

Public Knowledge, Open Access

By JON D. ERICKSON

When the Adirondack Research Consortium and the *Adirondack Journal of Environmental Studies* were launched in 1994 I was in graduate school, interested in research on the Adirondack economy and ecology, and desperate for a forum to pose questions, exchange ideas, and ultimately be a part of the policy and management process. Gone were the days of my professors—typewriters and armies of statisticians replaced by the computer—but the collections of the university library were still the dominant form of research. A literature review meant that the most current research cited was already three or more years old, reflecting the lag time from field work, analysis, and writing to peer review, editing, and publishing. The use of electronic listservs to form research networks was just beginning to narrow the gap between question and answer (with our very own Adiron-L a part of that first generation). Dial-up home internet access was a luxury, spam amounted to a few unsolicited e-mails a week, and college students still lived and breathed the Dewey decimal system.

Card catalogs today seem like a relic from a century ago, not just a decade ago. While dial-up internet and poor cell service still characterize many rural communities, the trends in internet archiving and publishing have significantly improved the delivery of current research. Research by my own students today is more often done through laptops and high speed, wireless connections to vast digital libraries (often from a couch in a coffee shop!). While limited internet access still plagues many rural areas, my own field research in the distant corners of Africa and Latin America is more often than not facilitated by the internet. Quality control can be challenging, and the standards of peer review

are as important as ever, but information access and literacy has rapidly changed the publishing landscape.

The majority of research journals today provide all content via the internet—some for free, others only to library or individual subscribers. Articles from widely cited journals such as *Science* or *Nature* to the most specialized journals are just a mouse click away. While most journals still publish a print version as well, the number of open access peer-reviewed web journals is growing rapidly. International collaborations

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such as the Public Knowledge Project (<http://pkp.sfu.ca/>) and its free Open Journal Systems software have facilitated an explosion of web journal publication, with 1400 titles in 10 languages using this publishing platform alone. A recent estimate of peer-reviewed, open access journals puts the total at 3400, about 12 percent of the worldwide total of peer-reviewed journals, and about two-thirds of non-open access journals allow their authors to deposit their manuscripts in open access repositories.¹

Web journals are more than just online archives. They need not be static, one-way dialogues between writer and

reader. Interactive reader commentary is often facilitated, weekly web logs (blogs) from editors and authors are becoming the norm, and the domain of whose voice is publishable is broadening beyond just the credentialed expert community. Peer-reviewed wiki sites such as the Encyclopedia of Earth (<http://www.eoearth.org/>) encourage submission of edits, reviews, and boxed insets to previously published work, in addition to publication of web books and articles.

And so, as I hinted at in my last prerogative, AJES will begin experimenting with a web version. The first step has been to create an Adirondack Research Consortium blog (found at <http://adkresearch.blogspot.com/>), where invited blog authors will post regular research notes, ARC conference and business updates, and other news relevant to the Adirondack research community. Anyone and everyone can read and comment on postings. Over the coming months we will begin to put this issue of AJES online, experiment with layout and features, and prepare for future online issues (along with our print issue). The plan is to join the growing community of scholarship under the Public Knowledge

Project, with the journal *Ecology and Society* (<http://www.ecologyandsociety.org/>), one of the earliest peer-reviewed open access journals, serving as a model. Please be sure to browse <http://www.ajes.org/> in the coming months, check out our progress, and get back to me with ideas and advice at jon.erickson@uvm.edu, or the old-fashioned way at 802-656-3328.

¹ Suber, Peter, "The Opening of Science and Scholarship," Publius Project, June 4, 2008, <http://publius.cc/2008/06/04/peter-suber-the-opening-of-science-and-scholarship/> (accessed on August 10, 2008).