

Promoting open access in Germany as illustrated by a recent project at the Library of the University of Konstanz

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Abstract

Purpose – With the illustration of a best practice example for an implementation of open access in a scientific institution, the paper will be useful in fostering future open access projects.

Design/methodology/approach – The paper starts with a brief overview of the existing situation of open access in Germany. The following report describes the results of a best practice example, added by the analysis of a survey on the position about open access by the scientists at the University of Konstanz.

Findings – The dissemination of the advantages of open access publishing is fundamental for the success of implementing open access in a scientific institution. For the University of Konstanz, it is shown that elementary factors of success are an intensive cooperation with the head of the university and a vigorous approach to inform scholars about open access. Also, some more conditions are essential to present a persuasive service: The Library of the University of Konstanz offers an institutional repository as an open access publication platform and hosts open journal systems for open access journals. High-level support and consultation for open access publishing at all administrative levels is provided. The integration of the local activities into national and international initiatives and projects is pursued for example by the joint operation of the information platform open-access.net.

Originality/value – The paper offers insights in one of the most innovative open access projects in Germany. The University of Konstanz belongs to the pioneers of the open access movement in Germany and is currently running a successful open access project.

Keywords Open systems, Publishing, University libraries, Germany

Paper type Research paper

Open access in Germany

Since the Berlin Declaration on open access to Knowledge in the Sciences and Humanities (<http://oa.mpg.de/openaccess-berlin/berlindeclaration.html>) in 2003, open access has gained increasing significance within the academic world. Various academic institutions, research funding agencies, as well as a growing number of universities, have already signed the Berlin Declaration and are actively promoting open access publishing. Thus, in the last four years, open access has become a topic of high actuality and relevance in Germany, especially regarding publication policies of institutions and funding agencies: Scientific organizations and institutions such as various universities, scholarly societies, the German Rectors Conference (HRK) and the alliance of the research organizations are supporting open access, and have put

forward policies regarding open access publishing, its relevance, and the specific impact on the scientific communication. Accordingly, the major German funding agency, the German Research Foundation (DFG), encourages scientists to publish their results originating from the DFG-grants open access. The publications are either to be deposited in discipline-related or institutional electronic archives (repositories) following conventional publication, or to be published in a recognized peer-reviewed open access journal. A growing number of universities support the open access idea, and implement institutional repositories to provide the opportunity of free archiving and free access to scientific documents.

Meanwhile, the advantages of worldwide free and unrestricted access to scientific information are beyond controversy. For researchers, using open access maximizes their research impact, increases their visibility, and raises their reputation. Users can access relevant information on the web at any time and place. In addition, the worldwide free access to scientific information is essential in enabling enhanced information supply in developing countries.

The need for information on open access

Even though many scholars already have a general idea of what open access means, there are still large information deficits as identified in a DFG survey (Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft, 2005) in 2005. In this survey, more than a 1,000 scientists were asked about open access publications. The survey results show that the major problem in implementing open access is the lack of knowledge in the scientific community.

Similar experiences have been made at the University of Konstanz. Some scholars had already realized the opportunities of open access publishing many years ago, and since the cooperation between the Library of the University of Konstanz and its scientists is traditionally very close, an intensive open access discussion began and the library's engagement in the open access field gained momentum. While convinced scholars mainly saw the publishing advantages of open access, for the library the consequences of rising journal subscription costs with decreasingly limited budgets led to a consequent pursuit of the open access idea. In 2004, the library began to put out information about open access issues on its homepage. Another concrete activity was the institutional BioMedCentral membership to support open access publications of Konstanz scientists. During that time, the awareness of the importance of open access regarding the entire information supply steadily grew. The library also realized the complexity and subject-specific diversity of the open access issue. The knowledge of scientists concerning open access varied significantly; informing them all adequately turned out to be a challenge. While in 2004, many scientists were not aware of the chances, possibilities, and the details of the publishing process in open access, discussions at the university showed a basically open and positive attitude towards it, once the researchers became better informed and saw the relevance for their specific field of interest.

The objective of the library was to inform scientists as precisely and concentrated as possible about the open access topic. With the awareness of the complexity and subject-specific diversity, the idea of a nationwide open access information platform developed.

Establishing the information platform on open access

A lot of widespread information was accessible on the web, but clearly structured information with a general overlook for scientists as well as for librarians and similar infrastructure providers was lacking.

Why should similar information be held and administrated at different places coexistently? The directors of the university libraries in Konstanz and Bielefeld initiated the founding of a nationwide information platform on open access. Together with the University of Goettingen and the Free University of Berlin, they asked the DFG for support for this project. Fortunately, the support was granted and since 2006 the platform has been funded by the DFG to support scientists and research institutions in the implementation of open access practices.

