

Tensions in creating discussion spaces in the French Open Access landscape: A necessary evil?

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Background and context

- This communication is part of a PhD research project, which takes the academic publishing market in chemistry (mainly periodicals) as research object.
- I use Open Access as a “marker” of transformations in scholarly work (OA is a modality - among others - of the Open Science movement).
- A few “ethnographic” studies which focus on the publishing industry.
- An opportunity to join, as an observer, the OA group of a professional association (other groups exist on open data, big data, knowledge society...)
- A specific context: an online consultation on draft “Digital Republic” law, where citizens were invited to comment on proposals and suggest changes.

Goal

- Through a detailed description of a series of (8) meetings, I propose to study the implementation of an OA policy in France, up to the adoption of a law setting embargo periods (6/12 months).
- I will describe the sequence of events which lead to the disruption of the group and a redefinition of its mission.
- Using insights from STS, this communication is a tentative to explore OA as shaped by negotiation processes promoted by different stakeholders, where friction appears as soon as actors try to collaborate.

Conceptual framework

- A STS market study anchored in a « relationist » economic sociology (Cochoy 2012)
- The contribution of the market-agencement conception (Callon 2015)
 - A shift from the traditional view of markets as interfaces for the conception of markets as agencements.
 - The market-agencement conception refers to dynamics of organization processes. It draws attention to other actors [than readers and publishers] and insists on « social engineering » (role of intermediaries).
 - Gulledge, Roscoe & Townley, J. of Cultural Economy (2015): the book proposal as a « market device »

The OA group

- The OA group was set up in 2007. Initially conceived as a forum of exchange, the group is chaired by a respected scholar in information sciences.
- It gathers representatives of stakeholder organizations: public research organizations (PROs), funding body, ministries, publishing industry, national publishers' association. It's a membership structure.
 - Composition: public/private, SSH mostly + STM, high level representatives (CEO, information services managers in PROs). No representatives of university or library consortium.
 - Expectations: "being able to propose" (chairperson)

Research questions

- Work in progress: an first attempt to study the formulation of arguments and positions, the different nodes and issues.
- In January 2013, the OA group has delivered a position paper (recommendations on OA) and produced a vademecum on licensing & negotiations. Why did the OA group split, is it linked to the specific context?
- Is regulation a proper way to deal with uncertainties?

Methodology

- Participant observation in a close space. 8 meetings since April 2015.
- The chairperson invites one or two external speakers, who give a speech or present work in progress. Duration of each meeting: 2,5h.
- I took notes extensively and recorded 2 sessions, then identified the different entities in the transcriptions of conversations:
 - Actors/organizations: the State, public bodies, Matignon, CNRS, Couperin, BSN...
 - Who talks (or doesn't talk), in whose name?
 - Arguments, nodes, issues
 - Language registers (anger, irony...), vocabulary (value, ecosystem...) 7

Chronology (1/2)

- In the two first meetings, publishers use the space as a tribune, and insist on threats:
 - “We won’t go against OA but we need to preserve a small commercial space” (STM publisher)*
 - “Megajournals are a big stuff, the biggest since 10 years. We’re not anymore in a market where we buy and resell each other. Where do we go from here?” (STM publisher)*
- In the group, participants unanimously consider the bill “poorly prepared”. It is considered as a “political affair”. Discussions focused on:
 - Embargo periods (3rd meeting, June 2015)
 - “12 months of embargo for social sciences, that’s not good. Unsubscribing will push economic actors into the red” (publisher)*
 - The lack or incompleteness of impact studies (4th meeting, Sept. 2015)
- The ministry’s representative tries to convince participants that *“the policy is designed to preserve diversity. Do not assume that we want to see the demise of the private sector”*. She gives the first overall description of the support plan to the French SSH publishing industry (3rd meeting).

Chronology (2/2)

- Tensions emerged around writing a joint position statement during the consultation phase (Sept.-Oct. 2015). Several PRO representatives vote explicitly against the group's statement.
- There is a peak in tensions several months later (3 February 2016), in a meeting (the 6th) where examples of support plans are presented. The choice of the exemplified countries (Sweden, UK and the Netherlands) lead the chairperson to come up with injunctions regarding transparency and « vision » of the ministry.
- The group goes separate ways after the professional association has offered to cooperate with the gouvernement on OA monitoring:
“The [professional association] proposes to facilitate the government's work by analyzing the situation in other European countries comparatively and/or helping for drawing up indicators to implement OA in France”. (Letter to the minister's office, 14 February 2016)
- PROs delegates resign, arguing the prof. assoc. has no legitimacy to implement such a policy. BSN is the space where impact studies need to be conducted, in particular when looking at APC costs.

First fundings

- The controversy ends with the offer, by the PROs, of a “collective expertise”. At least, impact studies are not discussed. The issue is to administrate the proof.
- The breaking point is not where it was supposed to be. The question is not why the gold road but how to manage money with gold road/hybrid journals.
- Members use arguments anchored in their values. They are consubstantial:
 - with their attachment to the State (PRO representatives),
 - with her autonomy as Professor (the chairperson). Benchmarking techniques (with iterative processes) are internalized and heavily mobilized.
- Who talks, with whose name? A point discussed by the General Delegate of the prof. association in the case of PROs

Lines of inquiry

- To link these results with the map Célya and Constance have build. The OA group has its own autonomy and sociability, but is inserted in the general landscape.
- To articulate of online and offline activities (the way members use the mailing list).

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Any questions?

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Thank you for your attention.