

Open Access in Serbia: Interview with Biljana Kosanović

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[Biljana Kosanović](#) is Head of the Department of Scientific Information at the [National Library of Serbia](#) in Belgrade. Recently I spoke to Kosanović about the research environment in Serbia, about access to international journals, about local Serbian journals, about initiatives like [doiSerbia](#), and about Open Access. It turns out that the situation is not quite how I had envisaged it.

Those who advocate for Open Access ([OA](#)) argue that in the age of the Internet the traditional subscription-based journal system used to publish scholarly papers is outdated, and so places an unnecessary barrier between researchers and published research.

Why? Because in order to have their work published, researchers freely give their papers to publishers, who then package them into journals and put those journals behind a subscription paywall so that they can recoup their costs, and make a profit. Many, however, believe that journal subscriptions are unreasonably high. Moreover, argue OA advocates, while this paywall may have been inevitable in a print world, in an online environment it is not, and simply creates a needless accessibility problem.

For so long as research libraries could afford to subscribe to all the journals they needed this accessibility problem was minimal, or non-existent. With the amount of research published growing year by year, however, it has become increasingly difficult for research libraries to afford all the journals they need — creating an affordability problem. And this affordability problem has led to a serious accessibility problem.

In an attempt to resolve the problem, in the 1990s publishers created the so-called [Big Deal](#). Instead of selling subscriptions on a journal-by-journal basis, they started to sell discounted packages of (sometimes hundreds) of journals on an all-you-can-eat basis.

Librarians initially welcomed the Big Deal, since it gave them more for less. Subsequently, however, they concluded that it had exacerbated the affordability problem, and so made the accessibility problem much worse. Not only have prices continued to rise, but libraries have come to feel that they are locked into large over-priced contracts from which they are now unable to escape.

Untenable

Underlining how serious the problem has become, last year the library of the [wealthiest university in the world](#) — Harvard — published a [Memorandum](#) in which it asserted that subscription-based scholarly publishing is now untenable. “Many large journal publishers have made the scholarly communication environment fiscally unsustainable and academically restrictive,” the Memorandum read. “This situation is exacerbated by efforts of certain publishers ... to acquire, bundle, and increase the pricing on journals.” [I.e. sell Big Deals, and at increasingly higher prices].

Even Harvard's wealth, it would seem, is no longer able to afford to provide access to all the journals its researchers need. So Harvard Library proposed a number of solutions, most notably that researchers should embrace Open Access ([OA](#)), which ensures that research papers are made freely available outside publishers' paywalls.

If the library of the world's wealthiest university can no longer afford to provide its faculty with all the research they need, I thought, how appalling must it be for researchers in universities based in less wealthy countries? It was for this reason that I made contact with Biljana Kosanović. Serbia, we should note, is a [transition country](#). It is also classified by many as a developing country (e.g. [here](#) and [here](#)).

To my surprise, however, Kosanović, informed me that access to international research is not a serious problem in Serbia.

Pretty satisfied

She added that this is because eleven years ago the Consortium of Serbian Libraries for Coordinating Acquisition ([KoBSON](#)) was created, and charged with negotiating and managing national licensing schemes (Big Deals) with scholarly publishers. The aim was to ensure that Serbian researchers had access to all the international journals they needed.

How do we know that access to international journals is currently satisfactory in Serbia? "Two years ago — when we celebrated the tenth anniversary of KoBSON — we did a big survey of our users," Kosanović explained to me. "We got around 3,000 respondents — which is pretty good for a user population of 30,000. Based on that, I would say that our users are pretty satisfied with what we offer them. There were only a few publishers they mentioned that we don't have in our collections."

How can it be that access to research appears to be less problematic for Serbian researchers than it is for those based at Harvard University?

Read the interview with Kosanović below to find out. In doing so you will also learn something of the research information environment in Serbia, and you will learn about the current state of Open Access in the country — for despite Serbian researchers' current satisfaction with their access needs, Kosanović is a committed OA advocate.

"KoBSON is not a long-term solution," Kosanović explained, adding, "I am sure that OA is the future of scholarly publishing, but this future will not arrive in the next year or two — so initiatives like KoBSON remain essential."

In the meantime, there is much to be done. Currently only [one university in Serbia](#) has signed the [Berlin Declaration](#), there are no OA mandates, and there are few institutional repositories.

On the other hand, more and more Serbian journals are becoming OA, thanks in part to the efforts of Kosanović and her colleagues who manage the doiSerbia initiative.



Biljana Kosanović

The interview begins ...

