

# The Politics of Open Access

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# What is Open Access?

Some tentative replies by Google:

[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Open\\_access](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Open_access)

<http://www.earlham.edu/~peters/fos/overview.htm>



# Wikipedia's

- Open access (OA) is free, immediate, permanent, full-text, [online](#) access, for any user, web-wide, to digital scientific and scholarly material, primarily [research](#) articles published in [peer-reviewed](#) journals. OA means that any individual user, anywhere, who has access to the Internet, may link, read, download, store, print-off, use, and data-mine the digital content of that article. An OA article usually has limited copyright and licensing restrictions.



# Peter Suber's


- Open-access (OA) literature is digital, online, free of charge, and free of most copyright and licensing restrictions.



Well, is that all to it?

We suggest: No.





What if we look beyond what are  
the traditional looks at OA?

That's what we are trying to do  
here with: "The Politics of Open  
Access"

# What are the implications of OA for research and science?

Some...and of thought, we suggest...



# Beyond OA and into Science and Society

- We argue the importance of analysing the politics of Open Access beyond the current discussion on models of publishing.
- OA should be addressed as a social movement of a special kind, not born outside academia but inside it very own womb.

# Open access as a social movement

- Since the late 1990s, the theme of Open Access (OA) has generated many acute discussions in the realm of scientific production.
- OA, however, is not only developing into a sizeable trend in intellectual circles, but is also starting to influence the policy debate.



# Tracing open access ideas

- In order to analyse OA, we define three different historical stages:
  - The ‘paleo-conceptual’.
  - The ‘neo-experimental’ phase.
  - The ‘social movement’ phase.

# The 'paleo-conceptual' phase

- The 'paleo-conceptual' phase began in 1963 with Ted Nelson and lasted to 1979 with the birth of Usenet, the pioneering distributed Internet discussion system.
- It is characterized by the early developments of networked digital technology and the mutual influence of developments in science and conceptual communication thought.



# The 'neo-experimental' phase

- Experimentation of technological possibilities, under a trial and error approach, led to the development of applications and their diffusion to large audiences, fostering large-scale online cooperative work.
- Examples can be found in: the Linux operating system; the Human Genome Project; Wikipedia, and; many academic journals born during these two decades.



# The 'social movement' phase

- The 'social movement' phase of OA began with the Budapest and Bethesda initiatives in 2002, and the Berlin initiative in 2003. These three events were a decisive turning point because the definition of OA was agreed and, subsequently, diffused within the international scientific community.
- Both events also signalled the existence of two complementary strategies within the OA movement: OA journals and OA institutional repositories.

# Social Movements

- As Castells (2004) argues, social movements must be understood in their own terms, that is, through their actions, their discursive practices and their impact on social structures.
- What defines a social movement is:
  - a) its identity - what it declares itself to be;
  - b) the movement's adversaries - who or what it aims to confront, and;
  - c) the movement's vision, social model or societal goal - what it wishes to attain.

# Social Movements

- These three dimensions for OA are clearly enunciated and widely available, not just in the founding declarations, such as the Budapest OA initiative, but also in the editorials of both scientific journals and repositories published by academic institutions, research centres or new business ventures in the field of scholarly publications.



# Social Movements

- In such, this movement can be seen as simply a re-statement, under the present pressure of the global market-oriented economy, of values that have been nurtured since the scientific revolution. With the demise of post-WWII big science funding, and with the swing of the pendulum toward privatisation and contractual relations, OA may be seen as a countervailing social process to keep at bay epistemic obstacles that are not scientific in nature, but rather economic and legal.

# The politics of open access

What, then, are the politics of OA, or better put: what is the political economy of OA and its implications for science?



# OA in science does not have an absolutely endogenous origin

- Its roots are found in the great cultural changes permeating contemporary society.
- Examples of such outside influences can be found in the discussion surrounding notions such as: a 'commons' within a digital framework (Benkler 2003);

# OA in science does not have an absolutely endogenous origin

- open source as a social organisation of production and form of technological innovation based on a new conception of property rights (Castells 2005),
- and even; notions arising in other social movements, for example the 'creative commons' approach to the use, circulation and distribution of cultural goods (Lessig 2004).

- So, understanding the OA movement is also to understand how science is being influenced by the great cultural and economic changes of our time.
- It is only by adopting this view that we can understand why implementing the objectives of openness to scientific knowledge has not been as easy as envisioned by early adopters of OA.

# Social Actors in OA

- The social actors involved in OA are less than homogeneous in their composition.
- In particular, publishers work on behalf of many different actors, including scientists, stockholders and other institutions, and encompass combinations of interests both within and outside the scientific community.



# Social Actors in OA

- OA also brings new players into the arena, and these have an impact on the established power relations within and around the scientific community.
- This is likely to open avenues not only for new journals offering OA but also for the production and redistribution of the power of selection and endorsement, within the community of editors and peer-review.



# Social Actors in OA

- We should also expect new players within the citations index and impact-factors business, for example, technological companies like Google with its 'Google scholar'.

- However, actors involved in the scientific creation process (i.e. sponsors, universities, enterprises, research centres, researchers, teachers, etc.) also undermine some of the power of OA, since, through their actions, they exercise some direct or indirect control over scientific communication.
- For example, academic and researchers are not adhering to OA at the rate expected by defenders of the movement.

- If we acknowledge that researchers and academics are rational agents searching to maximise their impact factor, then Subers' argument is correct.
- However, to reduce the dynamics of academic publishing system just to one motive seems overly narrow. We cannot forget the weight institutional models have on researchers' motivations.



- We thus cannot forget that OA is also affected by socio-cultural specificities, and this is why Suber's argument that researchers and academics are just too focused on their work to acknowledge the advantages of OA is not entirely correct.
- OA also requires defining new management models in academic and research careers.



- Understanding the political economy of OA thus implies understanding the globalization of science production, dissemination and social appropriation.
- Moreover, these actions are undertaken by a large set of social actors and institutions that have little resemblance to any idyllic historical view of science, and occur behind the closed walls of university campuses, away from the pervasive action of overall societies, institutions and cultural and economic trends



# Questions and New Directions of Research

- The analysis of the political economy of OA outlined here demonstrates that the implications are not confined to the publishing and exchange of knowledge within the scientific community.



- The production and the distribution of science inputs and outputs is one of oldest, and most internationally-rooted, human enterprises and the evolution of science under the spirit of OA cannot be separated from the global condition within which it is organised.



- Since we live in a world of reflexivity and expert systems (Giddens 1991), science is one of the core elements of modernity. Consequently change in science, like change in its communication systems, has surely to be reflected also in societal change at large.



- By addressing OA as a social movement we are, at the same time, emphasizing the central importance of science in our contemporary societies, and not just as a fosterer of expertise.
- Science is at the root of knowledge dissemination, through teaching and publishing.

- Both activities are intertwined deeply with the academic institutions that, by its scientific and pedagogical models, influence the overall model of educational systems in a given society.
- By changing the way through which we access academic information at university level, we must also consider that those choices will have impact in other educational levels of society and beyond those.

- The choice of access models to information delivery and knowledge production, within academia, might also account for the possible future impacts that OA can have in media consumption in our societies.

- Will it be possible to separate a generalization of free academic information from the willingness to obtain free access to other information rich contents, from TV to Websites, newspapers to books and cinema to videogames?

- Those will, probably be, questions without definitive answers in the short term, but nevertheless, we should take them into account while exploring the overall implication of OA in science and social change.



- Which is the same as acknowledging the importance of further research on OA implications beyond changing publishing and looking more at its social movement dimensions and implications for social change.