Open-access.net is an online information platform on open access issues jointly operated by the Universities of Bielefeld, Goettingen, Konstanz and the Free University of Berlin, who belong to the pioneers of the open access movement in Germany. The platform provides information about the growing scientific and political significance of open access issues. Open-access.net is the first online platform providing information on open access in German language. It offers information on publishing strategies, costs, and legal aspects, and lists open access journals and other publishing possibilities for different research areas. This subject-specific information is of great practical relevance, such that the specific information needs in individual research areas can be fulfilled. Additionally, it presents convincing arguments for the use of open access not only for researchers, but also for research institutions, universities, professional associations, libraries and publishing houses. The official start of the platform was announced at the "German e-Science-Conference" in Baden-Baden in May 2007.

As of today, the platform is already well accepted and well known among people dealing with open access. To guarantee the abundance, quality, and sustainability of the content, as well as to reach a high media resonance, a cooperative network was established: The platform is supported by the German Rectors' Conference, the Volkswagen Foundation and the German Initiative for Networked Information (DINI e.V.). At the same time, several research institutions, such as the Helmholtz Association, the Fraunhofer-Gesellschaft, and the Max Planck Society have added information about their own open access policies to the content of the platform and are promoting the platform as the main source of information on open access. An academic advisory council regularly evaluates the platform to meet the needs of the researcher community. Two scholarly societies – the German Psychological Association and the German Linguistic Association – underline their support with their labels on open-access.net; cooperations with other scientific societies are in preparation. In a next step, the platform is going to be translated into English and internationalized even more. The aim is to establish an internationally recognized powerful and continuous information platform on open access.

The implementation of open access at the University of Konstanz

For the engagement of the library of the University of Konstanz on open access, the information platform was an important starting point. Whenever talking to researchers, profound knowledge is a key element for promoting open access. So, the platform is both a service for everybody interested in open access in Germany and an important foundation of the open access policy at the University of Konstanz.

Besides the launch and the operation of the platform, the University of Konstanz is very active in promoting and implementing open access inside the University.

In the beginning of open access discussion in Konstanz, the golden road was not really the “golden road” for Konstanz. There were only a few pioneers who published in the small number of existing open access journals, so the “golden” road for the library in Konstanz first became the green road archiving in the institutional repository as described in the next section.

Meanwhile, the situation has changed to some extent. As the amount on open access journals has increased, the number of researchers at the University of Konstanz publishing in open access journals has also increased. Recently, when promoting open access in Konstanz, many examples of researchers at the university publishing open access can be demonstrated. Meanwhile, there are two researchers listed in the worldwide top 100 category of BioMed Central authors.

Besides encouraging authors to publish in open access journals, the library also supports scientists who want to launch new open access journals. The library hosts “Open Journal Systems,” a software for open access journals and also offers counselling and technical support. Two open access journals have already launched: “Survey Research Methods” (<http://w4.ub.uni-konstanz.de/srm>) and “ISBS-Conference Proceedings Archive” (<http://w4.ub.uni-konstanz.de/cpa>). Both journals were set up in 2007.

Establishing the green road in Konstanz: The institutional repository KOPS

The Library of the University of Konstanz was one of the first libraries in Germany which dealt intensively with open access, and also one of the first to establish an institutional repository. Since 1999, the “Konstanz Online-Publication-System (KOPS)” is offered as a full-text-server on which publications are made freely accessible on the internet. Recently, KOPS is well established at the university and contains over 4,000 documents, mainly secondary publications of peer-reviewed documents. At the moment, around 300 new articles are put into KOPS each month, and the number of cooperating scholars and departments is increasing. In August 2007, KOPS became the first German repository with the new “DINI-Zertifikat 2007”, a certificate for quality standards of repositories assigned by the DINI e.V.

In the beginning of the activities to promote open access and fill the institutional repository, the director of the library visited several university departments and explained the problems resulting from increased journal subscription costs, and presented open access as one way to solve this journal crisis. Besides making the scientists aware of the crisis and the opportunities of open access publishing, several scientists were convinced to put their already-published papers into the institutional repository, and some were also willing to publish in open access journals. These activities showed that the biggest problem regarding the implementation of open access is the lack of knowledge about it. Another problem that occurred in this context was the amount of work it takes to put all of a scientist’s publications in KOPS. It only takes about five minutes to put one publication into the repository, but even though this is acceptable for the current publications, no chair or department is really willing to invest a huge amount of time in putting hundreds of old publications into a repository. The idea was to offer a “no-worries-service” from the library. Chances to realize this service with the libraries’ resources at that time were low. Fortunately, a grant submitted to the Ministry of Science, Research and Arts regarding personnel

resources for the expansion of the institutional repository was successful, so two new staff members were appointed. One position was created to meet and inform scientists and departments about open access and the institutional repository and to offer a range of different types of events depending upon the demand, the second position ...

