

Preface

The decision to organise an international meeting on the subject of Open Access (OA) to the Scientific Literature was taken in early 2002 on the occasion of the ICSTI (the International Council for Scientific and Technical Information) Winter Meeting in Paris, following a proposal by two of its French members INIST (Institut de l'Information Scientifique et Technique) and INSERM (Institut National de la Santé et de la Recherche Médicale).

At approximately this time the Budapest Open Access Initiative (BOAI) declaration was published and was widely disseminated in the press, in French newspapers in particular and had brought about an interest in the problems of scholarly publishing, beyond the professional STM information world. The BOAI goal is to make research and education more accessible, “share the learning of the rich with the poor and the poor with the rich”, and “lay the foundation for uniting humanity in a common intellectual conversation and quest for knowledge”. Although the BOAI was not the only proposal in place concerning the future of scholarly publishing, it did generate a lot of peripheral publicity, primarily because of the support it received from high-profile supporters such as the Soros Foundation, The BOAI has specific implications for access and use of STI in the developing world, a topic which ICSTI and its Members have emphasised in its actions.

From the information circulated at the time it was clear that France had only a minor role on the international scientific publishing scene. Although some important French self-archiving initiatives have been developed, they have had only limited visibility in the international context. It was felt that the newer techniques could improve the possibilities for publishing the results of French research work. (A few months later, over 25% of the signatories of the BOAI were from French speaking countries.)

INIST, INSERM and ICSTI were also aware of the need to encourage the wider debate on OA and to raise the issue at the political level, to ensure continued support from public funding.

There were several reasons to hold this meeting in France. The ICSTI Secretariat is based in France, associated with International Council for Science, ICSU. ICSTI's various meetings on Digital Preservation had been held in Paris. Open Access is considered by ICSTI to be a natural extension of its work on Preservation, if for no other reason than that the advent of ‘Openness’ means that more material is more widely dispersed and its identification for archival purposes becomes an issue. In addition, as stated above, French activities in the area of OA needed more exposure to an international audience.

In September 2002 the US National Academy of Sciences had held a Symposium on the role of Scientific and Technical Data and Information in the Public Domain, in Washington, DC. The Symposium brought together leading experts and managers from the public and private sectors involved in the creation, dissemination, and use of STI to discuss the role, value, and limits of public-domain STI in the research and education context; the various legal, economic, and technological pressures on producers of public domain STI, and their potential effects on research and education; the existing and proposed approaches for preserving the public domain or providing “open access” to STI in the United States. The ICSTI/INIST/INSERM meeting was designed to amplify this discussion, add further international elements and together the two meetings would provide inputs to a proposed UNESCO sponsored meeting in March 2003 on Public Access to STI and ultimately provide material for the inputs from the Scientific

community to the World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS), of which the first part would be held in December 2003.

ICSTI, a non-partisan body representing all interests in STI, whose members are participants in the whole chain from author to library, was well placed to assist its French organizing partners in bringing together all potential actors on the OA scene: authors/researchers, publishers, librarians, information service providers, technical standards developers, funding bodies, public authorities and international development agencies.

“State of the art” was included in the seminar’s title, because this was what the meeting was intended to provide; and by defining the term Open Access very broadly – covering all aspects (technical, organizational, economic, legal and political) all of the new methods of disseminating STI and of the whole phenomenon of publishing by means other than, or in parallel with, “traditional” publishing, could be covered.

To sum up, the objectives of the meeting were twofold:

- To provide an overview of the latest technical and economic developments concerning access to scientific and technical information.
- To anticipate the developments that could be induced by the various projects and initiatives on the open access to this information.

Furthermore, the organizers agreed upon some general principles:

- As Open Access is a term widely used in different contexts, associated to changing economic models, public access, permanent availability, intellectual property rights, self-archiving, third world access, etc., the issues were felt to be confused and some clarifications were to be offered. (BOAI had just offered a new acronym to the existing list, at first sight close to OAI (Open Archives Initiative) and OASIS (Open Archival Information System), but all have quite different meanings.)
- Consequently INIST decided to ask Jack Franklin, a consultant in STI publishing, to write a preliminary report, for distribution to the speakers in advance of the meeting and then as reference paper on the seminar’s website, which was to give a background on OA, by showing where it came from and what it might mean to the various parties. There would also be a paper prepared by ICSTI to deal with the different definitions associated with OA and expand the many acronyms used.
- There should be a certain number of French contributions (with Canadian contributions in French playing an important part) and the meeting should be completely bilingual, with simultaneous interpretation. INIST’s and INSERM’s senior management should be present, as well as the French Ministry of Research, to give weight to the event and to use the occasion for pointing out what has still to be done, with the help of public funding, in the French (and European) STI landscape.
- ICSTI has always attached a priority to the availability of STI in developing countries and regions and feels that OA offers significant opportunities to encourage this. Therefore it was decided that a session of the meeting should be devoted to the issue of STI access in developing countries and specifically the effect of OA on that availability.
- The value of the meeting should be raised by creating a special web site, to be hosted by INIST, offering background information, reference documents, as mentioned above and an extensive bibliography on OA, and then making available all the seminar’s contributions (slides, videos). This availability was considered a priority, as one of the most important aspects of organizing such meetings is making sure that the momentum generated is maintained.

