

## OPEN ACCESS AND EVALUATION. WAR OR PEACE?

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### Abstract

Focuses of this article are Open Access and Evaluation. These two topics seem to be against each other or, at best, disagree. We'll try to prove that open access and research evaluation are destined to a close collaboration.

### Keywords

Open Acces, Open Science, Research Quality Assessment, Evaluation of Universities and Research Institutes

### 1. Preface<sup>1</sup>

European culture has taken a real leap forward with the invention of the press because the circulation of ideas has increased and the horizons of awareness and knowledge have expanded enormously.

Identically with the advent of the Internet and new means and models of communication, a real revolution has occurred in our time that has also involved scientific communication.

Among these new methods of scientific communication, open access shines in its own light, be it *green*, in which authors freely and voluntarily disseminate their articles by depositing them in a freely accessible repository, or *gold*, in which authors publish the results of their work in an open access journal that makes them equally freely and immediately accessible to all at the time of publication.

In recent years, there has been another revolution in the world of research: the advent of evaluation, that is, a sort of Big Brother that looms over everything we produce and that should spur us on to do better and better. It is well known that Italian VQR - Research Quality Assessment, enter strongly into our academic life and in some cases can affect it.

So, Open Access and Evaluation; at the moment there is a lot of talk about these two topics, often as if they were contradictory or even at war. Are they really though?

### 2. War or Peace?

In reality, evaluation makes authors of articles aware of the value of their work or, in the case of an open and honest mind, strict evaluation will help to improve it.

Carlos Moeda (engineer, economist and politician) was European Commissioner for Research, Science and Innovation from 2014 until 2019. His principal focus was: "Let's dare to make Europe open to innovation, open to science and open to the world". Moeda said: "Science goes hand in hand with truth and transparency. I deeply believe that communicating about science and making science open to citizens explaining it better is the key in this process".

Therefore, in order to allow for greater sharing of research, the European Union has in recent years dedicated many initiatives in support of a European open science, funding various programmes (Università di Milano, 2017).

The role that the world of Open Access can play in the evaluation of research concerns the possibility of submitting non-traditional materials for evaluation and developing new bibliometric and non-bibliometric indicators to be added to those currently in use.

As we know in recent times, the international research world is beginning to indicate and in

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which are certainly more research-intensive and also more expensive from a monetary point of view since they are often self-financed.

Another element to be considered concerns the version of the document to be evaluated. Since the nature of the IT applications underlying open repositories permits the repository of several versions of the same document, may be in future the evaluator will be able to determine which revision of the document to consider; specifically, the choice can be between pre-print and post-print version.

In this regard, we are all aware of the exhausting battles we had to endure with our publishers to get a PDF copy of one of our works to deposit it or to submit it for VQR evaluation. Moreover, we all know that after the publisher gives us the PDF it is often unreadable because it has a very low definition or a common inscription that prevents its diffusion.

Not to mention the stunts we have to go through to upload an article by a restrictive publisher in a repository like Academia or ResearchGate, i.e. creating a PDF where there is only the first page, then an unbearable blank, then the conclusions and bibliography. A PDF that certainly won't help you to understand anything about our work. A kind of appetiser that will leave only questions for our readers.

The Internet is starting to become the privileged place for the diffusion of research products all over the world and this is resulting in a robust development of research sharing in general, not only of its products.

In 2008, Great Britain began to take into account research products for its evaluation exercises that are also disseminated via the Internet and of which the content is liable to change over time ((CRUI, 2009)). A sort of fascinating "liquid publication" (Casati, Giunchiglia & Marchese, 2007), still beyond our horizon but it is a fact that indicates and clarifies that technological evolution could have considerable and interesting repercussions, also in the evaluation of research products.

Still in an area that privileges open access to knowledge, Italian universities and research institutions have started out on a path in this sense, first adhering to the Berlin Declaration<sup>3</sup>

(Berlin Declaration, 2003) and then outlining a policy that would include Open Access also in evaluation policies.

Important testimonies of this are the "Call for participation VQR 2015-2019 (for the assessment of the Italian Institutions)" (ANVUR, BANDO. Valutazione della Qualità della Ricerca 2015-2019 (VQR 2015-2019), 2019) and the "Regulations for the classification of journals in non-bibliometric fields" (ANVUR Regolamento per la classificazione delle riviste nelle aree non bibliometriche, 2019), which contain the Criteria for journal classification for the purposes of National Scientific Enabling.

The first provides, unlike the previous one, for all the products under evaluation to be freely accessible to everyone in at least one of the following repositories:

- a) University Repository;
- b) Open subject repository;
- c) Discussion papers series;
- d) Researchers' personal websites.

For monographs, ANVUR will be able to define specific agreements with the publishers.

The second provides for stronger requirements for the journals of the highest Rank (Class A magazines), requiring them to meet at least two of the following characteristics:

- a) presence in at least one of the major international databases consistent with the characteristics of the scientific sector;
- b) abstracts (also in English) of the individual articles in open access;
- c) accessibility of open-access content, at least within eighteen months of the publication of each issue.

### 3. Conclusions

So, open access is not only not at war with evaluation but it is destined to be increasingly contiguous and associated with it, in order to reach close collaboration, or a real peace.

So, even today, we cannot disagree with Walter Gropius:

*"The mind is like an umbrella. It functions best when open".*

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and scientific journals, comparable to bibliometric journals of less elevated quartile. (Q2 or less).

<sup>3</sup> The Berlin Declaration is an international statement on open access and access to knowledge. It emerged from a

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conference organised in Berlin by Max Planck Society in 2003

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