RP: Can you start by saying how many researchers there are in Serbia today?

BK: There are less than 30,000. In fact, if you calculate it on an [FTE basis](#) there are little more than 10,000 full-time research posts. So it is a really small community.

RP: How many universities are there?

BK: There are five state universities, and a few private ones. The majority of the private universities are dedicated to economics and management studies.

RP: And how large is the Serbian research budget?

BK: Currently it is around €100 million, which is 0.3% of the state budget.

RP: Who are the main research funders?

BK: The government provides 73% of research funding, the [Ministry of Higher Education](#) provides 10%, the EU 7%, and business 8%.

RP: So 73% of the money for research in Serbia comes directly from the government into universities?

BK: Yes, and into research institutes, of which there are about 60 in Serbia. However, some of these are very small, and some are attached to universities.

RP: The money for research that comes from the EU: is that money Serbia gets through EU programmes intended to support peripheral countries, or can non-EU researchers apply directly for EU grants?

BK: That is money that comes directly from the EU via [FP7](#) or [FP 6](#) projects, or similar.

RP: Once a research project is completed the results are written up and published in a scholarly journal. Can you say what proportion of the papers published each year globally are produced by Serbian researchers? (For purposes of comparison I understand that the UK produces [around 6% of the world's research papers](#))?

BK: That is easy to calculate. 6,500 of the papers indexed in the Web of Science ([WoS](#)) last year were produced by Serbian researchers. So if we divide that by the number of papers published annually — which is [estimated](#) at around 1,350,000 million articles — we could say that Serbia accounted for about 0.33% of the total.

Rising star

RP: I assume that, as in most countries, researchers in Serbia are publishing more and more papers each year?

BK: Correct. In fact, as a result of a push by the Serbian government to encourage researchers to publish in international journals there has been a substantial increase in the number of papers published.

This is all too clear if you look at [the graph](#) we published on the web site of The Consortium of Serbian Libraries for Coordinating Acquisition ([KobSON](#)). This shows the number of Serbian papers indexed in the Web of Science ([WoS](#)). From this you can see that where in 2011 they published 5,300 papers the number grew to 6,500 in 2012 — a 22% increase.

And if you consider that the number of articles published globally increases by around 4% per year then Serbian researchers are doing rather well. As I say, this is because the government is really pushing the research community to publish abroad.

RP: You said that 6,500 of the papers indexed in WoS last year were produced by Serbian researchers. But how many papers in total did Serbian researchers publish?

BK: Around 15,000 Serbian papers were published in journals last year.

I would also point out that in 2010 and 2011 Serbia was flagged as a science “[rising star](#)” by Thomson’s Science Watch. Thomson has stopped doing this now, which may be a good thing since this nomination was a result of the fact that the name of our country has changed a few times in the last 15 years (Yugoslavia, Serbia and Montenegro, and now just Serbia).

However, the numbers look a bit different in [Scopus](#), partly because for Scopus Serbia did not exist as a separate country before 2006 (so no papers were credited to Serbia). And as you will know, Scopus is less strict about adding new journals.

Anyway, a comparison with our immediate neighbours — Croatia, Bulgaria and Romania — is available in SCImago [here](#).

RP: You estimated that Serbia accounts for 0.33% of global research. I note you based this on the 6,500 articles indexed in WoS. Should you not include all 15,000 papers produced by Serbian researchers when estimating the percentage of global research produced by Serbia?

BK: The 15,000 articles should not be included, because the majority of them were published in local journals that are not recognised by the international community. It is for that reason that I based the percentage only on the number of articles indexed in WoS.

RP: How many local Serbian journals are there?

BK: It's around 380 today. Of these, around 22 are indexed in WoS and 43 in Scopus. Serbian journals are evaluated by an independent organisation called the Centre for Evaluation and Science ([CEON](#)). CEON has been doing this for 12 years now.

RP: Are most of the local journals science journals?

BK: No. More than 60% of them are in the social science and humanities. These disciplines are more locally oriented, and cover topics that are of more interest to the local research community.

For this reason, although physics topics are covered in local titles, there is no Serbian physics journal as such. Physics is an international discipline and so authors working in that field publish abroad.

We do have some chemistry and mathematics journals, and there are some medical journals, but the authors who publish in them tend to be much more internationally (or at least regionally) oriented.

In short, the majority of Serbian journals are in the social sciences and humanities.

RP: Are local Serbian journals all published in Serbian?

BK: No. A lot of our journals have shifted from Serbian to English. There are also a number of journals that publish in both Serbian and English in parallel.

