Open Access and Dissemination of Research

Research work propels the human race forward. If there was no ongoing research in the area of science, arts, humanities and other fields of study, how could we make new discoveries, improve on existing models or enhance knowledge? Nobody underestimates the importance of conducting research. However, how much of this knowledge is actually accessible? Most people will opt to consult academic journals and monographs but how much of this material can be discovered by researchers, students and non-researchers individuals who might be interested in a particular subject? Journal subscriptions incur heft recurrent expenditures while academic research monographs cost a fortune. So how can we conclude that such research is widely accessible if there are so many financial barriers?

Nowadays, researchers are encouraged to publish with Open Access (OA) journals. These are journals that do not ask for subscription fees from readers. Such journals can be freely accessed online and the research published can be re-used. This is because open access publishing grants a CC BY license, which allows others to distribute, reuse, expolit and build upon previous research, including commercial research as long as the authors of the original paper are credited. OA publishing does not affect the quality of publishing since articles that are accepted for publishing in OA still go through a peer-reviewing process. Some journals ask for article processing charges (APCs) to cover the costs of publication, editing and peer-reviewing. Funding agencies and institutions are starting to budget for such APCs through their research budget.

OA publishing is not just a choice that the researcher makes while thinking about publishing options. EU research programmes such as Horizon 2020, which is an EU Research and Innovation programme, with nearly €80 billion of funding available over 7 years (2014 to 2020), require that all funded research must be published in Open Access and APCs need to be included in the application before applying for research. Beneficiaries of such funds are mandated to deposit a copy of the research in a repository of their choice and ensure and the publication is made available in OA within 6 months from publication for the sciences and 12 months for the arts, humanities and social sciences. Such measures will guarantee that

funded research will be made freely accessible online with the potential to be disseminated globally.

As a fundamental believer in the dissemination of knowledge and research, the University of Malta Library, offers academics the possibility to upload their research papers on its Institutional Repository - OAR@UoM. This will increase the visibility of the research being carried at the UM and enhances the Library's collections. Owing to the fact that OAR@UoM is the sole institutional repository on the Maltese Islands, non-university researchers can also upload their material, as long as they have an approval form signed by an academic from the respective field of study.

Uploading academic works on OAR@UoM, provides 24/7 access. Furthermore, since all the works uploaded are harvested by Google and Google Scholar, this enhances dissemination as well as discoverability. Hence, divulging the work to an international audience. This increases the chances of research collaborations with different entities, local and/or foreign. More readers can translate to more recognition. Studies show that research articles published in Open Access are cited by other authors more frequently than comparable article, which have restricted access. In a study published in 2008 by Harnard (The University's Mandate to Mandate Open Access) it was shown that OA can increase citations from 25% to over 250%.

As of September 2016, there are over 10,300 items on OAR@UoM; ranging from articles to book chapters, audio recordings, ephemera and dissertations. These items cover over 15,000 different topics and subjects. Such a volume of resources gives OAR@UoM the potential to be very visible online thanks to search engines like Google that retrieve material from the repository in any relevant search. So much so, that the UM Library had a number of requests from researchers from countries like Germany, Switzerland, Nigeria, and Holland to access dissertations, which metadata is showing online but are restricted to UM patrons. OAR@UoM is also OpenAIRE compliant. OpenAIRE aims to support the implementation of Open Access in Europe. It provides the means to promote and realize the widespread adoption of the Open Access Policy, as set out by the ERC Scientific Council Guidelines for Open Access and the Open Access pilot launched by the European Commission.

OAR@UoM provides a platform for Maltese research to be disseminated and made accessible on a global level. Besides enhancing awareness and reputation, academics who upload their research on the institutional repository also increase the opportunities of further collaborations with other international researchers and research institutions.

For further information about OAR@UoM, one can access the website https://www.um.edu.mt/library/oar/ or send an email on oar.lib@um.edu.mt

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