

Preface

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This special issue of *Information Services & Use* brings together a collection of selected and further developed papers from the 19th International Conference on Electronic Publishing (Elpub) “*Scale, Openness and Trust: New Avenues for Electronic Publishing in the Age of Infinite Collections and Citizen Science*” which was held in Valletta, Malta, on 1–2 September 2015 and co-organised by the Department of Library Information and Archive Sciences of the University of Malta and Spazju Kreattiv, the national creativity centre of Malta. Besides giving a taste of themes discussed at the conference, exploring such a collection is yet another opportunity to contemplate on the way electronic publishing is developing, and on the particular role of the long-lasting international conference Elpub in the process of advancing this field.

Elpub 2015, the 19th edition of the conference, continues the tradition bringing together academics, publishers, lecturers, librarians, students, developers, entrepreneurs, users and all other stakeholders interested in issues regarding electronic publishing in diverse contexts. Three distinguished features of this series of conferences are: the broad scope of topics which creates a unique atmosphere of active exchange and learning about various aspects of electronic publishing; the combination of general and technical tracks; and a condensed procedure of submission, revision and publication of proceedings which guarantees presentations of most recent work.

Being around for almost 20 years is a commendable lifespan for a conference in such a volatile area and Elpub contributes to the ever-changing environment focusing on a special theme every year. In 2015, Elpub explored the interplay of two dimensions of electronic publishing – the ever growing volume of digital collections, and the improved understanding of the widest user group: that of citizens. Human, cultural, economic, social, technological, legal, policy-related, commercial, and other relevant aspects come easily together to support different views on the theme. This rich fabric of various contributing research domains and perspectives makes one ask, what exactly is important for a conference like Elpub to capture, so that it continues to play its role in bringing research excellence and practical needs of the publishing industry closer while not losing track on the advances in both research and practice?

If we look at other long-standing resources, for example the Scholarly Electronic Publishing Bibliography of Charles W. Bailey, Jr. which had 80 updates within its 15-year life span encompasses sources published in English language mostly from January 1990 till October 2011 [2], the main building blocks are specific types of issues (for example, economic, legal, and library-related issues), and the type of

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electronic publications (e.g. books and serials). This combines content-centered and domain-based aspects which are very helpful for understanding some of the main dimensions of the electronic publishing domain. However, in order to truly appreciate it, one also needs to feel the pulse of innovation-led changes in this area, and to understand better the user demands related to electronic publishing.

In this sense, the decision to focus each edition of the Elpub conferences on a theme which comes to the forefront of the professional and academic communities' attention helps to address the most striking new developments – for example in 2014 the conference focused on the aspects of research data management and digital scholarship in the context of electronic publishing [5]. To understand better the particular position of themes discussed at the conference, one could also apply the technology adoption life cycle developed after the diffusion process suggested by Bohlen and Beal in the late 50s of the 20th century [3] which looks at the various roles of stakeholders in the innovation process (innovators, early adopters, early majority, late majority and laggards). After all, electronic publishing is about specific technology in its perpetual development. In this sense the Elpub conference themes are normally bringing on board early adopters who have a good opportunity to spread awareness and engage larger communities. The 19th edition of the conference was yet another good example, featuring workshops on “The evolving scholarly record: library stewardship roles in a fast changing multi-stakeholder ecosystem” presented by Titia van der Werf, a Senior Program Officer at OCLC Research, and “Upskilling for Research Data Management: how do you train the Data Librarian?” delivered by Andrew Cox, University of Sheffield, and co-organised with the Maltese Library and Information Association (MaLIA); the EC-funded CRe-AM project discussed the theme “Shaping the future for e-Publishing”, the launch of the DARIAH¹ in Malta, and a workshop on “The role of knowledge maps for access to Digital Archives” organised by the KNOWESCAPE² COST action.

While these additional events are not reflected in this special issue, it is worth mentioning them because they help to understand better the themes of major interest which are being discussed around the conference. Hopefully the domain of electronic publishing will soon enjoy a thorough analysis of the dynamics of the research topics and their impact on practice as the database community did within a series of meetings over 20 years with a concise analysis provided in the famous Claremont report [1]. This will definitely contribute to visualise the development of the domain on different levels of granularity and will help to expand the content- and domain-specific points of view with the larger innovation-driven point of view.

The collection of papers in this special issue provides diverse by theme, informative and thought-provoking articles which help to illustrate several trends of development in electronic publishing.

The first set of four papers explores different aspects of open science, open access, and social media use in scholarly communication.

The first article in the special issue, entitled “Collaborating on Open Science: The Journey of the Biodiversity Heritage Library” by Jane E. Smith and Constance A. Rinaldo explores how the Biodiversity Heritage Library (BHL) has developed over a ten-year time period (2005–2015). The authors are paying special attention to the aspects of user engagement within the context of digital libraries with scientific content. Addressing a cluster of sciences which benefit from open access to digital resources illustrates some of the practicalities around open science. For example one of the interesting aspects explored in the article is the so called “taxonomic impediment” – BHL offers such a huge amount of resources that the estimate is that there are some 157 million scientific names in it. Besides offering solutions which

¹<https://www.dariah.eu/>.

