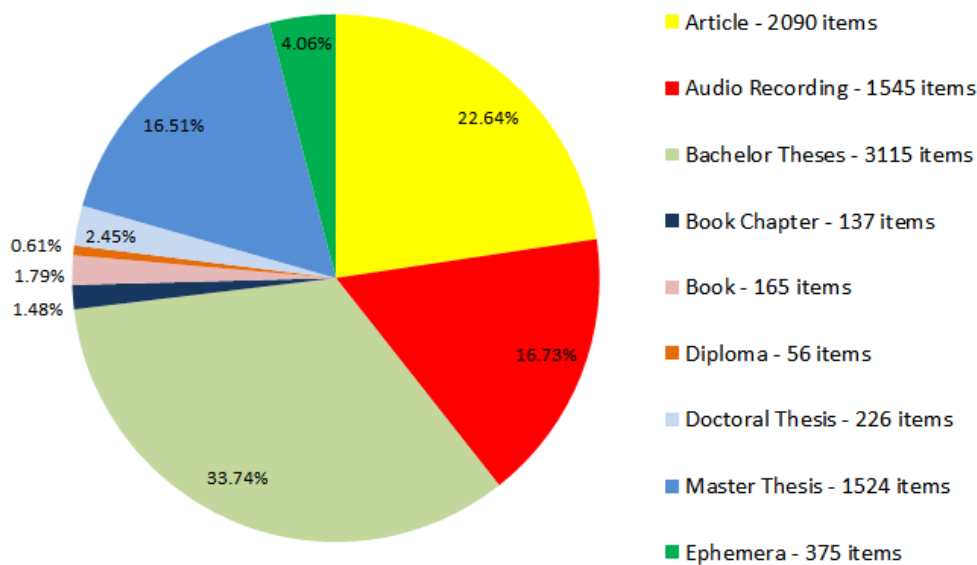Search

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FUNDING OPEN ACCESS   **RESEARCH PROMOTION**   **OPEN ACCESS IN HUMANITIES**

The first Open Access Repository in Malta: two years of challenges and experiences

Content archived in OAR@UoM - Data as of end of August 2016

- Article - 2090 items — 22.64%
- Audio Recording - 1545 items — 16.73%
- Bachelor Theses - 3115 items — 33.74%
- Book Chapter - 137 items — 1.48%
- Book - 165 items — 1.79%
- Diploma - 56 items — 0.61%
- Doctoral Thesis - 226 items — 2.45%
- Master Thesis - 1524 items — 16.51%
- Ephemera - 375 items — 4.06%

(http://openscience.com/wp-content/uploads/2016/09/CXPyM5.png)

September 19, 2016

Two years after the launch of the first open access repository in Malta, Ryan Scicluna* comes up with some thoughts on the evolution of this project. Unfortunately, disseminating information and speaking at local conferences was not enough to persuade academics to upload material. In consequence, the University started working on an OA policy to mandate submissions onto the repository.

In September 2014, the University of Malta (UM) launched its Open Access (OA) Institutional Repository (IR) – OAR@UoM (https://www.um.edu.mt/library/oar/). In line with other institutional repositories of higher education institutions, the repository's primary goal is to collect, preserve and disseminate the research output of the University. Subsequently, OAR@UoM is an online platform, which supports UM academics and researchers to publish their research output in OA as delineated by Leslie Chan (http://www.thehindu.com/todays-paper/tp-features/tp-educationplus/in-defence-of-open-access-systems/article4257197.ece), "the set-up of an institutional repository should be the primary means that each institution has for making the research output of their faculty openly accessible" and thus eliminating the hefty recurrent expenditures for licensing online journals hosted by commercial publishers.

This, however, presents a number of challenges. Since OAR@UoM is the first and only online institutional repository on the Maltese Islands, it also serves as an opportunity to expand partnerships with other institutions. This pushes the boundaries of traditional IRs and creates new sets of challenges.

Promoting green OA in Malta

One such challenge, is promoting the idea of uploading research in OA to a number of academics who are unaware of OA or are bound by copyright obligations and restrictions. For this reason, awareness is crucial and thus the UM Library is actively promoting OAR@UoM to academics as a platform where research created by the UM is preserved and also showcased online in OA. This highlights the value of having research created at the UM available on the repository both for preservation purposes and also to make research available on an international level without any restriction.

Before implementing OAR@UoM, a pilot study was conducted and the results were quite positive with regards to academics submitting items in OA. However, in practice most of the academics that showed interest and were keen to upload their research, were concerned mostly about two aspects; copyright issues and not having the time to upload their research. For some reason the idea of OA seems to be a cultural shock for the academic community in Malta. Another common reason for not uploading on OAR@UoM was the fact that a big number of academics had already made their research available in OA through other platforms such as researchgate.net and academia.eu prior to the implementation of OAR@UoM. These academics argued that uploading their research output on OAR@UoM would be repeating again what they had already done on these social networks. Nevertheless, there were a number of academics who supported the repository and uploaded their papers, book chapters and other items on OAR@UoM., However, they only represented a minor segment of the University of Malta academics.

Library staff organise training workshops on how to upload the research output onto OAR@UoM and highlight the benefits of OA publishing. Librarians also offer direct one-to-one training sessions with academics addressing copyright and plagiarism issues as these might be one of the many issues holding back academics from submitting their research. The Library takes part in events like Science in the City, meetings and discussions on a European level to constantly raise awareness about the repository and also learn new trends in OA. In October the Library also organizes OA week (http://www.openaccessweek.org/) on campus where more in depth training is given and awareness about research in OA is raised. In May 2015, the Library in collaboration with FOSTER hosted a conference, specifically aimed at academics who publish on a regular basis. The goal of the conference was to address main concerns and issues academics have with uploading their research on the repository in OA.