What this tells us is that many researchers and editorial boards recognise that English is the language of science, and so if they want to join the global scientific community they have to produce papers in English, even when their paper is published in a local journal.

RP: Presumably it is mainly scientific journals that publish in English?

BK: Correct. Humanities journals are invariably published in Serbian. It is the same in the social sciences, although there are some disciplines in social science — e.g. psychology — in which papers are published in English.

As I said earlier, Serbian researchers are now very much encouraged to publish in international journals. The aim is to increase the visibility of Serbian research.

At the same time, however, we are keen to increase the visibility of our own journals. To assist in this, in 2005 we in KoBSON began a program we call [doiSerbia](#).

doiSerbia

RP: Can you say something about doiSerbia?

BK: Sure. In small countries like Serbia scientific scholarly publishing tends to be based around small presses in scholarly societies and university faculties. There are no professional scientific publishers. So articles are generally print-only or, if online, published on ad hoc web pages rather than properly indexed sites.

This makes it very difficult to implement new technologies for the electronic world, and to make the move to electronic publishing. It also makes it very difficult for Serbian science to attract international attention unless researchers publish in international journals.

RP: So how does doiSerbia work?

BK: doiSerbia is essentially a journal repository that also provides electronic archiving. In addition, it is designed to improve the visibility of local journals within the international scientific community.

To this end, in 2005 the [National Library of Serbia](#) was the first library to become a regular member of the DOI resolver service [CrossRef](#). This allows us to assign DOI numbers to articles published in local journals, deposit proper metadata about them into CrossRef, and then make the articles available online, providing free and unrestricted access to all the articles in the journal.

All the journals we index have also made their backfiles available from 2002 onwards.

This means that the articles are all clickable, and more visible — not least because the metadata from doiSerbia are regularly harvested by OA repositories and search engines like [Google Scholar](#). The content is also harvested by [The European Library](#) and by [Europeana](#).

In addition, over the last two years the journals have become available in the Directory of Open Access Journals ([DOAJ](#)).

RP: What you say suggests that, as a condition of being included in doiSerbia, a journal has to make all its content OA?

BK: Yes, that is something we insist on. We say, “Ok, we will help you by producing the metadata and making sure that they are deposited in the proper way to allow them to be harvestable. But in return you must make your journal OA.”

It is possible for us to insist on this because editorial boards recognise that DOIs can increase journal visibility, and they can see that when a journal is included in our service it attracts more citations.

Importantly, this has been demonstrated by the fact that since we began doiSerbia 18 of the journals included have been added to Thomson's Web of Science ([WoS](#)). Consequently, editorial boards have become increasingly keen to be added to our repository.

RP: You say that 18 journals have been indexed in WoS since doiSerbia started. Earlier you said that there are 22 Serbian journals in WoS. So prior to doiSerbia there were just 4 journals in WoS?

BK: Correct, although of course this expansion is not due only to doiSerbia.

RP: I would like to come back to the topic of OA later. Can you say how many of Serbia's 380 journals have been added to doiSerbia to date?

BK: It started with a pilot project of five journals and now includes 61 journals. This means that today over 24,000 full text articles are freely available to read.

RP: Why only 61 journals?

BK: The truth is that we are just a small group of people. There are only six of us working on all the things we do at KoBSON, and doiSerbia is just one of those things.

RP: Have some journals chosen not to be included because they don't want to make their content OA?

BK: Yes, we have had two journals decide not to take up the offer for that reason.

RP: Was this because they did not want to lose subscription revenues?

BK: I don't think so. I think they were just a little bit afraid of openness.

RP: From what you said earlier I suspect that most, if not all, Serbian journals are in fact funded by the government, rather than through subscriptions. Is that right?

BK: They are funded by the government, and by associations and faculties, but not by subscriptions. I don't think any journal could survive just on subscriptions in Serbia. Indeed, I doubt the journals of any country with a research community as small as ours could do so.

RP: But some journals do have subscriptions?

BK: Some do, but no journal could survive on subscriptions alone.

RP: So Serbian journals do have subscriptions, but not as their main source of revenue?

BK: Yes.

RP: Where does [SCIndeks](#) fit in here?

BK: SCIndeks is our citation database. All of our 380 journals are indexed in this. Like any citation database this records citations. So an author can see what citations he or she has received in Serbia's local journals.

RP: *SCIndeks is a local version of the Web of Science then?*

BK: That's right. SCIndeks is a really huge project funded by the government. And the service is available to anyone, whether they are based in Serbia or abroad.

