The importance of Reference and Information Services (RIS) in relation with Open Access

English translation of the original paper: "La importancia de los Servicios de Consulta en Acceso Abierto".

Translated by the Authors

Jennifer Voutssas-Lara
National Science and Technology Council (CONACYT), México.
javoutssas@gmail.com

Arturo Garduño-Magaña
National Science and Technology Council (CONACYT), México.
arturo.garduno1989@gmail.com

The text of this document has been translated into [insert language] and differences from the original text may occur. This translation is provided for reference purposes only.

Abstract:

There has been some controversy over the role and importance of Reference and Information Services (RIS) once Open Access (OA) distributes much of research outputs. Unlike more conservative approaches, we believe that information centers will continue to be significant resources, as they have been so far.

We believe that OA will have a positive impact on librarians to reach specific content that are not displayed anywhere, such as paid subscription journals and databases.

Today, academic repositories face the challenge of having their valuable content and information reachable by popular search engines. There are many academic contents and results still not published in peer-reviewed journals; thus, OA represents an opportunity for researchers and students to be updated and to spread their results faster and at lower costs. OA has benefited from access to primary sources of researches in a shorter time. Hence, RIS have the opportunity to be a platform for exploiting these data sources.

However, there are some key questions to be answered by librarians before the creation of an Open-Access based RIS, such as: How much of the RIS of my library rely on paid subscriptions? How familiarized am I with the use and content of OA platforms? Can we trust in OA content quality? How familiar am I with permissions and information use licensed under Creative Commons?

There has been some controversy as to the possible minor importance of the Reference and Information Services (RIS) once Open Access (OA) distributes plenty of research outputs. Unlike more conservative opinions on this statement, we believe that librarians are essential stakeholders in the development of quality and standardized OA content, which will enrich the digital collections of libraries and services as Reference and Information Services (RIS).

Some points that support the argument of the minor importance of RIS are:

1) There is an increasing proliferation of OA contents.

2) The use of RIS services may be reduced because OA content is increasingly accessible from anywhere and without intermediaries.

3) Prices of commercial publisher materials are rising steadily.

4) Limited library budgets, especially in developing countries, making OA an attractive alternative for offering a wide range of valuable contents.
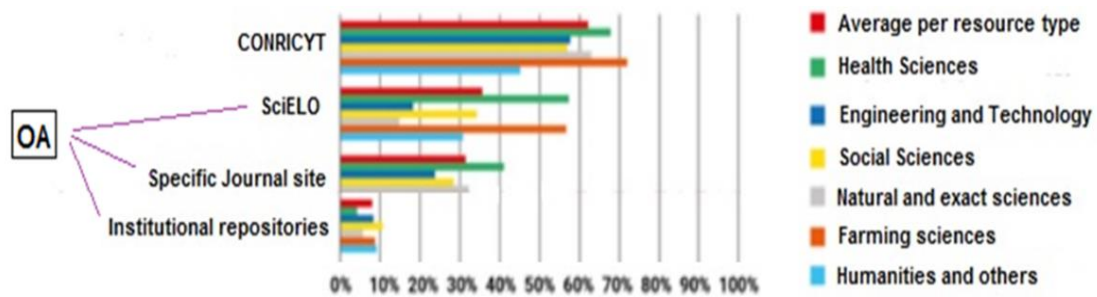
Some points that support the argument of the greater importance of RIS are:

1) Due to the rapid proliferation of OA repositories without policies, norms or standards, the quality of information could be compromised,

2) Most OA content is not available through common meta-search engines (such as Yahoo, Google, Duckduckgo, etc.). These hardly manage to retrieve the main pages of the sites, but not their contents.

3) For the same reason, informative skills are still required to find their contents.

4) OA repositories have a much wider variety of information types compared to paid subscriptions: data, images, video, reports, herbaria, biological collections of insects, mollusks, etc.

5) In OA, legal and/or ethical use and reuse of content is more difficult to control.

6) Libraries have a long experience in creating tools for access to all types of information: RIS services.

