

Enhancing the Visibility of Maltese Research

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Since the implementation of the University of Malta's Institutional Repository, OAR@UoM in September 2014, there has been tremendous growth in terms of both the number of deposited material and usage. To date, the University of Malta Library managed to populate OAR@UoM with over 12 000 important research resources. Nearly half of the repository's content (44%) is currently available in Open Access without any restrictions or limitations. Furthermore, all items on OAR@UoM are visible and discoverable online through indexing by Google and Google Scholar.

To further enhance the visibility of local researchers as well as their works, OAR@UoM has been registered with several key Open Archives Initiative (OAI) service providers. An OAI service provider is a website platform established and maintained by a scientific institution or organisation which utilises the OAI-PMH (Open Archives Initiative Protocol for Metadata Harvesting) to collect metadata records of primary documents from OAI data providers, i.e. institutional repositories and digital archives. The harvested records are then used to build an organised fully searchable metadata database equipped with a search system, user interface and a wide array of value-added services.

The OAI service providers are freely accessible to anyone; researchers, academics and students alike. Similar to search engines, users can use keywords to search for various types of material on a particular topic, and from the harvested metadata record, they can connect directly to the source document in the institutional repository.

The benefits of the OAI service providers for OAR@UoM and the Maltese academic community are numerous. Besides enhancing the transparency and reach of the scholarly works, these services also enhance the visibility of the University of Malta, increasing the chances of establishing new collaborations with international institutions with the possibility of foreign funding opportunities. The OAI service providers also offer various statistical and analytical tools that allow for the creation of comparative reports.

The first OAI service provider in which OAR@UoM was included is the OpenAIRE portal. The OpenAIRE portal represents a technological infrastructure, which is vital for inter-connecting and managing research outputs stored in various archives, repositories and data storages across Europe. As a part of a large-scale initiative, the OpenAIRE2020, aims to promote open scholarship and improve the discoverability and usability of research. On top of standard searching and browsing, the portal offers several valuable services including free user account creation and management, linking publications and research datasets with their respective projects, validating and registering repositories and monitoring the quantitative development of Open Access in Europe in the form of detailed statistics.

In June 2016, OAR@UoM has been registered with BASE - Bielefeld Academic Search Engine. BASE is operated by the Bielefeld University Library in Germany and represents one of the most successful OAI Service providers in the world. BASE currently harvests metadata records from over 4 900 digital archives and repositories, and offers two types of additional services, one for users and the other for database and repository managers. The former type of services includes user account creation and management, multi-lingual search option with Eurovoc thesaurus, plugins for Google Chrome and Mozilla Firefox and interface for the citation platform Zotero; while the latter type encompasses validation of repositories, integration of BASE into local infrastructures and the OAI-PMH blog.

Furthermore, in November 2016, OAR@UoM has also been added into CORE - Connecting Repositories. CORE is maintained by the Knowledge Media Institute at the Open University in United Kingdom and unlike the aforementioned OAI service providers, it harvests not only the metadata records but also the copies of primary documents and enriches the content using text and data mining. The value-added services offered include an application for mobile platforms (both Android and iOS), an independent plugin for recommending semantically similar documents, application programming interfaces which enable external systems to directly interact with CORE and a tool for statistical analysis.

In conclusion, OAI service providers constitute an invaluable tool for increasing the visibility, readership and impact of scholarly works written by local academics and for advancing Open Access in the Maltese research landscape. Making OAR@UoM compliant and registered with several OAI service providers allows for local research to be linked and compared with the rest of the world. However, to reap the benefits of the OAI service providers as outlined above, local academics must primarily upload their research on OAR@UoM.