Actually, I am surprised how many people outside Serbia do use it. But our international audience grew after some of our local journals were added to the Web of Science. In effect, these journals opened up Serbian research internationally.

RP: *Because more researchers in other countries have become aware of these journals?*

BK: Yes, and we have also noticed that when a Serbian journal achieves its goal of being indexed in the Web of Science, authors from other countries start to send their papers to be published in that journal. So the journals have become more international in this way too.

RP: *Essentially SCIndeks is necessary because the Web of Science is picky about which journals it includes?*

BK: Indeed. As we noted, it currently only includes 22 Serbian journals.

RP: *Would I be right in thinking that SCIndeks is also a repository and journal management system (or is this a separate service called SCIndeks e-UR and ASEESTANT)?*

BK: Originally, SCIndeks was a citation index with abstracts like [SCI/SSCI/A&HCI](#). In 2007 it was [integrated with the journals repository located in the Serbian National library](#). Now, about half (142) of Serbia's purely academic, influential Serbian journals are selected and made searchable and downloadable through SCIndeks.

Some authors like [Peter Jacsó](#) argue that SCIndeks became a "citation enhanced database". Perhaps it would be more accurate to say that it offers the core of a multipurpose system to map, classify, publish, evaluate, and selectively promote Serbian journals and their contents. Maintenance of SCIndeks is financed by the government, and therefore the content is Open Access.

SCIndeks e-Ur is a journal management system fully integrated with SCIndeks and other related services like the [Journal Bibliometric Report](#), but it is also a stand-alone software.

ASEEstant is a new version of e-Ur intended for journals published in all South East European ([SEE](#)) countries. It is not Open Access, but neither is it a classical commercial service.

RP: *Is ASEESTANT based on the Open Journal Systems (OJS)?*

BK: Yes, it is. However, OJS was substantially upgraded to accommodate the ASEESTANT mission. So CEON enriched OJS with numerous quality assurance functions. These include

utilities for the assignment of automatically generated keywords based on international thesauri (KwASS), for formatting references in accordance with a chosen citation style (RefFormatter) and for the detection of omitted citations in the article body and the references list (CiteMatcher).

Big Deal

RP: Let's turn back to the topic of international journals for a moment. Clearly, in addition to wanting to publish in international journals, Serbian researchers need to have access to all the other papers in these journals, and most of them will still be behind a paywall. To what extent is access to subscription journals a problem for Serbian researchers?

BK: In terms of access to international subscription journals we are much better organised today than a decade ago. KoBSON has existed for 11 years and we are regularly supported by the Government.

RP: So in order to provide Serbian researchers with access to international journals, the Consortium of Serbian Libraries for Coordinating Acquisition, or KoBSON, manages national licensing schemes with international publishers; and the cost of these Big Deals is underwritten by the Serbian government?

BK: Yes. And researchers really like it.

RP: I wonder how much librarians like it. As you will know, the reason why libraries around the world began to band together in consortia like KoBSON was because the cost of subscribing to scholarly journals has for several decades now been growing at a higher rate than libraries can keep up with. The logic was that by combining together libraries would be in a stronger position to negotiate attractive licensing terms with publishers, and mitigate the effects of the [serials crisis](#). You say that researchers like KoBSON, but I wanted to ask again, to what extent is access to research still a problem in Serbia today? How satisfactory would you say access is?

BK: Two years ago — when we celebrated the tenth anniversary of KoBSON — we did a big survey of our users. We got around 3,000 respondents — which is pretty good for a user population of 30,000. Based on that, I would say that our users are pretty satisfied with what we offer them. There were only a few publishers they mentioned that we don't have in our collections. It may be, however, that satisfaction levels have fallen off a bit since then as we have had to cancel some subscriptions that we could no longer afford.

RP: This goes to my point about the constant price increases perhaps. In addition, of course, when you have to rely on funding from the government that funding can at any point be withdrawn, or reduced. I think this is what happened in Serbia last year isn't it? Your negotiations with the Serbian Government over funding [ran into some difficulties](#). Amongst other things, this led to OUP cutting off access to its service for KoBSON users.

BK: Correct, and our funding last year was held at the previous year's level — so we had to cancel some subscriptions. This was an issue that affected access to other services too, not just OUP.

The interesting thing is that when we told our users about the difficulties we were facing they immediately organised a petition and 4,000 people signed it on the first day. Those who signed also added comments, both in English and Serbian. You can see it [here](#).

