



A week of open access conferencing: Part 2

"It's not communism, it's only open access", "There are two open access communities: the uploaders and the downloaders" and "Pick your favourite boundary. Push it!". These were just three of the provocative comments made at the recent Berlin 10 Open Access Conference hosted for the first time on the African continent. The conference was held in Stellenbosch, hosted by [Stellenbosch University](#), from 6 – 8 November 2012, with the theme "Networked scholarship in a networked world: participation in open access". The name of the conference derives from [Berlin Declaration on Open Access to Knowledge in the Sciences and Humanities](#) which was written at the first meeting 10 years ago in Germany. The Declaration has since been signed by 405 universities.



The Berlin 10 Open Access Conference was held from 6 – 8 November 2012 at Stellenbosch University (Photo credit: Sarah Goodier)

Workshops

Pre-conference workshops took place on the first day (see a full list of the workshops [here](#)). I attended [workshop 1](#), presented by [Eloy Rodriguez](#) and [Abby Clobridge](#), which looked at repository interoperability. For those who were looking to learn more about open access repositories, how to set up a repository to be able to exchange information with and use information from other repositories and how this can potentially improve the visibility and use of the outputs uploaded, this was a very useful session.

In the first half of the workshop, we were introduced to the [Confederation of Open Access Repositories](#) (COAR), an international network of repository initiatives whose [vision](#) is "a global knowledge infrastructure, based on worldwide networked open access digital repositories". COAR's report on "[The Current State of Open Access Repository Interoperability \(2012\)](#)" is a valuable resource for understanding what is currently possible in terms of the interoperability of repositories. This report's main findings were discussed in the second half, focussing what is currently available through the relevant interoperability initiatives for seven different areas. These main areas are metadata harvesting, repository networks, usage statistics, cross-system transfer, author identification, persistent identifiers and managing compound objects. To find out more, you can access the workshop slides [here](#).

Opening Up the Conference

In [his opening speech](#), Prof Russel Botman, Rector and Vice Chancellor of Stellenbosch University, stated, "If knowledge is the currency of our time, then open access amounts to the redistribution mechanism of that wealth". Improving the access to and visibility of research from African countries is possible through open access (OA) and will go a long way towards changing the current perception that Africa produces few research outputs.

As of 6 November, 405 institutions had signed the Berlin Declaration. This includes 27 African institutions (a number also signed at the conference, adding to this count). Institutions that are signatories make a commitment to support open access with regard to all scholarship (not just in the Sciences). The [Max Planck Society](#) put out a call for institutions to sign the Berlin Declaration – if your institution hasn't yet, you can find out more [here](#).



Twenty seven African institutions have signed the Berlin Declaration (Photo credit: Sarah Goodier)

Moving Closer to Open Access

With the UK government accepting the recommendations of the [Finch report](#) and several major funding agencies (including the [Wellcome Trust](#)) requiring the deposit of research articles in online repositories and encouraging open access publishing of articles, OA is taking a strong hold in the North.

From a Southern perspective, more institutions are moving towards greater openness and wanting to increase access to their scholarly output. Prof Kingo Mchombu, Dean of the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences at the [University of Namibia](#) (UNAM), working with the Scholarly Communication in Africa Programme ([SCAP](#)), presented the university's path to improved scholarly communication. The interventions planned so far have been e-portfolios, an institutional repository and a digital library.

In moving closer towards OA across the African continent, we need to take the words of Lars Bjørnshauge, Director of SPARC Europe, seriously: "Reclaim the responsibility for research outputs and how these are managed, disseminated, curated and measured!"

Research & Scholarly Publishing

As [Michelle Willmers](#), programme manager for [SCAP](#), put it in her presentation, Africa is a "large continent to generalise across, but [experiences] many common challenges". Traditional journal publishing statistics seem to indicate that Africa contributes a very small amount of research in terms of the total produced globally. However, this picture is not accurate. [ISI indexed journals](#) are mainly full-text English publications (or at least their bibliographic information is in English) and this can marginalise African journals published in French or any local language. In addition to the language bias, many research outputs produced in Africa fall outside of the definition of 'journal article'. Working papers, policy briefs and technical reports, to name a few, can form a large part of outputs.

