The geographic distribution of open access journals

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The geographic distribution of Open Access (OA) journals in the ISI citation databases differs significantly from the overall distribution of journals, namely in favour of peripheral areas and regions constituted predominantly of poorer countries. According to McVeigh (2004) in the ISI citation databases as a whole, North America and Western Europe account for 90% of the titles indexed, yet they account for only 40% of OA journals. Less than 2% of European and North American journals employ the OA model, yet 15% of those from the Asia-Pacific region and 40% from Central and South America are OA. This leads the author to conclude that "[for] many journals, providing free content online expands their access to an international readership" (McVeigh 2004, p.4).

Departing from this assumption the study at hand addresses the following questions:
- Is the geographic distribution of OA journals in general more favourable towards peripheral publishing countries?
- How does it differ from the distribution of scholarly journals in general?
- Which proportions of scholarly journals and of scholarly online journals are OA in different regions and in groups of economically similar countries?*

For this purpose, publishing data for active scholarly/academic journals from Ulrich's Periodicals Directory and the Directory of Open Access Journals (DOAJ) were gathered and analysed using descriptive statistical techniques. The data was gathered in May 2005.

The results indicate interesting differences between the geographic distribution of scholarly journals in general and the subgroup of OA journals. To illustrate, among the top 25 publishing countries for all journals, 7 do not belong to the group of high income countries*, and only 6 in the case of scholarly online journals. Yet for OA journals this number increases to 11, with Brazil taking the 3rd and India the 5th spot. According to the DOAJ almost a fifth (18%) of OA journals in the Health Sciences and over a quarter (26%) of Biology and Life Science OA journals are published in the Latin American and Caribbean region. While the group of high income countries publishes 6% of its online journals as OA, 32% of those from upper middle income countries, 10% of those from lower middle income countries, and 34% of online journals emanating from low income countries are OA. Correspondingly, 5% of online journals published in Western Europe* and 6% of those from Canada and the USA are OA, yet 51% of online journals published in Latin America and the Caribbean are. (South Asia: 7%, Africa/Middle East: 8%, Eastern Europe/Central Asia: 15% East Asia/Pacific: 15%) This also has to be seen in the light of the fact that the USA, Canada, and the countries of Western Europe together account for 80% of all registered academic online journals, while their share of OA journals amounts to 59%.

Due to the fast changing nature of the subject the results are meant to provide a snapshot as well as to be indicative and exploratory, and also to invite different interpretations. Yet at the same time they are also intended to instigate debate about the role OA is attributed and its significance as a peripheral practice.

Notes:
McVeigh, M. E. (2004). Open Access Journals in the ISI citation databases: Analysis of Impact Factors and Citation Patterns. Thomson Corporation
** for the purpose of this study “Western Europe” means pre-enlargement European Union, plus Switzerland, Iceland, and Norway.

This investigation forms part of the author’s doctoral research project and was intended as a preliminary and exploratory gauging of the area in order to establish the potential for further investigation of OA (publishing) as a peripheral practice.
THE GEOGRAPHIC DISTRIBUTION OF OPEN ACCESS JOURNALS

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TOP 25 PUBLISHING COUNTRIES

DATASET: OPEN ACCESS JOURNALS AS SHARE OF SCHOLARLY ONLINE JOURNALS IN INDIVIDUAL COUNTRIES

MOTIVATION

According to a recent study (McVeigh 2004) the regional distribution of Open Access (OA) journals in the Ulrich citation databases differs significantly from the overall distribution of journals, namely in favour of peripheral areas and regions constituted pre-dominantly of poorer countries.

QUESTIONS

Is the geographic distribution of OA journals in general more favourable towards peripheral publishing countries?

How does it differ from the distribution of scholarly journals in general?

Which proportions of scholarly journals and of scholarly online journals are OA in different regions and in groups of economically similar countries?

DATA & METHOD

Journal publishing data for active academic/scholarly journals was gathered from Ulrich’s Periodicals Directory as well as the Directory of Open Access Journals (DOAJ) and was analyzed using descriptive statistical techniques. The results are indicative and are meant to give different interpretations.


OPEN ACCESS JOURNALS AS PROPORTION OF ALL ACADEMIC/SCHOLARLY JOURNALS

ACADEMIC/SCHOLARLY ONLINE JOURNALS

SOURCE: Ulrich’s Periodicals Directory, May 2005

REGIONS OF THE WORLD:

- Asia
- Africa
- South America
- Middle East
- Central America
- North America
- Europe
- Oceania

REGIONS OF THE ECONOMY:

- High-income countries
- Upper middle income
- Lower middle income
- Low income

ABBRIVIATIONS AND EXPLANATIONS:

- OA: Open Access
- All: All
- Academic: Academic
- Scholarly: Scholarly
- Online: Online
- Well-endowed: Well-endowed
- Lower middle income: Lower middle income
- Lower income: Lower income
- UMIC: Upper middle income
- LMIC: Lower middle income
- LIC: Low income
- GNI: Gross National Income
- GDP: Gross Domestic Product

WESTERN EUROPE: Pre-enlargement EU plus Norway, Iceland, Liechtenstein, South Asia: India, Pakistan, China, Nepal, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, Bhutan, Hong Kong was treated as part of China; MULIT-COUNTRY: More than one country publishing country; no OA classification.