

# Open access repositories are beginning to push academic publishers off their previously unreachable perch.

by Blog Admin

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*Open access repositories have fuelled a quiet revolution in disseminating knowledge, bypassing the toll gates that publishers have set up. **Professor Martin Hall** writes that the days of dominant publishing privateers are surely numbered.*



George Monbiot likes to stir things up. Writing for the [Guardian newspaper on 29 August](#), he denounced academic publishers as “privateers”, taking unjustified profits from the public world of research. “You might resent Murdoch’s paywall policy”, Monbiot wrote, “in which he charges £1 for 24 hours of access to the Times and Sunday Times. But at least in that period you can read and download as many articles as you like. Reading a single article published by one of Elsevier’s journals will cost you \$31.50. Springer charges €34.95, Wiley-Blackwell, \$42. Read 10 and you pay 10 times. And the journals retain perpetual copyright. You want to read a letter printed in 1981? That’ll be \$31.50”.

Have no doubt; the publishers’ lobby will respond. But many academics will have reflected on the peculiar system to which we are party. We put a huge amount of effort into research that is partly funded from public money, substantially supported by our own time. We write peer reviews for journals, sit on editorial boards and edit special editions of journals, making the results of research widely available. When we come to publish ourselves, we often surrender our copyright in full, including our right ever to reprint or distribute our papers. But then our university libraries have to pay substantial subscriptions (that increase annually at rates significantly above general inflation) so that our colleagues and students can read our work. And, in a final turn of the screw, we are invited to pay a large amount of money so that we can send our own papers to our colleagues and collaborators without risk of prosecution (I was recently offered a special price of \$3000 for this privilege). Dividends from publishing companies are paid to private investors. Many people would agree that George Monbiot has a point.

What is less well known is that, irrespective of the contract for final publication, it is quite legal to make the final draft of a publication available to anyone in an open access repository. This is not an ideal way to go; such versions will not have the correct pagination, illustrations and figures may not be as published, and there will often be minor editorial changes made to the published version. But it’s better than forcing someone who wants to check through your work as part of a general literature review to pay \$30 or more. And, of course, an increasing number of progressive publishers are offering “green” open access publishing, which makes the final version openly available.

These options have fuelled a quiet revolution in disseminating knowledge that is bypassing the tollgates that the publishers have set up. The admirable [Registry of Open Access Repositories \(ROAR\)](#), hosted at the University of Southampton, now monitors well over one hundred repositories in Britain, and some eighty of these serve individual universities. We are well on the way to having one million individual papers open, free of charge, to anyone on this basis.

There are many good reasons for making research available on an open access basis. One of these is self interest. The evidence is now incontrovertible that putting a paper in an open access repository may significantly increase citations, often dramatically. This is intuitive. If you are carrying out a literature search, spanning perhaps several hundred potential sources, ease of access is everything. Downloading a well-indexed PDF file from a university repository is a pleasure. Paying \$30, and going through the palaver of an on-line purchase and reclaiming the expense, is not.

There are all sorts of ways in which publishers will continue to add value to research. But extracting rents

through traditional subscriptions and very high priced journals is not likely to be one of them. The days of the publishing privateers are surely numbered.

*This post originally appeared on Martin's Hall blog which you can read [here](#).*

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