hrčak
PORTAL OF CROATIAN SCIENTIFIC AND PROFESSIONAL JOURNALS

Insights into the Economy of Open Scholarship:
A look into HRČAK with Jadranka Stojanovski, University of
Zadar/Ruđer Bošković Institute, HRČAK Advisory Board

KE
Knowledge Exchange

DFG   CSC   Jisc   cnrs   SURF   Deff
Denmark's Electronic Research Library

About HRČAK

HRČAK is the central portal of Croatian scientific, professional and popular open access (OA) journals. HRČAK offers open access to almost 500 journals, 300 of which are scientific peer reviewed publications, mostly in Croatian. Around 60% of the journals are in the humanities and social sciences (HSS) subjects. The portal, which was government-funded in the first three years of its production, is now an integral part of the University of Zagreb University Computing Centre (SRCE) and also receives occasional funding from international grant-funded projects. Most of the journals do not ask authors to pay article processing charges (APCs).

hrcak.srce.hr

HRČAK: Business model

Key activities

▸ Journal platform for 500 Croatian open access journals, of which 300 are peer reviewed scientific and professional journals

Organisation type

▸ Non-profit
▸ Staff: 1.2 FTE

Key partners

▸ Academic and research libraries
▸ University of Zagreb Computing Centre
▸ Government
▸ Universities
▸ Journal publishers

Revenue streams

▸ HRČAK journals: government funding, institutional funding, a few journals experiment with author fees
▸ University Computing Centre (SRCE): staff and infrastructure
▸ Government funding (first three years)
▸ Grant funding

IP/Copyright

▸ Code base is not open
▸ Articles: open access, some Creative Commons licensed

Customers/users

▸ Researchers/authors
▸ Journal editors
▸ Publishers
▸ Government
▸ Citizens

An interview with Jadranka Stojanovski

Scholarly publishing in Croatia has always had its idiosyncrasies: There are no significant commercial players active in the field and most journals are published and funded by universities, professional associations, and societies. These collect some funding via print subscriptions but, unlike the textbook publishing industry, where commercial publishers play a role, there have never been real market forces at play.

"When international journals started being published in digital and online versions in the early nineties it was obvious that Croatian publishers weren't following this migration at the same pace. There was a discrepancy between the relatively large number of scholarly journals in Croatia and the small proportion available online. These journals had neither enough technical know-how nor the funding needed to hire professional staff who could provide production, sales, marketing, and administrative support," says **Jadranka Stojanovski** from the HRČAK Advisory Board.

In 2005 a small group of librarians and information specialists wrote the initial project proposal to build a common platform for Croatian journals, HRČAK (hamster in English), which would enable journal editors to publish their content online free of charge.

As a result of a long partnership, the proposal for the HRČAK project was successfully submitted by the **SRCE (srce.unizg.hr/en/university-zagreb-university-computing-centre-srce)**. "When we started with HRČAK, we had the goal of attracting at least 50 journals to use the portal. Nowadays we have almost 500! Besides around 300 peer reviewed journals, HRČAK also collects professional,

popular and student publications, as well as some trade and industry journals.

"HRČAK is a good example of a fruitful collaboration between journal editors, librarians and ICT specialists," says Stojanovski.

> Currently, HRČAK is still hosted, maintained, and developed by SRCE and it is a good example of a fruitful collaboration between journal editors, librarians, and ICT specialists.

Stojanovski: "We've always collaborated well with journal editors and our model, providing them with free infrastructure to publish their journals in open access at no cost, was widely accepted. HRČAK became popular quickly, measured by publicly available usage statistics. For some journals our platform offers the only digital version available but, for the majority, editors are providing to HRČAK the same content as published on their websites."

Government support for journals has always been a tradition in Croatia, especially for HSS research, which is mainly published in Croatian. The entire scholarly community in Croatia is only around 11,000 researchers, and without some form of support these journals would have severe sustainability issues. After an evaluation process journals are assigned different government-issued subsidies ranging from 800 EUR to 32,000 EUR per year, which is about 80% of their costs.

"We are also looking for projects and grant funding schemes. Partnership and collaboration with bigger consortia such as **OpenAIRE (openaire.eu)** and **OPERAS (operas.hypotheses.org)** are crucial for us. Also, we would like to establish a collaboration with **SciELO (scielo20.org)** (Scientific Electronic Library Online) since we find many similarities between HRČAK and the SciELO platforms.

