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Knowledge grows when shared

The Launch of OpenAIRE, 2nd December in Ghent

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Published in:
ScieCom Info

Publication date:
2010

Document Version
Publisher's PDF, also known as Version of record

[Link back to DTU Orbit](#)

Citation (APA):

Elbæk, M. K. (2010). Knowledge grows when shared: The Launch of OpenAIRE, 2nd December in Ghent. ScieCom Info, 6(4), 4758.

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KNOWLEDGE GROWS WHEN SHARED – THE LAUNCH OF OPENAIRE, 2ND DECEMBER IN GHENT

Mikael Karstensen Elbæk

Introduction

Knowledge is one of the few commodities that don't devalue when used. Actually knowledge grows when shared and the free online access to peer-reviewed scientific publications is a potent ingredient the process of sharing. The sharing of knowledge is facilitated by the Open Access Movement. However Open Access is much more than downloading the PDF. Vice President of the European Commission and European Digital Agenda Commissioner Neelie Kroes boldly presented this message in the Opening Session of the OpenAIRE launch¹.

On the 2nd December 2010 the official launch of OpenAIRE² the European infrastructure for Open Access was launched in Ghent, Belgium. This project and initiative is facilitating the success of the Open Access Pilot in FP7 as presented earlier in this journal³. In this brief article I will present some of the most interesting issues that were discussed during the first session of the day.

A commonwealth of learning

In his keynote Professor John Willinsky wove together historical, philosophical and economic perspectives on the importance of free access to knowledge particularly of the benefit for education.

In his reference to John Locke's philosophies about "a commonwealth of learning" Willinsky made the point that learning has its own economy which is crucial to the public good. Thus the high quality information of scholarly output should not be locked up, which stresses the importance of Open Access.

The message needs to be advertised

However the important message has yet to sink in with many academics, and even the public.

We must ask ourselves whether we are educating our students to keep on accessing knowledge after they leave this tower (Ref.: to the Ghent University Library Book Tower where the event took place)? Or have we taught them to use course packs, while library courses taught them to use closed knowledge and not open

knowledge. We should really teach them to think. Locke was one of the most influential thinkers of the Enlightenment Movement. In many ways the Enlightenment failed. However with the Open Access Movement we are given an extra chance but if you want the support from the public and the academics you need to get the message across – we've got to get out there and advertise.

Open Access is a legal and technical reality today

The need to promote Open Access was also addressed in Neelie Kroes' speech in which she stated that "*Open Access is a legal and technical reality today. The question is no longer 'if we should have open access but 'how' we should develop it further and promote it'*".

It is this "how" which is now the real challenge. The Internet has provided an infrastructure that has disrupted existing models for scholarly communication and Open Access has provided the standard for the future of scholarly dissemination. It is an organisational business challenge and not least a social challenge. But rather than getting lost in unfruitful debates from the past we should see the opportunities the future offers.

Getting back to Willinsky, OpenAIRE needs to grab this opportunity and advertise it to our academics and to society – OpenAIRE should take advantage of the ideas of the Enlightenment; the rules of reason, civil rights. We should promote the idea of the *human right to know* which is consistent with the ideal of the European idea. If we learn that we have the right to know then we can ask *how do you know?* And only if the information, the data, used in a case is Open Access can we truly test it.

The success of e-infrastructure in the European Union

The European Union has a successful history building e-infrastructures funded by the EU Member states and the European Commission, like the high speed networks provided by GÉANT to European scientists. Neelie Kroes presented a sincere hope that OpenAIRE will provide another building block in this tradition thus enhancing the continued international collaboration and coordination of Open Access repositories.

¹ Kroes, Neelie (2010). Neelie Kroes' speech at OpenAIRE launch in Gent. Last visit 09.12.2010:

<http://www.libereurope.eu/node/588>

² <http://www.openaire.eu>

³ Hagerlid, Jan (2010). OpenAIRE, Sciecom Info 1 (2010)

The National Open Access Desk⁴

During the launch event member of the OpenAIRE consortium Professor Yannis Ioannadis presented the important human aspect of OpenAIRE and asked the 27 National Open Access Desk's representing the 26 member states plus Norway to stand up. Here they received a well-deserved applause for their effort.

In conclusion

The strength of the OpenAIRE project is the strong network and participation of European countries. It is with their connections and knowledge of local affairs

that the important message of Open Access can reach researchers everywhere in Europe.

Spirit and enthusiasm was very much present at the OpenAIRE general assembly which was held the day before the OpenAIRE launch event. Being there and participating in the meeting I felt assured that the National Open Access Desk will facilitate the success of the FP7 Open Access pilot and hopefully lead the way for the overall Open Access policies for the next framework programme in the EC.



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⁴ Originally the national nodes in the OpenAIRE project were named National Contact Points. But to prevent confusion with the local EC FP7 contact points the name was changed to National Open Access Desk