RP: So as a result of the petition, and the publicity it received, the government relented and gave you the money you needed?

BK: Well to be honest, when I wrote [the letter](#) to users that attracted the publicity we were already concluding our negotiations with the Government, and we recovered the services that had been cut off immediately after we finished that negotiation.

So in the event we did not need the petition. But it is good to see that our end-users are so positive about the service we offer.

RP: The letter you wrote indicated that your budget had fallen by 11% on the previous year.

BK: Well as I said, at the time of the petition we were at the end of our negotiations with the government. My thinking in writing the letter was that access to the scientific literature should be viewed as a given for any country wanting to take part in the global scientific endeavour. In my opinion, governments should understand that they must pay subscriptions if they want to do science.

RP: So access to OUP's journals was subsequently reinstated?

BK: Yes, OUP stayed on our list. And in fact this year we will see some increase in the budget.

RP: As I noted, most librarians today believe that the Big Deal has only staved off what they see as the intractable problem of the subscription system — a constant increase in costs. Moreover, they say, the Big Deal has exacerbated the situation (e.g. by locking libraries into ever more expensive deals, and forcing smaller publishers into the hands of larger publishers — thereby increasing the power of the large publishers, who can today effectively name their own price). Certainly, prices [continue to rise much faster than inflation](#), as you will know. Most librarians have therefore concluded that consortia like KoBSON do not offer a durable solution? And that, they say, is why OA is essential..

BK: Well, I agree that KoBSON is not a long-term solution. But remember that at the beginning of the 21st Century there was little in the way of open access. And while OA has increased over the last 12 years there are still a lot of journals and publishers that use the subscription model. I am sure that OA is the future of scholarly publishing, but this future will not arrive in the next year or two — so initiatives like KoBSON remain essential.

But look, you also have to keep in mind that we are part of [EIFL](#), and so the rules are different to how they would be if we had to negotiate directly with publishers on our own. True, there are a few publishers who are not part of EIFL, but most are, and they are much more understanding of the situation poor countries like ours face. So we don't experience the same increases in price as other countries do.

RP: You are saying that because you are a member of EIFL publishers don't charge you as much as they charge other countries for access to subscription journals, and they restrain their price increases for you?

BK: That's correct. And I want to stress that point — because the only way we could possibly afford the journals that we subscribe to is because we go through EIFL.

Open Access

RP: You said you are sure that Open Access is the future. You also said that doiSerbia requires OA. But how would you characterise the situation in Serbia today so far as Open Access is concerned?

BK: That depends. In terms of locally published journals I believe it is more useful for us to implement “new” techniques to make them more visible via services like doiSerbia, and to tie that to the requirement that the journal is made open access. I think that is the most useful thing we can do in that regard.

As for policy initiatives, the fact is that only [one university in Serbia](#) has signed the [Berlin Declaration](#), and we currently have no OA mandates.

RP: Would you say that there is currently greater interest in Gold OA ([OA journals](#)) or Green OA ([repositories](#)) in Serbia today?

BK: Gold for sure. Almost all journals are OA, in one way or another.

RP: Why do you think there is a greater interest in Gold OA?

BK: Because our green repositories are not fully developed yet. The fact of the matter is that OA will cost money, especially during the transition period, and the research community does not realise that. For researchers OA simply means that papers are “free to read”, they know nothing about what it might mean for them as authors.

RP: When you say that will OA cost money, especially during the transition, presumably you are referring to article-processing charges — in other words Gold OA?

BK: Yes.

RP: Green OA, on the other hand, costs little more than the price of setting up institutional repositories.

BK: That is true, but somebody has to set them up, and these people represent a cost. Of course it is not comparable to the cost of the subscriptions we pay, but if it were that easy it would have been done already.

RP: And I guess the cost of building repositories has to be measured against the fact that Serbia is able to get its subscriptions at a lower cost than other countries?

BK: That is right.

RP: *How much does Serbia pay in journal subscriptions?*

BK: Out of the €100 million research budget we spend something less than €2 million on scholarly journal subscriptions.

RP: *This is essentially the cost of the Big Deals that [KoBSON](#) manages is it?*

BK: Yes, some journal subscriptions will be taken out by individual universities, but I would estimate that KoBSON accounts for some 99% of the subscriptions.

