Lars Bjørnshauge – talk at the PKP-conference, Mexico City
August 20th 2013

Open Access (OA) advocacy in Europe.

Thank you for the invitation to come to this event. My first time in Mexico, and I can say already that I have learned quite a lot! I am grateful for having this opportunity to inform a bit about OA-advocacy work in Europe. I will do so and as well try to put this in a broader perspective.

I work for SPARC Europe. SPARC Europe was founded in 2002 out of LIBER, the Association of European Research Libraries. SPARC Europe is a sister organization – the smaller sister – to SPARC developed in U.S. 1997 by the Association of Research Libraries. We are advocating change and working to correct imbalances in the scholarly publishing system for the benefit of research and society. We are primarily funded by university libraries

While we are in the midst of all the work we are doing in and around open access, it might be beneficial to remind ourselves why we are doing what we are doing.

We do it because has become obvious not only for us but more importantly for more and more stakeholders that the still dominant system of scholarly communication and publishing, based on subscription barriers and reuse restrictions, does not work. It simply does not adequately serve research, higher

education, innovation, industry, societies and the people and it leaves major parts of the world out of the loop.

So SPARC Europe is advocating and working for changes in the current system. For my part I have reached the point where this is an understatement. We are not only working for improvements, we are aiming to radically change the system of scholarly communication and publishing.

We want a new system!

A system that serves research, higher education, our societies and our fellow citizens.

But how come we have such an inefficient system to communicate research? How come that we despite all kinds of technological advancements still have a system, that essentially still is in the print age?

If we look at research in general, research is funded via grants from research funders, universities (via government funding), international organizations etc. In short: research is funded, paid for upfront – in other words: research is subsidized directly.

Where I come from – Europe and I take it that this account as well for North America - the dissemination of the output of research – publications – on the contrary is not funded upfront.

Instead, scholarly publishing has been outsourced - initially to scholarly societies and gradually to corporate companies,

publishers that are doing the publishing and sending the bill to (academic) libraries, which in turn are funded by universities as an overhead – even on grants from funders.

It is worth to remember that outsourcing is not a bad thing in itself, as long as those who are deciding to outsource are able to specifically determine what they expect from the service provider, and as long as it happens in the context of a competitive market.

But as we all know that is definitely not the case. Competition is absent, because essential features of a free market are absent.

The research community, that is the research funders, the universities and the governments have (until recently at least) happily outsourced the dissemination of research output and the result is as system that is dysfunctional and outdated.

Now, and I have said that before as well, there is a tendency to blame the commercial publishers. But as commercial for-profit companies they are just doing what they are supposed to do - maximizing their income and pleasing the shareholders. They just exploit the conditions offered to them.

The important stakeholders in the scholarly communication system have allowed them to fine tune a system, that is way too expensive and dysfunctional and the same stakeholders are still to a large extent supporting the mechanisms that strengthen the commercial publishers and service provider's grip on the

scholarly publishing system. What I am referring to here is the regime of the Journal Impact Factor.

I will not go deeper in this here, but just stress, that the research community has allowed this mess to develop, and essentially open access advocacy is to demonstrate that it is a mess, that it can be changed, and that we can offer the evidence, the help, the infrastructure, the services, that can bring about the necessary changes.

So how have we dealt with and how do we deal with open access advocacy in Europe.

First of all: Contrary to for instance North America and Latin America, Europe is very diverse. 50 countries, more than 25 languages, huge differences in GNP per capita – almost a factor 100. We have huge diversity in culture, traditions and political systems, and different IPR/copyright legislation.

Despite all these challenges open access has due to the ground work of committed individuals, researchers, libraries, librarians and organizations such as SPARC Europe, EIFL, COAR etc etc made its way into the agenda of the important stakeholders: the universities and their organizations, the research funders and their organizations, some governments and last but least important in this context, into the European Commission and European Union.

In Europe we can count around 50 research funders that have issued OA mandates and more that 100 universities and institutions have done that same. The overall majority of these mandates have a preference for the so-called green road – deposit in institutional repositories; quite many of the mandates includes support for paying article processing charges (APCs) in OA-journals. A number of funders allow researchers to pay APCs via their research grants and several universities have set up publication funds in order to support researchers to pay APCs.

