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Stop, Look, Listen — Learning from Knowledge Unlatched 2016: Making OA Work



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Knowledge Unlatched (KU) has just finished its third round of unlatching monographs in the humanities and social sciences, making 343 books from 53 publishers around the world available as open access (OA). The initiative (www.knowledgeunlatched.org), founded by **Frances Pinter** in 2012, has thus become the largest cooperative endeavor for open access books. With almost 450 academic libraries participating through funding the project, KU is also one of the most active players in addressing the practical issues around OA for books — and there are still many left to address. As libraries from the United States and Canada form the largest group of supporters of this global initiative — 44% of all participating institutions in KU Select 2016 are based in North America — there are four key challenges KU has been working on.

Usage in Times of Open Access

Librarians are rightly very concerned about the efficient use of their resources, and that means that they care a lot whether content they have spent library budget on is used by the library's patrons. COUNTER-compliant usage statistics are important to secure funding from university deans and provosts, and to prove that a library is investing in the "right" content. In an Open Access world, that poses a special challenge to all initiatives out there, as there is no apparent reason for students and researchers to log into the library system to read an OA book (or journal article).

Knowledge Unlatched has addressed the issue by combining the usage from researchers within the IP range of the library with geolocation data. Thus, librarians can assess downloads of books that have been unlatched in an easy way. And the impact is astonishing: Looking at the Boston/Cambridge area, KU books have been downloaded within the IP ranges of the three supporting institutions — **Harvard, MIT and Boston University** — 84 times in Q4 of 2016 — counting full books, not chapters. If geolocation data is included, it becomes clear that this figure only captures 13.5% of all downloads in the region. The total number of downloads was whopping 593 in just one quarter for 104 titles only!

If there were doubts before whether OA is an economical way of supporting monographs in the humanities and social sciences, these numbers clearly demonstrate that it is.

Double Dipping

A major concern about OA traditionally is double dipping, the unintended duplicative acquisition of the identical content, mainly as a consequence of a lack of transparency between publishers, vendors and libraries. As Knowledge Unlatched works with high quality publishers from around the world, you

can expect quite a share of double dipping in leading libraries. And anecdotal evidence from a number of major libraries indeed shows that the share of titles within KU that these libraries would have bought anyways is between 50% and 70%. Given that in many cases libraries do not receive additional Open Access funding, but have to finance it through collection building funds, this seems to be good news. But the process of shifting budgets is something libraries are clearly struggling with.

As KU sees itself as a bridge model from one with a traditional acquisition focus to one supporting Open Access, the major challenge is to support libraries to efficiently shift their budgets without missing out on content or duplicating.

Since the second round, KU has provided skeleton MARC records to allow for transparency early on in the decision making of whether to support Knowledge Unlatched. And libraries around the world have actively used the information provided to prevent double dipping through stopping their acquisition of material that is part of KU collections.

The cooperation with vendors providing approval plans proved difficult. Of course, KU and participating publishers want to avoid titles which are unlatched and hence Open Access to be listed with a price in these vendors' systems. Conversations have not led to any tangible results yet, but are continuing. It seems that the library community has to make its voice heard to effect a change here.

Differential Pricing

In line with more titles becoming unlatched from the pilot round (28 titles) through the second (78) to the third round (343), the financial support required by each participating library has therefore increased significantly, from 1,300 USD to 10,780 USD. In an environment where library budgets are under pressure, it has not been easy for libraries to free up this amount within a relatively short period of time.

Knowledge Unlatched has reacted in three different ways. First of all, the decision was made to not increase the volume of the title package for the next round to allow for a moment of consolidation. Secondly, in 2017, KU will introduce differential pricing. This will allow smaller institutions to participate in the pledging, while they lacked the financial resources in previous rounds. The differentiation for North America has been developed based on Carnegie Classifications.

Thirdly, KU will increase its efforts to work with consortia to secure broader participation in Open Access for books while limiting the financial impact on the individual institutions.

A good example of how library feedback changes KU is a functionality that will be

available from this year on. Many libraries indicated that they would like to pledge not only for one year, but for a period of three years right away to minimize the time spent on the transactional side. KU has built a functionality that allows institutions to opt for this.

The Future: KU as a Market Place for Open Access

Knowledge Unlatched has been very successful in demonstrating that there is the willingness of both publishers and libraries to support Open Access for books in the humanities and the social sciences. This support has been financial, but more importantly, KU's partners really are an active part in advancing the model. This does not only happen through its advisory steering or title selection committees, but equally importantly through numerous meetings on specific issues, some of which I have addressed here.

Libraries and publishers alike are most interested in broadening the impact of Knowledge Unlatched, using it as a vehicle to make more content available in Open Access and eliminating barriers in the current academic publishing landscape. In support of this notion, KU will develop into a platform that is open to more initiatives than just the unlatching of its books as we know it so far.

Beginning in 2017, KU will add around 20 journals and offer libraries the opportunity to unlatch these. All are being published by renowned publishers, all of them have existed for quite some time, and will soon be flipped completely provided the initiative gains enough backing.

Furthermore, with **Language Science Press** as a very innovative Open Access linguistics publisher, KU works on collecting the financial support to secure the operations of **Lang Sci Press**. In this case, KU does not only reach out to libraries, but also beyond that core. Institutes of linguistics and individuals are also being approached, naturally with a specific unlatching fee that is only 106 USD p.a. for individuals.

Finally, KU is concerned with supporting the broader infrastructure of Open Access in academic institutions. For its hosting partner OAPEN (next to HathiTrust), it will spread the word about their institutional repository service OAPEN will be offering from this year on.

Knowledge Unlatched has an infrastructure as well as an experienced team in library outreach in place, and it has always seen Open Access in the humanities and social sciences as a field in which cooperation is more important than competition. That's why KU offers others in the market the chance to work together on making Open Access work. 🌱