

SPARC Roadmap for action

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Topic: Policies supporting open science, Research data, New models of research assessment

Implementation scale: International

Responsible agents: Universities (governing bodies), Research managers, Libraries

Location: United States

Keywords: open access, research funding, governance, science communication

Start and end date: 2019 -

Sustainability: Yes

Summary

Annual series of SPARC reports mapping the concentration of the academic publishing market and proposing a strategic roadmap to accelerate the transition to open access at a global level.

Promoting organizations

SPARC (Scholarly Publishing and Academic Resources Coalition) is a global coalition of more than 250 academic and research libraries headquartered in Washington D.C., founded in 1998 by the Association of Research Libraries (ARL). Its mission is to make open access and open science the norm in research and education.

Objectives

The scholarly communication market, and its associated infrastructure, shows increasing concentration in the hands of fewer commercial providers. In this context, SPARC highlights elevated profitability levels among some players, such as the reported operating margin of 37% at Elsevier compared to 23% at Springer Nature, and notes that Wiley's research business has operated for years at around a 35% margin. The report also underscores the pressure on academic budgets and the need for the academic community to increase control over its own content and

infrastructure.

The proposal is structured around three categories of action.

- To provide a data-driven analysis of market power and the economic dynamics of the sector, including relevant financial indicators and commercial practices.
- To document recent developments, including the expansion of read and publish agreements as a response to budget cuts, their potential consequences, and the emerging regulatory framework, such as the expectation that Coalition S funders will disqualify hybrid journals by 2024.
- To offer a Roadmap for Action that distinguishes between metrics and algorithms and organises responses into risk mitigation, strategic decisions and community actions to strengthen academic control over data and infrastructure.

Beneficiaries and stakeholders

University libraries and international consortia, research policy decision-makers, funding bodies and the research community as a whole.

Results

The initiative takes the form of the publication of the report “Academic Community Control of Data Infrastructure: A Roadmap for Action” (November 2019), produced by SPARC as a follow-up to the previous Landscape Analysis. The document offers a roadmap of possible actions for the different stakeholders (institutions, networks and the academic community) to design individual and collective responses to the risks associated with the deployment of data and analytics infrastructure controlled by commercial vendors, with an explicit emphasis on the fact that solutions are not one-size-fits-all and must be adapted to local culture and needs.

The proposal is structured around three categories of action: risk mitigation, strategic decisions and community actions, underscoring the need for institutions to maintain control over their data and over the analytical uses applied to it. It also proposes, as a direct pathway, the building or acquisition of infrastructure controlled by the academic community itself, along with the corresponding commitments and investment requirements.

Challenges

The financial opacity of major publishers forces reliance on indirect data (corporate reports, freedom of information requests), limiting the precision of the analysis. Added to this is institutional resistance to change: many universities are reluctant to cancel

contracts due to pressure from their research staff, who value high-impact factor journals. A key lesson learned is that the effectiveness of the analysis is greater when accompanied by coordination among international consortia.

Interest and transferability

The analysis and associated work helped to spark debate and the initial analysis became a valuable resource in the university sector for informing discussions and acting as a catalyst for deliberate decision-making.

As a concrete example of reception and influence on institutional debate, the document indicates that when the University of California system addressed the adoption of commercial research information management systems (RIMS), its Academic Senate issued recommendations that reference and largely endorse the findings and recommendations of the SPARC Landscape Analysis.

Furthermore, the report makes explicit its support structures and openness conditions: its development was funded through grants (Open Society Foundations and Arcadia) and it is published under a Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 licence, facilitating its reuse and circulation as a community resource.

Bibliography

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