And it can be those non-traditional outputs or articles outlining policy, for example, that have a significant impact, one which won't necessarily be reflected by citations. [Cameron Neylon](#), Advocacy Director for [PLoS](#), highlighted this using the example of papers published in PLoS journals authored by University of Cape Town (UCT) staff members and looking at paper views over time and the number of citations. While the usual overall pattern noted is increased views and citation over time, there are a few cases of an unusually large number of views but very few citations. Two such articles ('[Guidance for Evidence-Informed Policies about Health Systems: Rationale for and Challenges of Guidance Development](#)' and '[Building the Field of Health Policy and Systems Research: Framing the Questions](#)', both published in PLoS Medicine) focus on policy recommendations in the health sector – the articles are clearly having a large impact, but this would not be obvious using citations as a measure. Papers that may not seem to be of obviously high impact can be very relevant to certain sectors and this can be identified through looking at alternative metrics such as sharing and social media. These alternative metrics ([altmetrics](#)) (including views, downloads, blog mentions and tweets) can help us better appreciate the impact of our research, who is finding it relevant and useful and where they are located.

OA and Measuring Impact

The traditional [impact factor](#) was subjected to a lot of criticism. [Tom Olijhoek](#), representing [SURF](#), highlighted the weak correlation between citations of individual articles in

a journal and that journal's impact factor. Impact factor may currently be used as a measure of a journal's quality but, as it is based on the average citations for the average article, it can't be a reflection of any one individual article! Yet researchers are often assessed based on the impact factor of the journals they publish in. This has little to do with the actual impact or quality of their article. Rather, Dr Olijhoek advocates for thinking of impact in a broader sense as a combination of citations, usage, peer-review and altmetrics. I feel a broader view like this, looking at citation and article level metrics, is more logical when it comes to assessing academics and their individual outputs.

Students are Central

Highlighting the central role of students in OA advocacy and change was [Nick Shockey](#), Director of the [Right to Research Coalition](#). He encouraged students talk to their lecturers, thesis supervisors and the HoD of their departments and get discussions going about access. If you are a student (as an academic who interacts with students, you can pass along the message), be aware that the paywall (the all too familiar "Please pay \$24 for 24 hour access to this article") does not have to be part of the future. Think about what not having access to the latest papers does to your lecturer's ability to teach you the latest developments in your field of study. To quote from the [PhD Comics](#) open access [video](#) – "Professors can only teach what they have access to". You can help to change the system and make publicly funded research freely available.

Open Access in Africa

Prof Wieland Gevers, the Executive Director of the [Academy of Science of South Africa](#) (ASSAf), talked about the development of the [SciELO-SA collection](#). This full-text, indexed, free to access and peer-reviewed collection of South African journals was modelled on [Brazil's similar approach](#). This invaluable resource is currently funded through the [Department of Science and Technology](#) (DST). However, Prof Gevers acknowledges that sadly there has been "no progress yet towards compulsory OA for publicly funding outputs and no policy framework for OA repositories". This is a vital next step for South African research!

Dr Willie Nwagwu lecturer at the Africa Regional Centre for Information Science

University of Ibadan, Nigeria summed up it up well in his presentation: "OA could be an opportunity for us to upload Africa".

And it's a Wrap

In [SPARC](#) Executive Director [Heather Joseph's summary of the conference](#), she encouraged us all to take action: "Pick your favourite boundary. Push it" and also "Put students at the Center". I would like to see this challenge taken up at UCT by increasing our engagement with students around OA, raising awareness of what public access to research outputs now and in the future means for them. After all, they are the academics, researchers and policy makers of tomorrow.

by Sarah G

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