RP: *You said earlier that Serbian journals are funded by the government, by associations, and by university faculties. I believe that in 2011 George Soros' Open Society Foundations ([OSF](#)), via EIFL, [funded a project](#) designed to enable Serbian journals to start funding themselves by levying article-processing charges?*

BK: This is a sad part of the story. In one way or another journals already do that. It is done in a secretive way, but what happens is that if you are an author and you want to publish in a journal the editorial board will say, "Ok but first you have to buy a subscription to the journal" This is not an article-processing fee but the author must buy a subscription and after that their article will be published.

RP: *This is a request for the individual to subscribe not their library?*

BK: Individuals. Libraries usually operate journal exchange programmes. So, say, the Serbian Chemical Society will send its journals to, let's say, the Polish Chemical Society and they will then receive a Polish journal in return. However, this kind of programme will disappear in a few years as the current print journals become electronic.

RP: *Does it not raise conflict of interest issues if an author is told that his or her paper will be published if they buy a subscription?*

BK: This instrument is used only by a few publishers, and has generally been abandoned as an atavistic practice related to a publishing model that is on its way out.

In the past locally published (national) journals were essentially platforms for publishing papers to a specific local populations of researchers, or even single institutions. The present systems of evaluation, official recognition (so called categorization), and governmental financial support for journals encourages international authorship and co-authorship that is incompatible with the previous coercive policy. In 2012 more than a quarter (28.6%) of the articles in SCIndeks were published by authors affiliated with institutions outside Serbia.

RP: *What happened to the OSF/EIFL project? When I looked at the web sites of the five journals that were selected to be the first to introduce APCs I could see little or no mention of author charges. One of the journals concerned — the [Military Technical Courier](#) — told me that the system they use ([ASEESTANT](#)) does allow for APCs, but that they do not levy them.*

BK: To the best of my knowledge, the project is doing well. At this moment CEON has 39 journals included in the system and many others are interested in joining the service. Currently only three of them charge authors a publishing fee.

Publishers are generally discouraged from introducing APCs too soon, and certainly not before reaching a satisfactory acceptance rate. One of the reasons for this is that there is currently a negative public perception of the APC model in the region. This is partly because of recent events related to the so-called [predatory behaviour of some publishers](#). This has definitely slowed down the process of Serbian journals moving to the author-pays economic model.

Tempus

RP: *You said that there is greater interest in Gold OA in Serbia, and that if building repositories was so easy then it would have been done by now. I note that ROARMAP [lists no OA mandates in Serbia](#), and OpenDOAR lists just [three repositories](#). I guess that goes to your point?*

BK: Yes, as I said there are no OA mandates. But there are certainly more than two repositories. For some reason they have not been registered. The repositories are all maintained by librarians, and it seems they have not taken this step. But I do not know why they have not.

RP: *So how many repositories are there in Serbia today?*

BK: I think there are ten. There are certainly more than two, because a couple of years ago we got funding from the EU for the [Tempus project](#).

Tempus was a regional project in which three Serbian universities took part. The aim was to create repositories in each university and seed them with a few initial papers.

The problem, however, is that the repositories are still at the same level today as when the project ended. So the challenge now is to get them filled.

RP: *Which is why OA mandates are needed perhaps?*

BK: Sure, but we also need people who can take on these projects. That would also help.

RP: *Do you any plans for trying to get them filled?*

BK: We do. Since the DOI is a magic word for the Serbian research community we at KoBSON plan to start collecting brief metadata about all the theses published in the three universities that took part in Tempus (that is, enough metadata for a DOI). But we will only do so on the understanding that authors agree to deposit their theses in their university repository.

So when a researcher comes to us and asks to have a DOI for their thesis to enable them to track citations and so on, we will send him or her to their university and tell them to deposit their thesis in the local repository.

The hope is that when they visit the repository to do so their librarian will be able to persuade them to deposit other items too.

RP: *Who would you say is driving the development of OA in Serbia today: researchers, librarians, research funders, the Government?*

BK: Who is driving the development of OA: librarians, librarians, and librarians.

RP: *What are librarians doing to promote OA?*

BK: Running workshops, organising projects, and building services and tools like doiSerbia to help and encourage OA.

Historically, researchers tended to assume that if they published a paper then, one way or another, it would be visible and noticed by the research community. But there is so much more that can be done to make research visible, and librarians can help in this process. This is what doiSerbia has demonstrated so well.

We can help them in other ways too — by, for instance, showing them how to share their work through social networks, and how to benefit from the new article-level metrics and other forms of [altmetrics](#).

By the way, I think workshops are old fashioned and belong to a former age. Today it is very hard to persuade people to take time out to attend a workshop. And I understand why: I attended a lot of workshops myself between 2003 and 2006, but now I prefer to see something on the web, to attend webinars, or to listen to recorded conferences or other videos.

