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EIFL-OA: Open Access

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SUPPORTING SERBIAN JOURNALS PUBLISHERS TO SWITCH TO ARTICLE PROCESSING CHARGES OA MODEL A CASE STUDY FROM SERBIA

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Results of the EIFL-funded project: “Supporting Serbian journal publishers in switching to the article processing charges model” implemented by the Centre for Evaluation in Education and Science, Belgrade (CEON/CEES), in partnership with the National Library of Serbia and with the journal publishers or editors.

INTRODUCTION

In Serbia, OA has been promoted since 2000, mainly through cooperation of [Serbian Library Consortium for Coordinated Acquisition \(KOBSON\)](#) and EIFL, supported by CEON/CEES (<http://ceon.rs/>). As a result, Serbia was among the first countries in the region to widely accept the new publishing model and practice. At the moment, almost all Serbian internationally recognized journals (about 150 of them), are available under OA, primarily through SCIndeks: the Serbian Citation Index (<http://scindeks.nb.rs/>).

However, the global economic crisis followed by severe cut-offs of the journal budgets provided by the Ministry of Science (basically the only research journals funder in Serbia), forced publishers to look for other business models. Some of the journals were interested to learn more about APCs and start practicing them, but came across difficulties in their attempts to collect the payments.

KEY ACHIEVEMENTS

- Serbian Open Access (OA) journal publishers were provided with software and organizational ‘know how’ to collect article processing charges (APCs) from the authors or their affiliated institutions.
- A partnership with publishers was established based on a public call followed by an internet survey, and with an in-depth CEON/CEES analysis of the journals potentials of switching to the new model. More than 40 representatives of publishers and editorial boards have been trained to practice APCs.
- An immediate result of this project is that five journals switched to the new business practice, and enrolled additional 21 journals into preparatory programme.
- The project provides a new model for Serbian journals publishers, which will lead to their long-term economic independence.
- A proposal was submitted to the Ministry of Education and Science to support journals in transition to new business models (pending decision).

PROJECT DESCRIPTION

Within this project we wanted to assist the journals interested in APCs by providing them with the relevant software and support. More specifically, the goals were:

- 1) to map, by using an Internet survey, all publishing business models practiced among Serbian professional journals indexed in SCIndeks;
- 2) to identify journals interested in switching to APCs and select those having potential to successfully practice this model of publishing;
- 3) to provide the journal editors/publishers with organizational know how; and
- 4) to upgrade SCIndeks with a service enabling them to collect APCs, either from individual authors, or from authors affiliated or funding institutions.

The ultimate goal of the project was to strengthen the economic position of journal publishers struck by the budget crisis, so they can keep practicing OA publishing. And a related goal was to provide successful examples to journal publishers from Serbia and other Western Balkans countries, still hesitating to practice OA, mainly because they are afraid of losing their revenues based on subscriptions. Also, research institutions running R&D projects financed by national or EU foundations had a chance to test whether direct support to OA publishing and communicating research results is a more efficient way to increase their impact.

STRATEGIES, TACTIC, AND TOOLS

At the very beginning of the project implementation, we decided to merge some of the activities with our parallel project called SCIndeks e-Ur, which was intended for quality assurance of SCIndeks journals.

Within SCIndeks e-Ur, we had to establish a journal management system allowing journal editors to receive online submissions, to communicate with their reviewers and authors more effectively, and to use article quality control external services such as CrossRef-DOI, CrossCheck and AKwA¹ (Open Journal System is used as a platform).

Obviously, the two projects were highly complementary. Merging them turned out to be not only a rational choice, but also decisive for the success of both projects. Functionalities developed under the two schedules are now fully integrated, making together an important upgrade to SCIndeks. e-Ur is available at scindeks-eur.ceon.rs.

KEY BENEFITS

The outcomes of this project opened a new chapter in the development of OA movement in Serbia, as jeopardized by the latest budget cut-offs. Five journal publishers were selected to immediately switch to APCs business model. These are following:

1. Serbian Journal of Experimental and Clinical Research
2. PONS - Medicinski časopis
3. Acta Chirurgica Iugoslavica
4. Vojnosanitetski Pregled
5. Vojnotehnički Glasnik

¹AKwA is SCIndeks own service enabling authors to assign keywords produced through the process of automatic extraction from professional thesauri.

Additional 21 journals entered the preparation programme. It was agreed upon that these journals start using e-Ur's online journal management and article quality assurance system in order to first raise their impact and to reach/stabilize their international status, and only when this is achieved, to activate APCs.

SUCCESS STORIES

One general positive effect of this project is opening up of a new perspective to Serbian journals publishers. The vast majority of Serbian journals faced budget crisis and some of them even total cessation of support. This new perspective is about economic independence, initiative, and innovation. It implies reorientation of business strategies from relying on the government as the only funder, to the market created by sponsors, authors and their affiliated institutions as key stakeholders.

Another success is the merge of the project with a compatible e-Ur programme leading to higher quality of journals. It was encouraging that about two dozen journals were interested to enter into such an arrangement, investing in their future. At the beginning of the project, there was a lot of scepticism. In fact, the scepticism was justified because the potential of journals published on so-called scientific periphery to attract new authors is relatively low. But in the end, the results exceeded expectations, showing that OA ideas can grow even when they fall on infertile ground.

THE FUTURE

We are confident that our approach suggests a sustainable model. We will continue promoting it within SCIndeks journal community, warning the publishers at the same time that adopting APCs model requires certain preconditions and preparations. To ensure sustainability, we submitted a proposal to the Ministry of Education and Science to provide support to journals in their transition to new business models, including APCs. This will hopefully lead to a broader scope of journals covered by this program. We expect that in 2012 the total number of journals practicing APCs will be at least doubled.