Decolonizing the University in South Africa: the role of research publication

SANLIC Conference 2017
Eve Gray, IP Unit, Faculty of Law, UCT
2015 Turmoil in South African universities
#RhodesMustFall!
#FeesMustFall!
#Decolonise the University!
Blade Nzimande had long recognised that there was a problem...
“Over the last few decades, some things have not changed. There’s been no significant break in relations of knowledge production between the colonial and post-colonial eras. African universities are essentially consumers of knowledge produced in developed countries.”

Blade Nzimande, UNESCO World Conference on Higher Education 2009
But only in 2015 did the question of knowledge production and publication start to become a mainstream issue as a result of student action – why did it take so long?
#Decolonise the university... Students in talks and negotiations about the curriculum, African content, black identity... Steve Biko and Franz Fanon.....

Photo Sami Ben Gharbia CC-BY2.0
In one of these discussions students asked the scholars they were talking to how, after obtaining a doctorate, one became a professor. The answer was ... ‘you publish journal articles... lots of journal articles... in international journals...
Yet this relentless quest for publication in foreign journals, and the way in which this drives prestige and promotions in our universities has not been on the ‘decolonisation’ agenda.
Why is this so?
Scholarly journals are seen as sacrosanct – but is the current system really part of an ‘old tradition’, as the Budapest Open Access Declaration suggested in 2002?
PHILOSOPHICAL TRANSACTIONS: GIVING SOME ACCOUNT OF THE PRESENT Undertakings, Studies, and Labours OF THE INGENIOUS IN MANY CONSIDERABLE PARTS OF THE WORLD.

Vol I.
For Anno 1665, and 1666.

In the SAVOY,
Printed by T.N. for John Martin at the Bell, a little without
our Temple-gate, and James Allestry in Duck-Level,
Present to the Royal Society.
Presented by the Author May 30th, 1667.
Transactions was more like our current networked science – a community engaged in discussion and discovery
The current journal system in reality is in fact the product of the post World War II climate in Europe and in particular arose out of the recognition of the value of research in an increasingly technological society.
Robert Maxwell – media mogul, but also one of the main architects of post-war scientific publishing...
... landed up at the end of World War II working for British information services in British Occupied Germany, where Springer was in the British zone
Maxwell offered Springer UK distribution... he could make things happen, with his connections with the British ...
... two years later he had a staff of 120...
The UK government quietly, in the background, set up a national initiative to purchase German content and put in the hands of UK publishers, through Butterworth..
Politically?

English would become the dominant language of science
Providing the essentials of a neo-colonial enterprise: the English language and British national interests were now at the dominant features of journal publishing.
Eugene Garfield’s creation of metrics in 1955 to measure the impact of journals and the extension of this system to measure the impact of individual authors helped create a dominant and inelastic market.
...promotion and prestige became inextricably linked to journal publication...
In this world, Africa is on the margins. The ‘international’ standards that lead to reward and recognition address British/American interests.
To the detriment of developing country concerns, with often disastrous results...
Open Access

An old tradition and a new technology have converged to make possible an unprecedented public good. The old tradition is the willingness of scientists and scholars to publish the fruits of their research in scholarly journals without payment, for the sake of inquiry and knowledge. The new technology is the internet.
World scaled by the number of documents in Web of Science by authors living there (2011)
But there is something missing...
Our universities, in particular, should be directing their research focus to address the development and social needs of our communities. The impact of their research should be measured by how much difference it makes to the needs of our communities, rather than by just how many international citations researchers receive in their publications.

Blade Nzimande, SA Minster of Higher Education and Training, Women in Science Awards. 2010
Research goes to waste

Håvard Ovesen

South Africa produces excellent quality research, often with public money, with little impact on policy. This is due to serious systemic failure of poor knowledge management that renders information invisible. "We need publicly funded research to be widely and easily available," urges development consultant Rick de Saëgê.

His message resonated strongly with the experiences of researchers and stakeholders gathered together for the "Synergies II" session on Wednesday afternoon. In the discussion, many told their own stories of unobtainable data and research disappearing into the dark hole of knowledge mismanagement.

De Saëgê recounted his experiences of being commissioned by the Presidency to research whether there is a need for a poverty information service. The answer was a resounding yes.

But much knowledge is restricted either by subscription fees or pay-per-view deals that are out of reach for many NGOs and other institutions including government departments. Another recurring issue is that the information might exist somewhere, but is not available on the internet. Comparatively little is available through open access licensing.

