Feature Stories - Open access: EU project results go public

Publicly funded research should benefit everyone, not bury findings in obscure or expensive journals. The European Commission wants results from Seventh Framework Programme (FP7) and Horizon 2020 projects to produce fully 'open access' publications; a project is now promoting open access and building a portal for all FP7 project publications and datasets.

DIGITAL ECONOMY

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The stereotypical scientist: unruly Einstein hair, locked in his laboratory. The caricature is so strong that we often forget that landmark scientists like Galileo and Einstein were often excellent communicators - exchanging knowledge with their peers and the wider public - as are today's successful scientists; they speak at conferences, they write books and papers, they interact with people online and 'schmooze' at workshops and symposia.

Communication is a fundamental part of the scientific endeavour. Without it the understanding and knowledge that researchers acquire would remain locked in their brains and never find their way into new products, innovation and real-world applications.

Read all about it

The most traditional and still the most important vehicle for disseminating scientific knowledge is the peer-reviewed paper. These papers are published in specialist journals - from the well-known, high impact titles like 'Nature' and 'Science' to publications which focus on very narrow topics and highly specialised fields of research.

But herein lies an unfortunate irony: when scientists publish in this way, their research sometimes becomes less accessible to the public, as it is locked away from all but their own research community. Most scientific publishers, running private businesses, charge subscriptions to their journals and fees for access to individual papers. Private individuals and businesses cannot read papers unless they (or a library) pay a subscription or one-off fee.

For a long time the European Commission has argued that the results of publicly funded EU research should remain in the public domain. The Commission supports a model of open access scientific publishing which offers free access to published papers.

Out in the open

To make it easier for EU-funded projects to make their findings public and more readily accessible, the Commission is funding, through FP7, the project 'Open access infrastructure for research in Europe' (OpenAIRE). This ambitious project will provide a single access point to all the open access publications produced by FP7 projects during the course of the Seventh Framework Programme.

'To try and push more open access publishing, the European Commission has made open access publishing mandatory for around 20 % of FP7 projects,' explains Natalia Manola, the project's manager. 'This is written into the contract, but it is still a soft target - hard to enforce and monitor or really measure the impact. The idea of online open access is still quite new and one of the biggest problems is that projects will publish some results in traditional journals and some in open access publications. Knowledge is fragmented and it is difficult to see the output of a project because it is spread around so much. We want everything to be accessible by everyone.'

OpenAIRE is a repository network and is based on a technology developed in an earlier project called Driver. The Driver engine trawled through existing open access repositories of universities, research institutions and a growing number of open access publishers. It would index all these publications and provide a single point of entry for individuals, businesses or other scientists to search a comprehensive collection of open access resources. Today Driver boasts an impressive catalogue of almost six million taken from 327 open access repositories from across Europe and beyond.

OpenAIRE uses the same underlying technology to index FP7 publications and results. FP7 project participants are encouraged to publish their papers, reports and conference presentations to their institutional open access repositories. The OpenAIRE engine constantly trawls these repositories to identify and index any publications related to FP7-funded projects. Working closely with the European

Commission's own databases, OpenAIRE matches publications to their respective FP7 grants and projects providing a seamless link between these previously separate data sets.

OpenAIRE is also linked to CERN's open access repository for 'orphan' publications. Any FP7 participants that do not have access to an own institutional repository can still submit open access publications by placing them in the CERN repository.

Open to persuasion

'OpenAIRE is not just about developing new technologies,' notes Ms Manola, 'because a significant part of the project focuses on promoting open access in the FP7 community. We are committed to promotional and policy-related activities, advocating open access publishing so projects can fully contribute to Europe’s knowledge infrastructure.'

The project is collecting usage statistics of the portal and the volume of open access publications. It will provide this information to the Commission and use this data to inform European policy in this domain.

OpenAIRE is working closely to integrate its information with the CORDA database, the master database of all EU-funded research projects. Soon it should be possible to click on a project in CORDIS (the EU’s portal for research funding), for example, and access all the open access papers published by that project. Project websites will also be able to provide links to the project's peer reviewed publications and make dissemination of papers virtually effortless.

