

BRINGING THE DOAJ TO A NEW LEVEL

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DOAJ - From a promising project to an important community supported Open Access service.

When the 1st Nordic Conference of Scholarly Communication, was held in Lund/Copenhagen Oct 22-24th 2002 it was really in the early days of Open Access¹, only a few months after the Budapest Open Access Initiative made the famous definitions of Open Access. Among the conference participants were a handful of the experts present at the Budapest meeting. At some point in the discussions the need for a list of Open Access journals was raised. A few months later Lund University Libraries Head Office received a project grant from the Open Society Institute to develop such a list. May 2003 the Directory of Open Access Journals was launched, listing 300 journals².

In many aspects the history of DOAJ reflects the short history of Open Access. In the beginning it was relatively simple. An Open Access journal was a journal published under a business model which is not based on subscriptions, a journal where readers can access the content from day one free of charge and the user can print, download, distribute content etc. Period.

During the years the number of Open Access journals has increased dramatically, a number of high profile pure Open Access publishers have entered the scene and Open Source software like the Open Journal Systems has made the threshold for entering publishing much lower. The development of the DOAJ helped in discovering the thousands of journals published all over the world by learned societies, university departments etc.

The fact that DOAJ shortly after the launch began as well to aggregate article level metadata and of course made all data harvestable made it possible for

aggregators, search engines and discovery service providers to fetch the data and integrate the records in their services, thus multiplying the visibility. There is no doubt that DOAJ has contributed significantly to the visibility and dissemination of the contents of Open Access journals, especially Non-European and Non-North American journals, helping these journals to reach new audiences.

The funding of the DOAJ in the early years was based on project grants or one time contributions from among others the National Library of Sweden³, Axiell, INASP, SPARC Europe and SPARC. As DOAJ aspired to become a continuous service there was a growing concern about being dependent on project grants. Luckily DOAJ attracted a lot of attention in the early years, and increasingly there were signs that librarians and libraries would welcome an opportunity to support projects and services that could help libraries find their way in the Open Access jungle.

Therefore a membership model was introduced allowing universities, library consortia and commercial aggregators to contribute to the operation and development of the DOAJ. The membership model proved to be promising and in the course of a couple of years it enabled the DOAJ to grow gradually both in terms of coverage and as well in terms of the staffing resources affordable.

Increasing complexity, expectation and demands.

With the advent of a new model, where publishers began offering open access to single articles published in subscription journals for a fee – the so-called hybrid model – introduced by Springer, an extra dimension of complexity was added. In the beginning there was not that much uptake of this model, but that should change due to other important developments.

As an increasing number of institutions and research funders introduced open access policies and mandates, the demands of transparency increased. Again this phenomenon took a number of years to develop, but

¹ The term Open Access and the definitions was made by the [Budapest Open Access Initiative](#) in a meeting just a few months before the Lund conference. In reality however free access to research results without embargo has been practiced since the mid-90ties in Latin America, via services such as SciELO and Redalyc.

² The initial list was provided by Bo Christer Björk and his team.

³ The National Library of Sweden supported the DOAJ during a number of years via the OpenAccess.se programme).

slowly the expectations to a service like DOAJ became more complex and specific.

Many universities began to establish specific funds to support their researchers in paying for publishing in those Open Access journals that requested a fee for publishing the article – the so-called Article Publishing charges, or APCs. Often there were specific requirements for journals to be eligible for APC support and often the requirements would state that a journal have to be listed in DOAJ to be eligible.

Research funders began as well to be explicit about the usage rights and especially reuse rights offered by the Open Access journals. With the Wellcome Trust as the forerunner several research funders are now requiring the most liberal reuse rights as expressed in the Creative Commons CC-BY license.

By the end of the last decade these and other developments and the sheer number of Open Access journals to evaluate and process made it more and more difficult for a single university to allocate sufficient attention to a service, whose importance was ever increasing.

Discussions between OASPA⁴ and Lund University was initiated about the future of DOAJ and late 2012 an agreement was made between Lund University and a not-for-profit community interest company based in United Kingdom, Infrastructure Services for Open Access (www.is4oa.org), whereby IS4OA took over DOAJ from January 1st 2013.

New organizational setting and taking DOAJ several steps further

At that point in time there was a long list of expectations and more or less explicit demands from the community as to what DOAJ should or ought to accomplish in order to still have an important role in the development of Open Access.

The most important thing was that the criteria for being included and remain listed in DOAJ was in desperate need of updating reflecting the developments and increasing demands in terms of more specific information about the journals policies and practice regarding reuse rights, peer-review process, openness, archiving, persistent identifiers etc.