- The audience was to be quite international, with representatives of all professions concerned with OA issues. As it was expected to have a number of librarians among the participants, it was felt to be important to ask the IFLA President to chair the meeting.

The organisers considered that the European Union, as a major funding body in scientific research in Europe, should be asked to make a contribution. Despite significant efforts, the EU felt its policy on these matters was not yet sufficiently developed to put forward a view but supported the holding of the meeting and the need for a wide discussion.

Illustrative of the objectives, considerable effort was given to ensuring a wide spectrum of presentations, not only from the STI creation and dissemination field but also from the advocates of OA and from some of their critics as well as representatives of the science community. The organisers were faced in fact with an embarrassment of options and had to carefully balance the content to ensure a coherent and valid discussion.

Confirmed by many positive and encouraging reports and reactions on the meeting, the organizers consider that its main objectives have been achieved. The level of presentation and discussion was very high, with the whole spectrum of the issues being raised by the different participants. The subject, which has sometimes created tension between the different interests, was discussed in an atmosphere of mutual exchange of information and with an understanding, if not a complete acceptance, of the different points of view. Those who had predicted some “dialogues de sourds” (dialogue of the deaf) between commercial publishers with well-known inflexible standpoints and those who actively support OA as a crusading tool against them, turned out to be wrong.

As the Chairperson said in her opening remarks, the meeting could not be expected to come up with solutions to all of the issues that OA gives rise to, however, there was a widespread understanding that OA was a phenomenon which was driven by recent technical developments in computing and networking and as such was proving to be attractive to authors and readers as a means of obtaining recognition for scientific work.

The papers and the discussion offered the opportunity, not only to hear the different viewpoints, but also to explore matters which were cogent to the subject, for example questions concerning the effect of OA on the quality of scientific reporting and the peer review process, or the use of publications as a measure of research effectiveness and also issues relating to medium and long term identification and preservation of STI in the age of OA. There were, as might be expected, robust opinions on the role of (commercial) publishers in STI, but those who might be considered to be at the focus of the issues on both sides discussed the situation in an atmosphere of constructive dialogue. This would seem to indicate that OA has moved beyond an ‘enthusiast’ or advocational status towards a situation where the possibilities of changing the mould of STI publishing are now being considered seriously. There are still a relatively small number of papers being published in the OA mode but at the same time the regulations which would normally be applied by commercial publishers were being relaxed, for example on intellectual property rights. This would seem to indicate that publishers accepted that there were other means of dissemination and that their business models should take account of them.

Perhaps the most significant development is the policy of publishers, both commercial and not for profit, to make available free access to their publications a short period after their original publication. This has important implications for scientists in the developing world, where access to electronic versions of papers is already a problem due to a lack of infrastructure but also because the cost of subscription to journals is beyond the means of many. While the movement does not deal with the problem absolutely, developing world scientists are still excluded from immediate access, it is a step in the right direction. The

meeting heard a wide range of opinions and details of a number of projects, concerned with improving access for developing countries.

As stated, the meeting was intended to discuss the state of the art of OA, a work in progress. In that it ranged over all or almost all the issues, it succeeded in that regard. OA is an ongoing activity, even since the meeting there have been a number of developments, such as the decision by the UK funding body for University computing to arrange access to one of the OA service providers in biomedicine, which would indicate a certain maturity in the OA domain.

This compilation of the papers and the discussions provides a good primer for those anxious to be informed about OA as well as a marker for the state of progress at a point in time. The INIST web site about the meeting is still operational and offers pointers to ongoing actions.

The organisers would like to thank all those who participated so actively in the meeting and the sponsors, the French Ministry of Science and ICSU, for their valuable support. The Editors would like to thank Elliot Siegel of the US National Library of Medicine and Chair of ICSTI's Technical Activities Co-ordinating Committee, for his valuable assistance.

Herbert Grüttemeier
INIST-CNRS, Vandoeuvre-lès-Nancy, France

Barry Mahon
ICSTI, Paris, France

Editors, July 2003

Disclaimer

Many of the reports and articles presented here have been produced from oral transcripts. The organisers have done all they can to avoid mistakes but apologise in advance for any errors that might have crept in during the taping, translating and typing.