Filling the repository

With this pilot project supported by the Ministry of Science, Research and Arts it was possible to establish an intense information and publication service, so a rapid increase of documents in the institutional repository was reached. In a first step, the open access team informs the scientists about open access in especially arranged meetings. The attempt is to talk to those scientists first who are already interested in the topic. For example, a request about a copyright question on self-archiving in the physics department initiated a meeting with several researchers, and resulted in a fruitful discussion about open access and the willingness of all attending researchers to put their publications into the repository.

The second step is to offer a full service: the researchers just give their approval and a CD with their publications and all other work is done by the library. Three well-trained students register the PDF's in KOPS, where they stay in a temporary area until one of the two librarians working on KOPS do the further steps. This way, easy work like registering the documents in KOPS or scanning older documents is done by students, but everything is checked and catalogued by librarians to ensure the quality standards. The project showed that it is quite easy to convince researchers to put their publications in KOPS, when the expense for them is very low. Some of the researchers from the physics department, for example, had more than 200 publications, and even though they were willing to put them in KOPS without the offered service of the library, it would probably have taken years to publish all their documents in KOPS. In a third step, the library tries to establish sustainable structures in the departments for future publications. New publications are registered in KOPS by the researchers or their staff. To foster this practice, the library regularly gives courses on the registration of documents in KOPS, which are especially meant for staff like secretaries or student staff who are assigned to do these registrations. The open access team also offers single instructions, and can always be contacted when problems occur or help is needed. Many secretaries were thankful to personally know a contact person they could call in case help was needed. Since legal questions seem to be an obstacle to the scientists, the library also offers to check the legal requirements.

The percentage of scientists which can be convinced to register their publications in KOPS is approximately 90 per cent after personal dialogues and 50 per cent resulting from group meetings. These are only the rates of scientists who provided their articles after the meetings without any further enquiries of the library.

The first results of these efforts already show in the increased numbers of documents in KOPS. When the project started in November 2006, KOPS contained about 1,700 documents registered there in almost eight years. By December 2007, there are more than 4,000 documents in KOPS, and there are still a lot of documents already given to the library which are waiting to be registered (Figure 1).

It was possible not only to increase the quantity of documents but also the quality. Until 2006, dissertations and bachelor/master thesis were about 67.2 per cent of the KOPS content. By 2007, 82.2 per cent of the newly registered documents were secondary publications of peer-reviewed papers (Kersting, 2007).

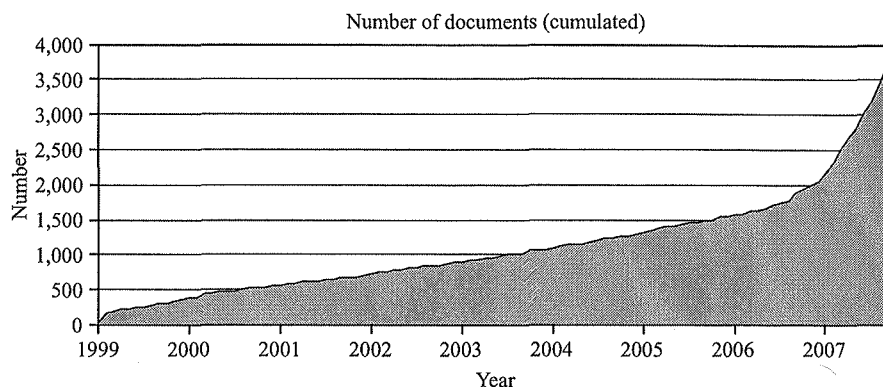


Figure 1.
Number of documents in
the institutional repository

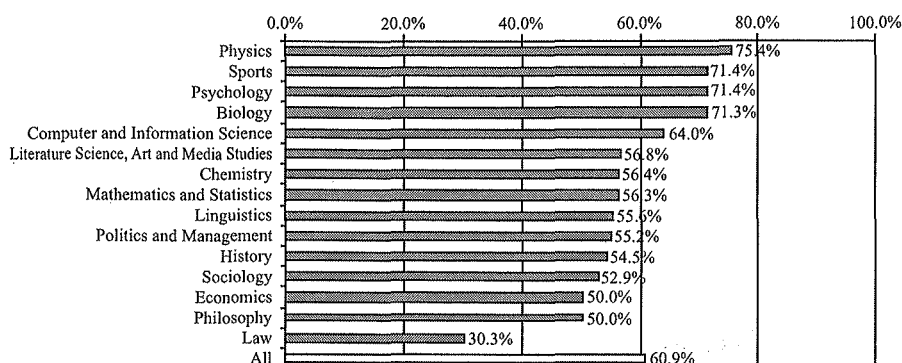
Until the end of the project in mid-2009, the intention is to organize meetings in all departments of the university, to intensively inform them about open access, the institutional repository, and the offered services. It is also intended to register at least all of the more recent publications of all scientists of the University of Konstanz in the repository by then.

