

OPEN ACCESS TO SCIENTIFIC PUBLICATIONS: THE SITUATION IN LITHUANIA

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Knowledge of the results of the latest achievements in science and scientific research expands the scope of attained knowledge, motivates new scientific discoveries and promotes the progress of science and economics. The necessary condition for progress is the unrestricted access to scientific information, which ensures greater visibility of scientific research results, as well as their broader use and employment. Earlier, scientists, lecturers, students and other members of society were content with access to scientific publications in subscribed journals and databases. However, constantly rising prices of subscriptions impelled us to look for new ways to ensure unrestricted scientific communication.

Increased prices of scientific journals made it difficult for scientists who publish their works in prestigious journals to recommend their articles to their students, as academic libraries often cannot afford to subscribe to those journals. Database subscription prices have been increasing each year no less than 5 percent. In 1999, due to this reason, a new movement fostering open access was started, which is acceded to by more and more institutions, which either sponsor and fund science, or are engaged in performing scientific investigations all over the world. Open access refers to free and unrestricted availability of information about scientific research results on the internet – articles, conference reports, and other published or unpublished material (e.g. report transparencies, scientific research accounts).

The movement for open access to scientific information in Lithuania

The movement for open access to scientific information in Lithuania was initiated by UNESCO, and started when Lithuanian universities began a pilot project to create an information system for electronic theses and dissertations (ETD), which later developed into several larger projects of the Lithuanian Academic Libraries Network (LABT¹). In 2003, the libraries of Vilnius University Institute of Oncology and Kaunas University of Medicine became members of BioMedCentral and started to publish articles in the “golden” open access portal BioMedCentral [4]. In 2006, the Minister of Education and Science issued an order to establish a Lithuanian information system for

electronic documents (eLABa) [6]. The system creates conditions for accumulating and disseminating scientific information, but is not obligatory for research institutions, which are totally free to join it or not. Presently eLABa has about 4,200 full text scientific publications (62, 606 REFER entries²). The most active institutions are: Kaunas University of Medicine (595 electronic documents, 12,957 REFER entries); the Library of the Lithuanian Academy of Sciences (460 documents; 7,140 entries); Vilnius Gediminas Technical University (482 documents, 5,766 entries); Klaipėda University (230 documents, 5,111 entries); the Lithuanian Academy of Physical Education (207 documents, 4,450 entries), etc. 63 scientific journals make their full text articles publicly available by means of eLABa, but only 13 journals are registered at the DOAJ³.

It is important to mention, that the most active in open access are academic libraries. The Lithuanian Research Library Consortium (LMBA)⁴ is a member of eIFL.net⁵ that runs the Open Access programme. The consortium organizes some events, in collaboration with the Lithuanian Academic Library Network (LABT)⁶, the Ministry of Science and Education, the Lithuanian Academic Publishers Association⁷, and the academic community.

In 2005, the Association of Lithuanian Academic Libraries organized in Vilnius the first seminar on open access to scientific communication. The well-known specialists in this field from abroad, Melissa Hagemann, Raym Crow, Lilian van der Vaart, Jean-Claude Guedon and others presented reports at the seminar. Representatives from the Ministry of Education and Science, from universities and scientific research centres were also invited to the seminar. In the same year, as an outcome of this seminar, a second seminar was organized at Vilnius University, this time by the Association of Lithuanian Academic Libraries together with Vilnius University Library: “The Open Access initiative – revolution in the publishing of scientific production?”[5].

On June 16th 2005, a follow-up workshop “Open

² REFER. entry – bibliographical description of cited documents

³ Directory of Open Access Journals, <http://www.doaj.org>

⁴ <http://www.lmba.lt/>

⁵ <http://www.eifl.net>

⁶ <http://www.labt.lt>

⁷ <http://www.akademesleidyklos.lt>

¹ <http://www.labt.lt/>

Access - Revolution in the Scholarly Publishing?" was held at Vilnius University. The target groups of the workshop were vice-rectors of the universities, policy makers for scholarly communication, and scientific community, librarians.

On October 14th 2008, a workshop "Quality Assurance of Scientific Information in Open Access" was held in Vilnius in order to commemorate Open Access Day. The workshop was organized by the Ministry of Education and Science, the Lithuanian Scientific Council, the Centre for Quality Assurance in Higher Education, and the Lithuanian research Library Consortium.

However, no provisions of the state on the open access issue have been approved; the scientific society has contradictory views on the movement. The meeting of 7th May 2008, initiated by the Ministry of Education and Science and organized together with the Association of Lithuanian Academic Libraries on issues of open access regulation in the European Union and Lithuania, also displayed ambivalent opinions. The SPARC Europe Director David Prosser was invited to this meeting as a keynote speaker. There were also Lithuanian science policy makers, experts from the Lithuanian Board of Sciences and from the Study Quality Evaluation Centre, pro-rectors for science, publishers, representatives of libraries and eLABa. Dr Prosser acquainted the audience with the main principles of open access, stricter requirements and the opening of vistas. His report inspired active discussions, during which a number of participants mostly negated the possibility of open access implementation because of publishers' copyright restrictions, because of an increased risk for plagiarism, and because it creates additional work for the scientist, who should have to negotiate with the publisher the right to include the article in an open access repository.