"It is important to stress that the platform was open access from the start even when there was no formal policy in place yet. When the advantages of open access became obvious we made it mandatory," says Stojanovski.

"Very important for us was the support from the Ministry of Science and Education and their publishing committee; publishing on HRČAK (and thus in open access) became a criterion for journals to receive government funding.

"Together with the ministry's publishing committee, which is in charge for journal subsidies, we are continuously improving the criteria for evaluating journals.

> ❝ What is important to stress is that the platform was open access at its earliest stage – even when there was no formal policy in place yet. ❞

As a stated goal is to emphasise the value of locally relevant research, HRČAK is also working with publishers and editors to raise the quality of Croatian journals, ensuring that editorial policies are up to standard and encouraging them to follow new trends in scholarly publishing.

Stojanovski: "What is quite exceptional is that the majority of journal editors are very much in favour of open access. They realise it's the most efficient way to attract new audiences and to guarantee their authors the biggest possible visibility and impact. We're encouraging them not only to open up the article, enabling wide usage of **Creative Commons (creativecommons.org)** licences, but also to open up the underlying research data. Also, we're currently promoting new approaches such as open peer review as well, although we're still waiting for the first journal to employ it.

"HRČAK still reflects our 2005 vision, which was mainly about providing a common infrastructure for journals to publish their content online at no cost for them or for the reader. But this doesn't respond to current journals' needs anymore. The new vision should be to offer more in-depth services such as modern editorial standards and technical innovations. In the future, HRČAK could be a publishing platform that encompasses all stages of scientific publishing from submission and the peer review process to publication. We would like to support the editorial process in a more integrated way. This could be achieved, for example, by the full integration of Open Journal Systems (OJS, **openjournalsystems.com**) or by an appropriate development of other editorial modules. We're already offering OJS to editors and it is quite easy to exchange the metadata with HRČAK, but I think it would be better to have both systems completely integrated.

"Applications or plug-ins helping authors and editors to create XML versions of articles for free would be welcomed by our journals. I believe this approach will ensure best editorial practices and research integrity, encourage new types of peer review, and so on. Another issue that we face now is that many journals publish the same content on their websites as they do through our platform – which doubles the effort and makes it difficult to aggregate usage statistics. We should be evolving towards a full-blown publishing platform.

"Our ultimate goal is to enable all Croatian journals to become high quality open access publications, with all research data available and open peer review in place, improving scholarly communication by use of the available technologies. We're also looking into enhanced publications with dynamic, multilayer, interactive, multimedia content. On the technical side, we're focusing on machine readability of the articles, linked data, open research data, variety of formats (beyond PDF), global author identification **(ORCID, orcid.org))**, persistent identifiers such as digital object identifiers (DOIs) and so on. When everything is open access and machine readable, publishers will be able to provide further added value, more functionalities and advanced services."

> **Our ultimate goal is to support all Croatian journals to become high quality open access journals, with all research data available, with open peer review in place, improving scholarly communication by use of the available technologies.**

In recognition of changing research workflows, and to stimulate them, HRČAK also wants to support other publication types besides journals, such as conference proceedings, books and educational materials. "We don't have enough resources to develop HRČAK-like platforms for conference proceedings and other types of publications as fast as we'd like to," says Stojanovski, "and we're also lacking in training resources – we haven't been able to train editors and authors as much as we'd like to. In addition, we need to pay more attention to emerging topics such as research integrity and other ethical issues. I also believe that we should evolve towards open peer review, with optional

disclosure of a reviewer's identity. Disclosure could be tricky in such a small research community, but openly available reviews could improve the peer review process, raising quality standards.

"At this point, we don't have sustainable funding available for HRČAK, and SRCE uses its regular staff for HRČAK tasks, while working on other projects and services. The members of HRČAK advisory board are all volunteers, and their engagement depends on how much time they can set aside." HRČAK used grant funding from the EU project OpenAIRE to implement more advanced features, but Stojanovski thinks that they would benefit from having a dedicated team working exclusively on development. There are different publishing platforms in Europe working separately, so maybe more international collaboration and cohesion could be a way to proceed faster.

Stojanovski: "We also see competition developing: Certain publishers are approaching Croatian journals and taking over the publishing role, but we're unsure about outcomes. On the one hand, the publishers might demand the introduction of APCs, which is

more of a source of income for publishers than of support for editors in Croatia, who work hard to provide reliable content. On the other hand, the reputation of the publisher makes the odds of inclusion in popular databases like Scopus and Web of Science much more likely, compared to an unknown Croatian publisher, even if content of the journal is identical. Our biggest strength is that our staff are very knowledgeable and competent. We have an excellent relationship with our journal editors and, because the community is relatively small, we can reach most members relatively easily. This direct contact is of great value to us."