High potential in open access acceptance among the researchers in Konstanz – the Konstanz Survey on supply of information 2007

In 2007, the library of the University of Konstanz conducted a survey including all university researchers (professors, postdocs and PhD-students), and inquired about their actual and estimated behaviour using literature and information. The response rate was 34.3 per cent or 501 researchers. Interestingly, the data revealed that there is a broad basic knowledge about open access in the different departments. About 60.9 per cent of the researchers stated that they use open access journals for information supply in their research areas. It was not surprising that this percentage was higher in the natural sciences (up to 75.4 per cent) than in the arts (50.0-56.8 per cent) and the social sciences (50.0-55.2 per cent). Overall, in all but one department more than half of the researchers reported reading open access publications. In the law department, only 30.3 per cent stated this; however, it is important to consider that there are not any well-known German language law open access journals (Hätscher *et al.*, 2007) (Figure 2).

Still more convincing is the result that 69.4 per cent of all researchers use literature archived in repositories, and that there are no pronounced differences between the departments. Among the frequent users of repositories, the authors found the most use by the departments of history (77.3 per cent), sociology (76.5 per cent), and linguistics (76.0 per cent).

While there is a broad acceptance in using open access journals and repositories for their own research purposes, open access seems to be lacking behind in researchers' willingness to publish their own empirical results: only 12.4 per cent of all researchers at the University of Konstanz had already published in open access journals and only 17.5 per cent in the institutional repository KOPS. Here, one can see considerable differences among the departments. In psychology, more than a quarter of the researchers have already published in open access, whereas in economics or linguistics no one is aware of someone who has already published in open access. The same result



Source: Hätscher *et al.* (2007, p. 37)

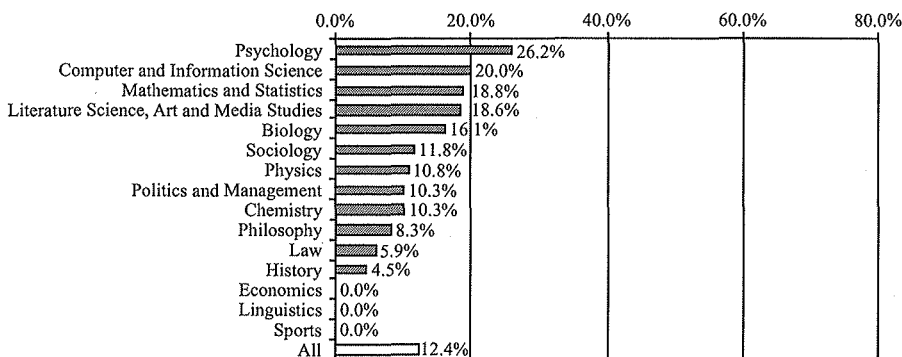
Figure 2.
Percentage of researchers
who already use open
access journals,
differenced by department

can be found for publications in KOPS. In literature and philosophy, for example, less than 5 per cent of the researchers had previously published in KOPS (Figure 3).

The survey results support the notion, however, that the research community in Konstanz is interested in acquiring a better knowledge about the open access publishing possibilities: more than a third (34.1 per cent) of all researchers expressed the need for specific assistance in archiving documents in KOPS and founding open access journals or similar publication forms. Nearly, half of all researchers are interested both in general information on open access and in functional training on the archiving documents in KOPS (Figure 4).

It is interesting that the demand for information on open access is higher the lower the usage of open access journals as reader or author, but that there is also an overall high level demand for information on open access (48.1 per cent of all researchers) (Figure 5).

What can be gleaned from these results? Open access is highly used and widely accepted by researchers, when it comes to retrieving information for scientific purposes. What lacks at the moment is the active contribution to open access by the individual researchers themselves. Experience shows that this might be due to a lack of information about open access publishing possibilities and its advantages, about the existence and



Source: Hätscher *et al.* (2007, p. 38)

Figure 3.
Percentage of researchers
who already have
published in open access
journals, differenced by
department

the handling of the institutional repository KOPS, or due to the researchers' unwillingness to put in additional effort after having published the original paper. By providing specifically relevant information to the researchers and offering additional services, the authors have been able to significantly increase the amount of researchers contributing their publications to KOPS.