It is necessary to mention the investigation performed in 2008 by the Vilnius University scientists Marija Stonkienė, Zenona Ona Atkočiūnienė, and Renate Matkevičienė *Authors' rights in science communication*. One of the constituent parts of the investigation was *Science Communication: viewpoint of editors of scientific journals supported by the state of Lithuania*, which strived to analyse the viewpoints of editors-in-chief of scientific journals funded from the Lithuanian state budget. What were their views on journal publishing, on the property rights of authors, whose works are published in scientific journals, and on open access to scientific works [10] The results showed, that more than half of the respondents (52, 2 %) agreed that scientific works should be open access right away, 34, 8 % indicated that open access may be useful only sometimes, while 4, 3 % had no opinion on this issue

[10]. The results are not very gratifying – only half of the polled acknowledges the usefulness of open access without reservation. The investigation has proved once again, that the formation of views on open access is important not only among scientists, but among journal editors as well. The same investigation also examined the attitudes of scientists toward open access. It became clear, that eventually scientists regard open access positively. However, about 25 % were categorically against open access publishing of their articles; while about 68 % were undecided. [10]. The research results demonstrably showed that the prevailing approach to open access in Lithuania, both among scientific journal editors and among scientists, must be changed. Partly, this negative attitude has been formed by lack of knowledge; therefore one of the possibilities to change the situation is education, providing information, and explanatory activities. There we may see wide perspectives in library activities: libraries must take the initiative to explain to scientists what open access is and demonstrate its advantages to the public. It is important to state that academic libraries are working in this field. Specialists from the libraries (Kaunas University of Medicine, Kaunas University of Technology, Vilnius University, etc.) present papers at conferences and give lectures to scientists. Vilnius University Library prepared a *Regulations of open access to scientific information of Vilnius University*.

Possibilities of access to articles published by Lithuanian scientists in foreign scientific journals

In order to find out the possibilities of access to the research results of Lithuanian scientists, an analysis of access to articles in foreign journals written by Vilnius University scientists was performed via databases subscribed to by the Vilnius University Library. 246 peer-reviewed foreign scientific journals from various fields of science were selected for the analysis. The list of journals was compiled after looking through the Vilnius University publications database, where all bibliographic information about all publications written by Vilnius University scientists is registered. The research results showed, that 50 % of the items were accessible via full-text subscription databases, 36 % via bibliographic databases, and 14 % were not accessible at all. This analysis shows that Vilnius University scientists have no access to 14 % of the University scientific publications published in foreign scientific journals.

The analysis of the above mentioned scientific journals served another purpose as well. It tried to find out the provisions of journal publishers on open access: did publishers permit authors to deposit their publications in open access repositories and on what terms and conditions. To perform this analysis RoMEO, a

service of the project SHERPA⁸ was used. It is an information registry of publisher policies on authors' rights, and permissions to deposit in open access repositories. The projects SHERPA and RoMEO are funded by well-known European organizations sponsoring scientific research: JISC –Joint Information Systems Committee, Open Society Institute and SOROS Foundations Network, SPARC Europe, and others. The projects are implemented at Nottingham University.

The information provided in the SHERPA RoMEO registry showed, that of the journals, where the works of Vilnius University scientists were published, 51% permit authors to place both peer-reviewed but still unpublished, and published publications in personal or institutional open access repositories. 6% permit only peer-reviewed and published publications, 9% journals – only accepted for publishing, but still not peer-reviewed and not published publications, and only 2% do not permit deposit in open access repositories. For about 32% of the journals there is no information at all.

The Opinion of the Scientific Committee of Rectors of Lithuanian Universities

February 21, 2008, the Scientific Committee of the Lithuanian Rectors Conference prepared the Project answer to the recommendations of the European University Association (EUA) on open access to scientific information. It states the problem of scientific information availability to Lithuanian scientists, lecturers and other interested individuals. The current situation of open access repositories in Lithuania is overviewed, emphasizing that without a legal basis a scientist or any other interested person or institution is not guaranteed that such a repository will provide long term storage, safety and access. Due to this reason the Scientific Committee of the Lithuanian Rectors Conference assented to the recommendations of the EUA to create scientific information repositories and suggested that Lithuanian universities sustain open access ideas and support and promote development of eLABa - national repository. In addition, it was proposed to evaluate the expedience of creating separate university open access repositories and ways of ensuring the quality of scientific information placed in those repositories, and to initiate the establishing of a legal basis of author rights and the rights of depository owners. The Scientific Committee proposed to address the Lithuanian Ministry of Education and Science concerning financial support to publish in open access scientific journals that are included in the Directory of Open

⁸ SHERPA [interactive]. Nottingham University, 2006 [viewed 2008-05-16]. Access via internet: <http://www.sherpa.ac.uk/>

Access Journals or freely accessible via scientific databases, and also to invite and promote universities to register in open access scientific portals and to pay the University member fee for publication of scientific information in open access databases [2].

Nonetheless, Lithuanian government institutions have no official position, strategies and regulations on open access to scientific information. Forming a strategy for science development more attention must be paid, first of all, to inform the Lithuanian scientific society – science strategists, directors of academic institutions, persons responsible for scientific activities in those institutions, scientists, lecturers, staff in scientific libraries – about the open access movement, its goals, advantages and the urgency of supporting it.

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