The project participants are also working with EU Members to develop a European-wide 'open access helpdesk' which will answer researchers' questions about open access publishing and coordinate the open access initiatives currently taking place in different countries. The helpdesk will build up relationships and identify additional open access repositories to add to the OpenAIRE network.

Aiming to build the 'knowledge infrastructure' of the European Research Area, an extension project, OpenAIREplus, is now working in parallel to OpenAIRE to add open access datasets to the mix and create a so-called 'information space' where publications, data sets and funding information (EC and national) are interlinked. Researchers can make their raw data, benchmark data, or data objects associated to publications, available for others to analyse or use.

'The current publication repository networks will be expanded to attract data providers from domain specific scientific areas. The participatory design of OpenAIREplus will seamlessly guide the researcher to open access research data,' says Professor Dr. Norbert Lossau, Scientific Coordinator of OpenAIREplus and

Director of Göttingen State and University Library, Germany. 'The experienced consortium will pave the way to support the research work of European scientists and open up the road to multi-disciplinary science.'

'I think more open access publishing, aided by projects like OpenAIRE and OpenAIREplus, could really boost Europe's economy and help boost innovation,' concludes Ms Manola. 'If you are an SME employee or a teacher, say, there is just no way you can read the latest research. With open access anybody will be able to use it how they want. It is the best way to make the most of publicly funded research.'

The OpenAIRE project received EUR 4.2 million (of its total EUR 5.0 project budget) in research funding under the EU's Seventh Framework Programme (FP7), 'Research infrastructures' programme.

Useful links:

- 'Open access infrastructure for research in Europe' project website
- OpenAIRE project factsheet on CORDIS
- DRIVER open access repository network

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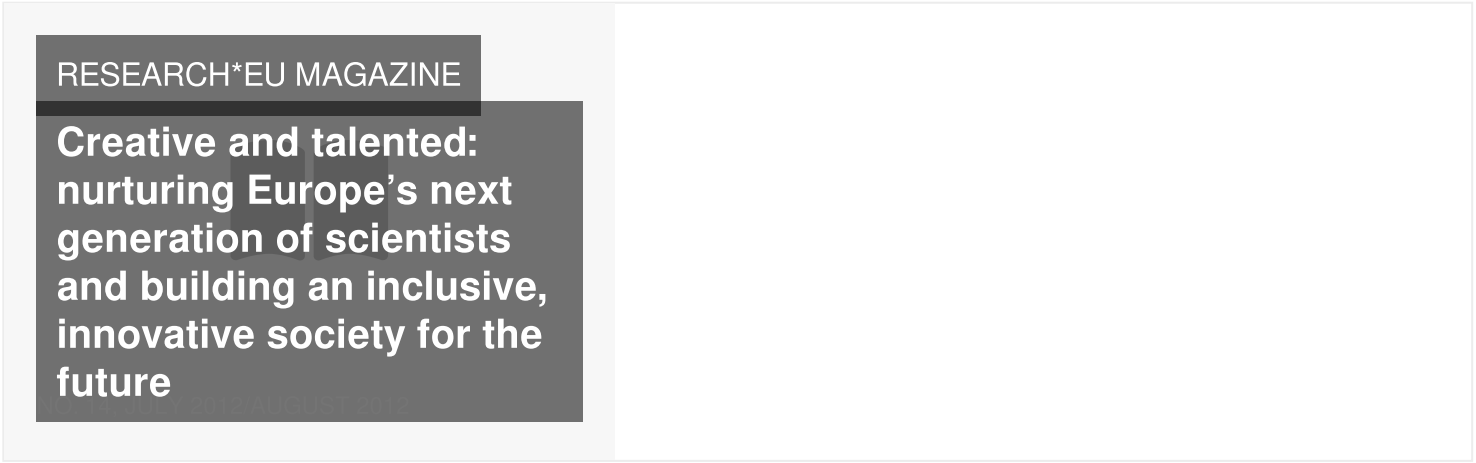

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