De Saëgê told Compi3 News that "there is an enormous amount of research and knowledge and information and evaluation that relates to poverty [and] policy that has disappeared down a dark hole. It's gotten lost, and it was extremely expensive to produce."

It doesn't always come down to incompetence or lack of resources. In some cases, researchers and research institutions use intellectual property rights to build "information lags" around data paid for by public funds. Keeping such knowledge out of the public domain for reasons of territorial jealousy is an act Conference Director Francis Wilson refers to as "theft."

Several of the participants at the session recounted incidents in which funders insisted on controlling the intellectual property rights to the research output, only to bury the product once the research produced inconvenient findings.

"Knowledge is power," de Saëgê reminded the audience, and later told Compi3 News that "one of the reasons why you may have information lag is around contestations of power (…) within the political system. The fear is that people may use or retain research outcomes "to advance narrow sectional agendas," rather than for the public good.

In de Saëgê's area, land reform, there is certainly no shortage of research, ideas, or evaluations. However, "there is a refusal to engage with [it], to change practice. That's what's so scary. You can get program evaluations that just remain somewhere, locked away in a government archive or in a filing system. They don't appear to impact on practice."

In 2011, South Africa was one of the eight founding governments of the Open Government Partnership, thereby "[committing] to openness and making data and information available." De Saëgê stressed that unless openness becomes part of governmental management performance assessments, this commitment might come to naught.

Access to information is important "so that people can hold government to account, so that people can co-create as well; they can participate in policy. They can become part of the conversation. That's ideally what research should be doing. It should be enabling a more nuanced national conversation about key issues like poverty."
The problem of development-focused research
20 years into democracy, what's happening on farms redistributed by govt from White to Black farmers? Read more

Taking action on land - AR + Action Research Plus

If there's one thing we are both passionate about, it's land. Not that we want it ourselves. Rather, as scholar-activists, we're both convinced that in South Africa, given our history, land reform is...

actionresearchplus.com

3:04 PM - 19 May 2017
This is NOT ‘grey literature’. It is use-inspired basic research.
Can developing countries offer insights that lead to new models of research conduct and outputs?
Wellcome criticises publishers over open access

Wiley and Elsevier attacked over failures to deposit papers as research funder warns it could withdraw funding for hybrid journals

March 24, 2016

By David Matthews  Twitter: @DavidMjourn
Elsevier clashes with researchers over open access publishing for academic texts

Wednesday 27 May 2015 4:04PM
Stan Correy

Will the European Commission’s Horizon 2020 Open Access plans resolve these tensions through a much wider-reaching model of OA?
Will the European Commission’s Horizon 2020 Open Access plans resolve these tensions through a much wider-reaching model of OA?
New models are emerging – open, integrated and continuous science
A new emerging model – open access, open data, open science

The old model thinks of publishing as a point in time. Once a work has gone through that temporal point and is published, credit and the accompanying authority are bestowed upon the author. But, in an open science model in which the work is done in public and there is no one moment in which the work goes public, credit and authority become harder to bestow unambiguously.

David Weinberger: Too Big to Know
OPPORTUNITIES

- Spurring new solutions in complex areas like eHealth, transport, environment
- Better science for complex problems
- Commercial opportunities for innovative companies
- Better public services such as smartcities
- Better value for taxpayers - opening up data produced by projects funded by the Horizon 2020 research and innovation programme: Findable, Accessible, Interoperable, Reusable
Everything is connected
EUROPEAN OPEN SCIENCE CLOUD
BRINGING TOGETHER CURRENT AND FUTURE DATA INFRASTRUCTURES

A trusted, open environment for sharing scientific data

Linking data

Connecting scientists globally

Long term and sustainable

Open and seamless services to analyse and reuse research data

Connecting across borders and scientific disciplines

Improving science
Transformative thinking
Open Science aims at transforming science through ICT tools, networks and media, to make research more open, global, collaborative, creative and closer to society.
WIDENING ACCESS; BUILDING TRUST

Widening the user base to the public and private sectors

A safe, secure environment with privacy and data protection built-in. Personal data and intellectual property protected by highest standards of quality, reliability, and confidentiality.
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Blog: www.graysouth.co.za
Twitter: graysouth
References


Achille Mbembe, *Decolonising Knowledge and the Question of the Archive:*