²<http://knowescape.org/>.

are well received by the end users, BHL also provides a unique freely available data services, opening its bibliographic and taxonomic data to be downloaded, re-used and remixed. The actual impact of such an open science approach is still in the making but the evidence provided in this article adds a palpable feel of the value of such a digital resource and the services it offers to the users.

The second article in the collection takes the reader to the more generic questions around the role of open access (OA) in the evolution of scholarly communication process. “Is There a Need for Change in Scientific Communication and Can Open Access Take on This Role?” by Aleksandar Dimchev and Rosen Stefanov looks at the process of transformation in scientific communication as a general worldwide trend, and also illustrated on the example of one specific country, Bulgaria. The article elaborates on the specific challenges Bulgaria’s current OA initiatives and policies are currently facing. The article argues that “For Bulgaria in particular, with its current issues in both the scientific and publishing sectors, OA could very well turn out to be a major opportunity that could enable the nation’s scientific community to improve its dialogue with the greater international scientific community, as well as improve the overall quality of its research output”. It is interesting to contemplate further on the enforced feedback a new publishing model has the potential to bring, and the under-researched theme of the influence of the dissemination of scholarly results on the quality of research outcomes.

Yet another article in the collection explores aspects of open access, but from the point of view of helpfulness of policy instruments. “The OpenAIRE2020 FP7 Post-Grant Open Access Pilot: Implementing a European-Wide Funding Initiative for Open Access Publishing Costs” by Pablo de Castro provides an excellent insight into the effect some specific policy measures of the European Commission have on the advancement of open access. The paper focuses on the outcomes of the first six months of the implementation of the FP7 Post-Grant Open Access Pilot and offers a range of helpful evidence on the effect of this funding instrument on Gold Open Access across Europe.

The final article in this first set, “Professional social networks among Italian astrophysicists. Prospective changes in validation and dissemination practices?” by Monica Marra, contributes to the ongoing research on the influences of the main web 2.0 tools on the scholarly communication cycle exploring the behaviour of the astrophysical research community in Italy. The article summarises the outcomes of a study involving 117 astrophysicists; it looks at the attitudes and behaviour towards some major professional social networks (ResearchGate, LinkedIn, Academia.edu) as well as their opinions about aspects of the main validation practices. While the paper provides evidence that professional social networks are widely used, the focus is on dissemination and not on validation of the quality of research.

The second set of papers illustrates different aspects of the practical development within the electronic publishing domain.

The article “Multimodal Literacies and Academic Publishing: The eTalks” by Claire Clivaz, Cécile Pache, Marion Rivoal and Martial Sankar shares the experiences of the Swiss Institute of Bioinformatics (Vital-IT, Lausanne, CH) in developing in collaboration with the Erasmus+ project #dariahTeach *eTalks*, an innovative multimedia publishing platform. It is developed with the intention to answer the emerging need within the academic publishing domain for accessible digital multimedia editing platforms allowing in-depth editing and quoting digital resources similarly to the practices established for printed sources (this is a very essential for tracing the impact of digital resources as demonstrated in [4]). The *eTalks* platform solves a number of practical issues such as linking images, sounds and textual materials with hyperlinks; the interface is friendly for use by academics. The paper addresses as well the digital rights management modality which is essential in such platforms. It is also worth noting that the paper contextualizes clearly the need for such platforms with the larger domain of multimodal lit-

eracies which require new skills in handling and manipulating text, image and sound together within the academic tasks.

The next article, “Theory & Practice in Visual Interfaces for Semi-Structured Document Discovery and Selection” by Fernando Loizides, George Buchanan and Keti Mavri, addresses the challenge of creating assistive software which reflects the personal information needs in the process of discovery and selection of relevant documents. The paper explores in depth the aspects related to better formulation of requirements for visual interfaces thus filling an existing gap on the In this article, we examine areas which contribute to the theory and practice of visual interfaces directly relating to the discovery and selection of publications. This is a comprehensive literature review which justifies the need for requirements gathering in the design of visual interfaces.

The final article in this special issue, “Design and Implementation of a Social Semantic Digital Library” by Maria Nisheva-Pavlova, Dicho Shukerov, and Pavel Pavlov, is bringing us back to the starting point of communities and their contribution to specialized digital collection but from the point of view of digital library developers. On the example of DjDL – A Digital Library with Bulgarian Folk Songs, the authors outline the major aspects development of social semantic digital libraries which involve contributions to content and metadata of communities of users. Reflecting upon the observation that the involvement of user communities helps to expand the end users and to answer better their expectations, brings us back to the set of issues explored in the first paper in the collection but from the user point of view.

We hope that a variety of readers will find articles of interest to their own theoretical or practical pursuits.

It is worth noting in conclusion that the International Conference on Electronic Publishing (Elpub) is soon celebrating in 2016 its 20th anniversary edition,³ hosted by the University of Göttingen, and the 21st edition of the conference which will be organised by the Cyprus University of Technology is under preparation. Here we would also like to extend our gratitude to all members of the Elpub Executive Committee which, together with the Programme Committee, helped preparing both the conference and this special issue. We also would like to thank all our sponsors (Emerald, ProQuest, Copernicus and Springer) with whom we reinforced the connection between the academic conference discourse and the professional publishing community which is extremely nourishing for this conference.

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³<http://meetings.copernicus.org/elpub2016/>.