Simultaneously a new phenomenon had seen the day

of light, namely bogus publishers, who saw a business opportunity in setting up poor quality journals profiting on the publish or perish syndrome. Questionable publishers⁵ were to some extent discrediting all Open Access publishers, and the community was expecting new tighter DOAJ criteria to indirectly address this problem.

Developing more detailed criteria was handled by drafting a long list of questions a journal should respond to. The list was discussed by the new DOAJ Advisory Board and as well sent out for public comment. After handling a huge amount of comments from the community a decision was made about the new criteria, or the new DOAJ Application Form as it were, late 2013.

It goes without saying that an increase in the amount of information to be handled from 6-7 questions to more than 50 questions will not be possible to manage with a team of three part time employees, and add to that, that all journals hitherto listed in the DOAJ will have to pass this new evaluation process.

In an attempt to recruit more work forces DOAJ early 2014 went out and called for individuals who would work unpaid as DOAJ Associate Editors to evaluate journals to be listed in the DOAJ. Apparently this offered an opportunity for many librarians, PhD student, researchers, retired professors etc. to contribute to Open Access in that nearly 250 individuals from all over the world responded to the call.

Implementing a new application form and developing a back office system allowing dozens of Associate Editors to handle applications has been the next major task.

After developing a new platform early 2014 our development partner Cottage Labs was commissioned to develop a system to enable the implementation of the new Application Form and the new back office system allowing the new crowdsourced editorial system with a three tier evaluation process to be functional.

Now Associate Editors, Editors and Managing Editors will evaluate the journals, and as indicated above this will not only be new applications, but all journals listed in the DOAJ will have to pass the new evaluation process.

⁴ Open Access Scholarly Publishers Association (www.oaspa.org), which by the way had its founding meeting in Lund 2008.

⁵ My personal view is that the questionable publisher issue is a rather overrated thing.

This is as well a huge task and even here we have commissioned development work to Cottage Labs, this time to facilitate easier re-application for journals already listed in the DOAJ. Although there are thousands of publishers with 1 or 2 journals listed, a significant number of journals listed are from publishers and aggregators with hundreds of journals. In the course of the next weeks a new fast-track re-application tool will be ready for multi-journals publishers.

Where are we now and what next?

Since May this year the current staff has added 363 journals based on the New Application Form and 128 journals have been removed.

We are now implementing the three tier evaluation process, by activating many of the volunteers. Currently we have set-up 10 teams covering 8 languages, and shortly we will kick off another 6-8 teams covering additional languages. The editorial teams have to digest a lot of instruction and training material before the evaluation work can really take off. We are now on the brink of being able to see the output of this new process. Currently 40 volunteers are at work and probably another 50 will start during the coming weeks.

Remotely managing nearly 100 volunteers from more than 30 different countries is quite an organizational experiment and challenge, and time will show whether we actually are able to do what we want to do!

As mentioned above we will soon be able to offer multi-journal fast-track reapplication, so shortly we will have a huge amount of applications to deal with. It is our expectation that all journals have been re-evaluated by the end of 2015.

But there is still more development to do: We will be reinstating our OpenURL service, we will develop easier upload of publisher metadata and journal applications and allow services to interact and extract our metadata in a way that has never been possible before; a mobile-optimised site; a subject browser; support for ORCID IDs and more.

Funding

We are currently on a funding drive, partly due to the financial requirements of the technical developments but also due to the management efforts required to control and guide all the volunteers. More new institutional members are signing up and virtually all existing ones are renewing their support. Recently smaller publishers are signing up for a couple of hundred GBP and we continue to have a very strong support among the open access publishers and aggregators.

We take this support and enthusiasm for our work as a sign that we are doing the right things, that we are on track, but during the next year or so we will really have to prove that we have managed the upgrade to the new requirements.

The financial state of DOAJ as of October 2014 is much improved compared to the same time last year but there are challenges ahead: we are not yet done with all necessary technical developments and as the number of volunteers grows so will the associated costs for managing and controlling the editorial evaluation process.

So....

It has been quite a journey from the birth of the DOAJ coming from a discussion at a conference to the current service, which really is in an important phase right now, November 2014.

Most promising projects do not make the transition to a service, much effort and many great ideas are lost. DOAJ has managed this transition since years, but now we are coming closer to the moment of truth. Whether what had turned out to be a social, organizational and managerial experiment: a community funded, crowdsourced free service, really can meet the expectations from increasingly demanding stakeholders.

In a year's time we will have the answer. In the meantime we are grateful for the support from the community, not least the Nordic Countries.



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