Although the predominant scholarly publishing culture in Croatia is still not based on authors' fees, there are now some HRČAK journals introducing APCs. Stojanovski: "Until recently, Croatian editors and publishers were unanimously against APCs because they essentially transform an open scholarly publishing system into a business, which has nothing to do with science itself."

> "Until recently, Croatian editors and publishers were unanimously against APCs because they considered them crucial in transforming an open scholarly publishing system into a business, which has nothing to do with science itself."

"Firstly, it is economically unfeasible for authors or funders from countries with low levels of research and development (R&D) investment to pay them, but it's also not in line with their journal publishing philosophy, which was never commercially oriented.

"Recently, some HRČAK journals introduced APCs not only because it's a way to get more (and more sustainable) funding, but also because they want to align themselves with the mostly author fee-based OA scholarly publishing in Western Europe. There are many small non-profit publishers in the world, some of them offering a more advanced approach towards publishing, but I am still wary of large

corporations controlling academic publishing and their influence. I believe that 'Open Scholarship' will be harmed if commercial publishers dictate its course. This development should be defined by the needs of the research community and society in general, and governed by openness. I find that discussions on open access focused exclusively on big publishers' business models, equating open access with APCs, are unproductive. We should be discussing the evolution of scholarly publishing into creating more efficient tools for sharing ideas, methods, and research results and shift away from paper-centric publications. The prevalent pro-APC discourse in open access publishing is a demonstration of how commercial interests are influencing the scientific publication process.

> ❝ I believe that 'Open Scholarship' will suffer definite harm if commercial publishers dictate the direction it will go. This direction should be defined by the needs of the research community and society in general, not by commercial interests. ❞

"Publishers can play a role in developing state-of-the art innovative services, which they can sell as a product to enhance scholarly communication. In that way, public/private partnerships can offer added value and make sense economically. However, they should not be allowed to lock in research articles or data. Publishing research results in open access incurs some costs which need to be covered, but in a system where the content is provided by authors/ researchers and is evaluated by peer reviewers/ researchers free of charge, the money should be invested in a variety of forms, formats, and media for the appropriate presentation of research results, accompanied by diverse services and with good text and data mining (TDM) tools available.

"When author fee-based publishing became the dominant model, I really had my doubts and I felt like a Grinch stole open access!" Stojanovski remains an outspoken advocate against author fee-based open access publishing: "Open access is, for sure, the future of scholarly publishing, but we need to support a variety of approaches and not-for-profit business models equally.

"With HRČAK, we have found that investing a relatively small amount of funding, supported by enthusiasm and lot of volunteer work, leads to a bigger common good. Open scholarship is about bringing back scholarship to the researchers, it's about improving scholarly communications in general, it's about bringing value to society – not only to advance the researcher's career. It's also about using new and digital tools and channels to disseminate research beyond the formats inherited from the printed world.

> ❝ With HRČAK, we have found that investing a relatively small amount of funding, supported by enthusiasm and lot of volunteer work, leads to a bigger common good. ❞

References and relevant links

▶ University of Zagreb Computing Centre (SCRE): **srce.unizg.hr/en/university-zagreb-university-computing-centre-srce**

▶ SciELO (Scientific Electronic Library Online): **scielo20.org**

▶ Creative Commons licence suite: **creativecommons.org**

▶ Open Journal Systems (OJS): **openjournalsystems.com**

▶ ORCID: **orcid.org**

▶ OpenAIRE: **openaire.eu**

▶ OPERAS: **operas.hypotheses.org**

About Jadranka Stojanovski

Jadranka Stojanovski is an assistant professor at the University of Zadar, Department of Information Sciences and research librarian at Ruđer Bošković Institute in Zagreb, a member of the Commission expert group on National Points of Reference on Scientific Information, the OpenAIRE NOAD for Croatia, and an Open Science advocate. She was involved in the creation of the OA information infrastructure, including the Croatian Scientific Bibliography CROSBI, Who's Who in Science in Croatia, ŠESTAR repository of Scientific Equipment, HRČAK and DABAR, enabling open access to the knowledge created by the Croatian academic and research community.

Stojanovski's research is in the field of scholarly communication and Open Science, research integrity, and next-generation metrics to assess research output.