scholars at all career stages to ensure their work has more prospects of getting disseminated and eventually, luckily, more widely read, cited and ‘reused’. Those of us advocating for wider adoption of OA models need also to work harder at empowering graduate students and Early Career Researchers (ECRs) to opt for Open Access publication platforms by collectively working towards a positive transformation in academic culture, one where open availability of online scholarship is not considered a liability but a desirable asset.

The future of scholarship cannot only be led by senior academics that built their careers following traditional paths. We cannot expect academic publishing to take a turn towards wider openness if ECRs are expected to develop their careers in the same way than their pre-digital peers. Open Access cannot remain the privilege of those who no longer have to worry about finding an academic job. It is up to the academics of today that will be the authorities of tomorrow to work towards new sets of rules. It is up to their elders to encourage and empower them.

This article gives the views of the author, and not the position of his employers or colleagues.