Let's face it, researchers have enough work to do in their job, so inviting them to a workshop on OA is asking them an awful lot. In any case, they don't generally attend and I completely understand why.

Compliance

RP: *What in your view should governments, research funders, and institutions be doing to make OA a reality?*

BK: Well, I think that those who fund research have a right to insist on Open Access — because they are the ones who invest money in research. And if the majority of that funding comes from the government it is reasonable to introduce a national mandate.

Of course for those on the scientific periphery — which Serbia clearly is — it will be most welcome if the countries that produce the majority of the world's research introduce OA mandates!

RP: *Currently Serbia is not a member of the EU. However, you said that Serbian researchers are nevertheless able to apply for EU research money. To what extent is the EU OA policy (particularly as regards [Horizon 2020](#)) influencing the debate about OA in Serbia, or is it not?*

BK: Actually, we Serbian librarians made an important discovery last year. When we looked at what was happening with the [OpenAIRE repository](#) we learned that a remarkable number of Serbian projects had been funded under FP7 and [twenty seven](#) of them required that papers arising from should be made OA. In other words, many Serbian researchers had signed special clause 39 — which requires that papers funded by FP7 in [seven disciplines](#) have to be made freely available, yet most of the papers produced by our researchers had not been deposited as required.

RP: What did you do when you discovered this?

BK: We created a repository called [NasiuFP](#) in order to provide a place where the papers could be deposited.

NasiuFP is now being harvested on a regular basis by OpenAIRE. We also set out to educate researchers about what is required of them, and we created a [FAQ](#) to prepare them for the OA requirements built into Horizon 2020. We also plan to put together some videos.

RP: Clearly this raises an important issue: introducing an open-access policy is one thing, ensuring that researchers comply with it is quite another?

BK: Indeed. Although many Serbian researchers signed Clause 39 most did not deposit their papers. However, this is not because they don't want to, they just don't know what they signed.

RP: Is compliance going to be a long-term problem with OA policies in your view?

BK: I think so, and so it is an issue that will have to be resolved in some way.

The future

RP: One of the reasons why a lot of people began to advocate for OA is that they believed it would be less costly than traditional subscription publishing. Is that your view?

BK: For sure it is less costly. But if you ask the question whether Open Access will be more or less costly, the answer depends on who you are. For libraries Open Access is undoubtedly very good news. We won't need to pay subscriptions, which is just perfect for us.

Remember also that in most countries libraries are financed from the same budget as research. That means that the money that currently goes to pay subscriptions will stay in the research budget. If you are based in a small country like Serbia that does not publish many papers, OA will therefore bring a financial windfall.

On the other hand, if you are based in a large country that does a lot of research, funding APCs is likely to be a really big challenge.

But when you move from paper to electronic it brings huge challenges and will completely change scientific publishing. So while OA will change things, we face a massive change anyway.

RP: Perhaps one of the changes you envisage is a change to peer review?

BK: Yes. You can see that happening already with [PLOS ONE](#), where anybody can review a paper by adding a comment. There is also a huge debate about [article-level metrics](#). A few years ago all that mattered was the [Impact Factor](#). Now people are saying that many different things can be counted and quantitatively represented.

RP: *So in terms of the big picture, Open Access is just one of a number of consequences of moving from print to electronic. But to go back to costs for a minute: while you are right to ask, “Costs for whom?” what are the implications for the research community at large. For instance, many argue that publishers’ profits are far too high, and so money is being taken out of the research community that ought not to be taken out. Therefore, they say, Open Access should be treated as an opportunity to force publishers to lower their prices, and so reduce the cost burden the scholarly publishing system imposes on the research community. Whether this happens will surely depend on how much is paid in APCs. Do you expect the overall costs of scholarly publishing to fall?*

BK: Personally, I think the publishers will find a way to maintain their profits. Consider, for instance, how quickly they adopted the [Hybrid OA](#) model. They will simply find other ways to maintain their profits levels.

RP: *The point about Hybrid OA is that it is generally more expensive than pure Gold OA, and indeed is set at the price it is precisely in order to allow publishers to maintain their current profit levels (regardless of what it costs them to publish a paper). So do you think that Open Access advocates should work on the principle that, since it removes paywalls, Open Access is good enough in itself? But they shouldn’t expect the cost of scholarly publishing to come down?*

BK: That is my view, yes.