Is mandating needed?

Unfortunately, similar to other institutional experiences, some academics are reluctant to submit their research on OAR@UOM. The initial years are the time when the Library has to overcome various reasons which hinder the submission of material to OAR@UoM by academics. At this stage institutions could consider adopting an exclusive Gold OA policy to mandate research to be published in OA journals but institutions expecting to adopt such an approach can be criticized for not taking into consideration the financial requirement for doing so, especially catering for APCs. This is similar to what happened in the UK when the government tried to implement a national OA policy favoring the Gold model at the expense of the Green model (http://openscience.com/parliamentary-committee-criticizes-current-policy-on-open-access-in-the-uk/). With the implementation of an OA repository instead of an OA Policy first, the University of Malta promoted the self-archiving route (Green OA) while also recommending and supporting Gold OA Publishing. Unfortunately, disseminating information and speaking at local conferences, was not enough to persuade academics to upload material on OAR@UoM. Since at the University of Malta we do not have the structure to guarantee funding of APCs, the Library started working on an OA policy to mandate submissions onto OAR@UoM (Green OA) while supporting OA publishing (Gold OA). This is also very similar to the model adopted by the UK according to the Research Excellence Framework (REF) policy (http://www.ref.ac.uk/).

The REF is the new system for assessing the quality of research in UK higher education institutions. The REF was undertaken by the four UK higher education funding bodies, who will use the REF results to distribute research funding to universities on the basis of quality, from 2015-16 onward. This mandates university research to be submitted into university repositories in open access making it easier for universities to be compliant with open access policies. This also changes the nature of submissions from a want to a need in the context of researchers. It creates a competitive environment where a researcher who wants to benefit from research funds must have had his previous research available through open access repositories. Failure in doing so has negative repercussions for him/her and his university. Having research funding and professional review directly connected with depositing articles in the repository in open access has drastically increased submissions and changed the attitudes of academics towards open access.

Technical issues

OAR@UoM offers two methods for submitting such research, mediated or self-deposit. Mediated deposit is used to support academics who might not have the time to upload the material themselves and/or needed some assistance. Academics who want to submit their items individually can use the self-deposit method. The submission methods for academics and students differ; in order to have dissertations available on the

repository, students submit an electronic version of their theses, which the faculty administration collects and then sends to the Library as a batch. Library staff uploads the dissertations under their respective faculty's collection and ensures that the metadata is consistent with Library policies.

When academics upload their research on OAR@UoM, the submission goes through a quality control phase. All submissions are checked by Library staff to ensure that the metadata is correct and the items submitted are the ones described. Most frequent issues at this stage are subject keywords. Replacing author generated keywords with Library of Congress subject headings (http://id.loc.gov/authorities/subjects.html) is usually the most frequent issue as this is usually a time consuming task, especially if the subject of the research is not clear or obscure.

8,000 contributing authors

After nearly two years, the Library managed to populate the repository with a number of important research resources. There are over 8,000 different authors who have items deposited on OAR@UoM with over 16,000 different subject classifications. These items are also the result of the Library's own initiative to find content appropriate for OAR@UoM and upload it on behalf of the creators. On a first impression 8,000 authors might sound impressive but at least half of them are students and their dissertations. Subsequently, from the remaining half, a forth are voluntary submissions from academics (self deposited or mediated), the rest are a result of the Library's initiative to digitize Melitensia items (papers and articles about Malta or written by Maltese authors). As of the end of August 2016, there are a total of 9,885 items available on OAR@UoM, over 2,000 articles, 1,500 recordings, 165 books, over 3,100 undergraduate dissertations and nearly 1,700 postgraduate dissertations. This is just a fraction of the total research output produced by University staff.

University published journals such as the International Journal of Emotional Education (IJEE), Journal of Malta College of Family Doctors (JMCFD), Images in Paediatric Cardiology (IPC), Xjenza, Bulletin of the Entomological Society of Malta, Antae Journal, Malta Journal of Health Sciences, Malta Medical Journal, Think Magazine and Symposia Melitensia upload their issues on the IR as a means to reach a bigger audience. Since OAR@UoM is OpenAIRE compliant, all uploads are to be OCR compatible and the IR is indexed by Google, anything uploaded on OAR@UoM is getting a boost in visibility online.

Another way to increase the visibility of the repository in general and to demonstrate the interest to the materials uploaded on the IR, can be to encourage other entities to upload material in special collections. An example of such is the University Campus FM, which see OAR@UoM as a means to archive their programs and also benefit from the visibility boost. Electronic dissertations uploaded on OAR@UoM are not available in OA, however, the metadata of these dissertations, is. In fact, the Library receives a number of requests from various researches from different countries, to gain access to these dissertations. After receiving a request, the author of the dissertation is contacted and if he/she gives permission, such requests are granted.

Another project linked with OAR@UoM is the digitization of Melitensia pamphlets (material related or talking about Malta, by Maltese authors or of Maltese heritage importance). This material is uploaded on OAR@UoM as part of the development of the IR into a National Repository.

UoM Library's goal is to bring together the Maltese research community by enhancing their awareness on OA; however due to the reluctance of academics to upload, in order to guarantee that researchers will submit material onto OAR@UoM in OA, the UoM has to issue a mandate that clearly outlines the responsibly involved with such an obligation. This may further impact the country as a whole due to the fact that research produced will be internationally visible and can result in foreign entities investing in local research.

* – Ryan Scicluna, Outreach Librarian at the University of Malta Library since June 2011. Interested in Open Access, institutional repositories and the promotion of library services. Ryan actively promotes literacy through the use of comics as chairperson of the NGO Graphic Novels Library Malta (GNLM).

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