The focal point for OA in Europe in the coming years will be the implementation of the very important mandate issued by the European Research Council covering the research funds provided by the European Union. It is a mandate with preference for green OA, but allowing payments of APCs, the mandate allows 6 months embargo and includes deposit of research data. There is support for developing and maintaining an infrastructure for harvesting the deposited documents and data via the EU-initiated Open Aire-collaboration.

Quite a number of national research funders in EU-member states have already mandates in place aligned with the EU-mandate, but there is a lot of work to do to implement these mandates and of course to promote mandates, where these are not in place already.

There is however a one notable exception. In the UK the government has issued a policy which gives preference to so-called gold-OA with a green option (I do not really like the term gold-OA, it gives in my opinion wrong associations). The UK policy is in my view a result of intense lobbying by the publishing industry, the British Government has listened too much to them, and they have in reality open up a new highway to public funds.

In my talk at the Berlin 10 in Stellenbosch, South Africa,November 2012 I said that "if research funders and governments listen to the commercial publishers they are in fact sacrificing innovation, progress, the health and wealth of their communities and all sectors of society in protecting an industry which has not left the print age and has proven inefficient in terms of serving science and society. We do not want a new open access big deal!"

I am afraid that this is what we see happen in the UK.

So coming to SPARC Europes to do list one very important item on that is to prevent the UK-disease to spread to the continent.

Policy developments and mandates is our top priority. We will work together with national OA advocates to secure a proper implementation of OA-policies based on the EU-policy, and as you will recall there are quite a number of countries in Europe.

We will inform the stakeholders, produce briefing papers and conduct studies, provide evidence to equip and support the

national OA-advocates in their work of promoting sound and effective policies and mandates – and very important here: to secure that policies and mandates will be monitored for compliance!

We will create alliances and continue and improve our collaboration with organizations that in different ways are supporting the open agenda

We will improve the governance of OA-infrastructures and secure the sustainability of OA-services – key issue here is interoperability. As we all know infrastructure and services for OA are not a thing we can discuss and manage as a European thing, these are indeed global issues.

We will highlight and promote new business models.

And not least support policies and initiatives that will change author behavior; most important here is to create incentives that make it attractive for authors to publish in the open by means of strong and monitored mandates and to bring about changes in the reward structures and systems, that will create incentives for authors to behave as they ought to, namely publish their results in the open for the benefit of research, higher education, innovation, industry, wealth and health for the people and society.

A key issue here is to create, promote and embed new metrics that eventually will kill the regime of the JIF, as the most obvious symptom of the power structures in scholarly communication.

Now being here in Mexico and Latin America makes me quite humble and I am so grateful for the opportunity to get more acquainted with the way key stakeholders in research communication process traditionally have handled the issue of disseminating research outputs. Probably of pure necessity – that is the to a large extent complete exclusion of Latin American research outputs from being visible in the international journals and databases - the universities here in this part of the world have done what we are fighting for in Europe (and North America), namely taken responsibility of the dissemination of at least parts of the output from universities, simply by funding and supporting peer reviewed journals published by the university. I am happy to be able to say, that right now I am in the part of the world where open access has been practiced years if not decades before the concept became known in the North and the West.

Sunday I had the opportunity together with Caroline Sutton form the OA-publisher Co-Action Publishing to visit Redalyc in Toluca, and I must confess that we were blown away learning what Redalyc under the leadership of Eduardo Aguado-Lopez, Arianna Becerril and Rosario Rogel have accomplish in terms of aggregating peer-reviewed journals, disseminating the content and providing advanced metrics.

The fact that Latin American universities have committed themselves to take care of an important share of their research outputs based on the financial commitment to supporting journals and the really outstanding substantial commitment from Universidad Autónoma del Estado de México has made this possible.

The accomplishments of Redalyc demonstrate the impact of collaboration and the combination of outstanding professional skills, use and development of advanced technologies and commitment to good editorial practices is truly best practice.

So while we in Europe are struggling to make improvements in the scholarly communication, to radically change the messy system that do not deliver what research and society deserves, I think we can say that due to certain circumstances Latin America is several steps ahead and we in the North and the West really have a lot to learn. For instance that the way to go for research funders, universities and governments is to fund the dissemination of research output upfront – which essentially is that the research community could reclaim the responsibility for the dissemination their research outputs and pave the way for a system that will serve the public.

That is not to say that open access has prevailed in Latin America, and you now that much better that I do, but you have a in many aspects the advantage that open access to peer-review content is not a strange animal.

So again: thank you for giving me the opportunity to part of this conference.