The library efforts have been greatly supported by the head of the university, for example, with a letter to all scientists asking to put all publications into the institutional repository.

Demonstrating the impact of open access: the first open access days in Konstanz

On the 6 and 7 of December 2007, the Library of the University of Konstanz organized the 1. Open Access Days in Konstanz in cooperation with the open access information platform. The objective of the event was to inform local scientists as well as other individuals responsible for open access at other universities and institutions about open access and related topics. The talks dealt with open access journals, repositories, and legal aspects. An important issue was how to implement open access in institutions and how to fill the repositories. The University of Konstanz is very

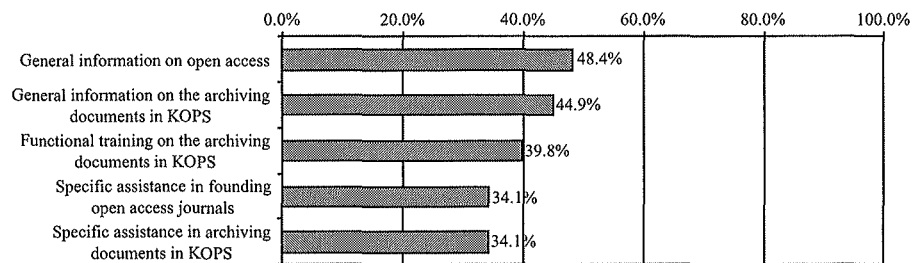


Figure 4. Percentage of desired support in the area of open access by researchers

Source: Hätscher *et al.* (2007, p. 46)

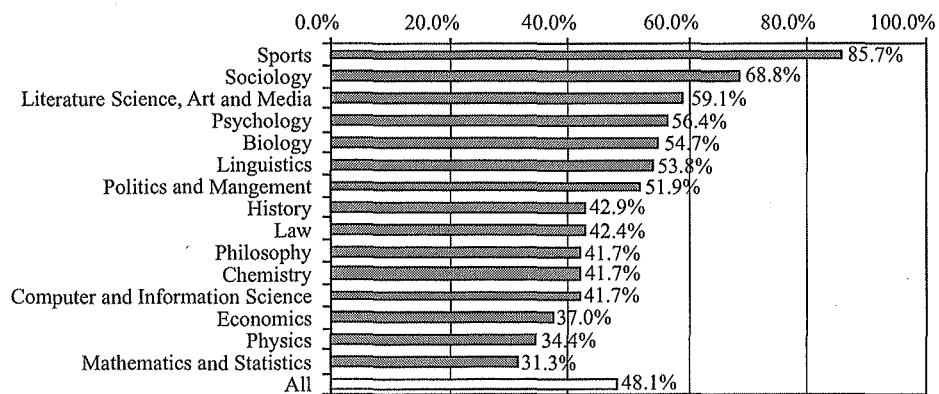


Figure 5. Percentage of demand for information on open access differentiated by department

Source: Hätscher *et al.* (2007, p. 47)

fortunate that the head of the university supports open access eagerly, which was also shown in a speech by the head of the university Prof. Brigitte Rockstroh.

Another very important issue discussed at the open access days was the launch of a network of open access representatives. The information platform open-access.net plans to establish this network on two levels. The first level will be the working level, the second the political.

On the working level, it is important to connect people dealing with practical questions of open access. The objective of this network will be to improve communication, share experiences, and initiate events for scientists as well as meetings and training courses of the representatives. On the political level, the platform plans to create a network which works on the more strategic level and meets once or twice a year in a "Conference of Open Access Delegates." Members of this conference would be institutionally assigned delegates like scientists, directors of universities, libraries, or other institutions. This conference will work out strategies, make recommendations and decisions, in short give open access a stronger voice.

The open access days showed very clearly that the way open access is promoted and supported in Konstanz seems to work out very well, and that the example of Konstanz really is a best practice example.

Conclusion

The original aim at the University of Konstanz was to foster the golden road of open access at the university. The experience of several years showed that achieving this aim straightforwardly was not easy. Although there was articulated interest among several researchers to publish open access, most researchers remained reluctant. With the establishment of the open access platform, it was possible to provide the researchers with substantial and subject-specific information on open access, and with the institutional repository KOPS, the university was able to implement a simple and easy solution for open access. The green way of open access helped to bring the golden road of open access nearer to all members of the university.

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