7) With library budgets shrinking and publishers' prices steadily rising, especially in developing countries, libraries are looking for new alternatives. Today, OA is an option to offer a wide range of valuable content, even with a limited budget.

Therefore, there are some important questions to be considered by librarians about the use and implementation of RIS linked with OA:

1. How much of the RIS of my library rely on paid subscriptions?

The following graph shows the behaviour of reference queries from users, both in paid journals and in OA. Under a study conducted by the National Scientific and Technological Information Resources Consortium (CONRICYT), which is a Public institution in México in charge of the public funds aimed for the purchase of journal subscriptions and databases (in collaboration with Higher Education Institutions and Public Research Centers). CONRICYT also offers online RIS.

G.1. CONRICYT statics from SCImago.

At first, the largest number of Ph.D. students' information queries falls into paid journals and databases. However, the difference between the first and the second one, which is an open-access repository, is minimal. Despite the following OA repositories, have a lesser presence, we can see how increasingly OA knowledge has more presence in Ph.D. students' reference queries.

2. How familiarized am I with the use and content of OA platforms?

Many OA contents are not the same type of information as in paid subscriptions. There are also data repositories, which serve a very specialized community and are available throughout academic and institutional repositories. For instance, these are data repositories, developed in Mexico under an Open Science Policy, which contains data of different types as seismology, proteins, genetics, species of animals and plants, among others.

Some data repositories

Within this type of information, there is still no RIS, which can help users to access such types of information. Many of these repositories are consulted locally, even though they are open and free.

3. Can we trust in OA content quality?

Usually users do not ask this question, but librarians do; especially now where is a greater susceptibility to misinformation. Either as consumers or as creators of OA contents, there is a need for mechanisms to ensure that OA content is reliable for users' queries. As a general principle, we must make sure if the original website is part of a recognized community (for instance, universities or research groups); also if the authors are real and recognized; and finally, if they have been referenced and the veracity of cites.

4. How familiar am I with permissions and information use licensed under Creative Commons?

There are many questions regarding the use of content under Creative Commons (CC) license. It should be noted that levels of use and reuse of the information is complex, but it is lesser extent restrictive with respect to copyright. For both librarians and users, it is crucial to know the rights of use under these license conditions, because there is an existing risk associated to plagiarism and misuse of OA content.
The correct use of works requires a strong awareness campaign to educate the users on the rights of use of OA content. Librarians are essential agents to train users for use, dissemination and partial or total reproduction of works under CC license.

So, as librarians, if we want to take the step towards RIS with OA content, there are a number of fundamental actions to take:

1. In-depth knowledge of the variety of resources offered by OA contents, such as learning objects, videos, data, research protocols, among others; which allow us to complement users' information needs.

2. The development of institutional policies that allow us to create a space where OA can be part of and interact with the regular collections and services of the library.

3. A training campaign for:

   - Reference librarians: enabling them to know and explore OA platforms, content types and a correct CC understanding.
   - Users: Introducing them into OA content and rights of use to complement their research.

4. Learning materials about Open Access through digital teaching models, as a system of personalized advisory within a schedule, as well as tutorials available 24/7 to guide users and introduce them to informational literacy.

5. There is a need of more investment in the library to create or improve OA content and access.

References

[1] Carreón, V. (2016). *Política de Ciencia Abierta* [PowerPoint slides]. Retrieved from: https://www.repositorionacionalcti.mx/docs/seminario_RI_y_su_interoperabilidad_con_el_RN/01_Politica_de_Ciencia_Abierta.pdf

[2] Guajardo, M. (2018). *Una Política de Ciencia Abierta para México*. Ciencia y Desarrollo. Volume 44, Special Edition. Retrieved from: http://www.cyd.conacyt.gob.mx/?p=articulo&id=396

[3] UNESCO (n.d.) *Open Science and Open Data Movement in Latin America.* Retrieved from: http://www.unesco.org/new/en/communication-and-information/portals-and-platforms/goap/access-by-region/latin-america-and-the-caribbean/