RP: *As you will perhaps know, earlier this year Research Councils UK ([RCUK](#)) introduced a new [OA policy](#). This was in response to the controversial government-commissioned [Finch Report](#). The new policy requires that UK-funded researchers make their research papers Open Access, and they are expected to prefer Gold OA over Green OA. In doing so, they may have to opt for the more expensive hybrid OA. This is likely to mean that many authors (or their funders or institutions) will have to pay to publish UK-funded research papers — and Finch estimated the average APC at £1,450 (€1,726). Since the UK only produces around 6% of the world’s papers, UK universities will also need to continue paying journal subscriptions in order to provide their researchers with access to the 94% of research produced outside the UK. This suggests that the affordability problem (historically known as the [serials crisis](#)) that has plagued research universities for several decades now can be expected to worsen. Partly for this reason, a recent [House of Commons Select Committee Report](#) has described the policy as “mistaken”. We don’t know how the UK government will respond, but the Select Committee has no power, so the UK government may ignore it. You say that the Serbian government wants its researchers to publish in international journals. If the UK policy stays in place, and if other countries decided to follow the UK example, including Serbia, what implications do you think it would have for Serbian researchers and for Serbian research institutions?*

BK: That would depend on who funded the research. If the EU followed the UK example, I assume they would provide the money to pay APCs for the researchers they funded.

For researchers funded only by the Serbian Government, I would expect officials in the Government would ask us to estimate likely expenditure based on what it had cost to publish in the journals of the “big” (and expensive) publishers in previous years. My personal opinion is that the Serbian Government knows that to mandate OA would incur an additional cost.

As for the UK, I hope that the final decision will be to prefer Green OA.

RP: *If one assumes (as I think you do) that sooner or later most if not all research will be published OA, there will be implications for librarians won't there?*

BK: For sure but, as I said, the process of migrating from print to electronic journals will have implications too. So it will mean a lot of changes for libraries and librarians. Actually, I am pretty critical of the library community about this.

RP: *How do you mean?*

BK: Librarians use new technology in their everyday life, they use new generations of mobile phones, washing machines or air conditioning, but when it comes to improving their everyday working environment they tend to shun new technology. So I am critical of them for that.

RP: *Do you think Open Access poses a threat to the job of the librarian?*

BK: It certainly need not be a threat, since librarians could position themselves to benefit from Open Access. There are a lot of tasks associated with Open Access, for instance, and librarians could take on these tasks.

RP: *What sort of tasks do you have in mind?*

BK: I mentioned some earlier. In addition, we could be studying all that is happening within the OA community worldwide, and presenting it in a clear and proper way in order to educate researchers. And we could be establishing repositories in different research communities. There is a lot of work we could be doing.

RP: *What are your hopes and expectations for OA over the next twelve months?*

BK: I mentioned the doiSerbiaPhD project: we would hope to get that up and running this year. It hasn't started yet, but we have applied for a small grant abroad, which I hope we will receive. If we do, we expect to have some results before the end of the year.

We would also like to see some progress in filling the NasiuFP repository with Serbian authors' FP7 papers. And we hope to use it for papers generated from [Horizon 2020](#) projects. This is something that will happen gradually.

Above all, we plan to do a lot more in the way of education. We hope to start work on one or two of the introductory videos on OA soon, but we will see how things go.

However, I do not anticipate much on the policy level this year, not least because we elected a new government last October. These people are just learning the ropes.

Essentially, the problem right now is that there is so much to do, and so many problems, and OA is just not a high priority. Every three years or so we hold a traditional conference on Open Access, but it is always mainly journals that are discussed, not repositories.

As for what policy to adopt, I think we should follow the admirable advice provided by Alma Swan in the [book](#) she wrote for UNESCO. This is full of excellent examples. The first thing to do, however, is to translate it into Serbian!

RP: Finally, do you have any views on the debate about Open Data and Open Science, and the role of OA within the larger Open Science debate?

BK: In my view the principles behind Open Access apply equally to data — not only the data contained in papers, but all the data collected during the research process. After all, in some disciplines it costs a lot of money to assemble scientific data, so people should be able to use it again and again, and without any restrictions.

This subject is very topical right now. Earlier this year there was a [Conference about Open Data Sets](#). This was organised as an FP7 project and called “Support for Establishment of National/Regional Social Sciences Data Archives”. On day two we had a [whole session about OA](#).

The conference can also be viewed (in Serbo-Croatian) on YouTube [here](#). And my presentation (in English) can be found [here](#).

RP: Thank you very much for taking the time to speak to me. I wish you every success for the future.



Richard Poynder 2013

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