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Stop funding open access – just a thought

Posted on April 9, 2015 by Wilma van Wezenbeek

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While we are implementing (hopefully more and more) open access deals in The Netherlands (e.g. with [Springer](#)) there is one thought that crossed my mind. For quite some time [funding agencies](#) support the open access publication of scientific articles. This is of course what we want, because we want knowledge to flow and our economy to grow. However ... is all the extra funding in open access publications a sensible way forward? The reason I am asking this is because of the upcoming [offset deals](#). We (institutes, libraries) have put money in the publishing system in the old days for access, for reading (and of course for more services the publishers offered alongside in the digital age). We have created a movement to (try to) change to a system where we (will) pay for the publication production part, and reading or access is “for free”. There is a lot to read about the total cost of publishing, and how open access will cost us much more than we pay for “closed” access right now.

And where does or will the extra money we need come from? From the funding agents, research grants, other faculty budget, or perhaps the government (the latter is not the case in The Netherlands). We are creating complexity in the world of publishing, we are finding ways to fund open access, where it perhaps could be as simple as it used to be. Apart from member or personal subscriptions, the major proportion of costs for the reading access came from the institutional (library) budgets. There was no budget for this from funding agencies; if you wanted extra content, not covered by the “big deals”, you needed to arrange this with your librarian, and publishers marketed their content via their libraries and via the researchers (“ask your library to ...”). So why are we changing this? If a library or consortium wants to have an open access arrangement for or alongside the subscribed content, you cannot “use” this extra money in the system. If I refer again to the Springer deal the money paid is (we accept that in this transition period) mainly for opening up our articles in hybrid journals, and it is not possible to fund this (what I do understand). However, we all know this extra money is there and exists, and we cannot ignore this during our negotiations. And this creates complexity.

Let there just be one budget for publishing (and for the sake of simplicity I leave out the surcharges that might be paid by the authors out of their own research budget, also in the old days), and have no, I say no, extra funding for open access. Too bad. Not because I am not in favour of Open Access. But because I am.

A few afterthoughts (and of course do not consider this blogpost as a well-thought-of and reviewed article, I am just writing it in the train):

<https://librarian.tudl.tudelft.nl/2015/04/09/stop-funding-open-access-just-a-thought/>

- This total publishing budget should be the university's. The library can keep it, but we need to make sure that authors understand what costs are involved in publishing.
- We need all stakeholders to make the transition happen, as I stated earlier, there is a [true choice](#) to decide to make progress in open access.
- We need to take care that open access is not adding a barrier for people to be able to publish (researchers who are not connected with research institutes that can afford this – though we had the same problem with subscriptions of course).
- In the transition phase funders can stimulate open access, but I think that funding agencies is not the way to do this.
- The complexity is perhaps more created by traditional publishers that do not want to change models due to an uncertain future. We know that there are upcoming successful open access publishers with a changed business model.

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