Electronic Journals: Their Use and Impact in the Portuguese Universities Output

Teresa Costa, Centro Interdisciplinar de História, Culturas e Sociedades da Universidade de Évora /FCCN, Fundação para Computação Científica Nacional, Salamanca, Spain

Carlos Lopes, Instituto Universitário, Salamanca, Spain

Francisco Vaz, Centro Interdisciplinar de História, Culturas e Sociedades da Universidade de Évora, Salamanca, Spain

ABSTRACT

The availability of electronic journals in the Portuguese academic community improved in a spectacular way since the creation of the national university consortium, Online Knowledge Library (b-on), in 2004. The work presented here is the outcome of a line of research begun in 2011 which aims to investigate the supply and use of electronic journals incorporated into university libraries through b-on. This study aims to present and analyse some of the statistical and bibliometric indicators of the Portuguese scientific consumption and output seeking to evaluate its connection with b-on. It was analysed the usage of b-on resources by the public universities members of the consortium, from 2004 to 2010. In addition to the usage data of the consortium, we used the Web of Science (WoS) from which we identified the articles indexed by five Portuguese universities between 2000-2010.

Keywords: Bibliometry, Electronic resources, Online Knowledge Library, Portugal, Scientific Production

INTRODUCTION

The development of the new information and communication technologies, especially, changes arising from the advent of the internet in the late 80s of 20th century, and the World Wide Web in the following decade, led to new forms of publishing scientific literature - moving from paper to other media, such as digital, changing the flow of communication. The Internet has become a key tool for research in universities, changing the education and the access to information worldwide. The contents of university libraries today are mainly represented by electronic resources providing access to digital information sources, such as journals and databases.

With the advent of the electronic resources the cooperation between libraries was reinforced with their association in consortia to negotiate better contracts, provide access to contents in a larger scale (Big Deal), making the transition to

DOI: 10.4018/irmj.2014070105
digital information. The acquisition of journals through this method has brought a real growth in available holdings. This practice was especially developed between academic libraries, since these institutions are the ones with greater usage of the available electronic contents.

According to Rodríguez Bravo, Díez, Almuzara, & Suárez: “there has been a large gain from the Big Deal approach, at least in relative terms, because inflationary pressure in the prices of periodicals was leading libraries to constant cancellations of subscriptions” (2008, p. 115).

Golnessa Galyani says that:

…there are many advantages for libraries if they buy their materials, especially electronic resources, through consortia, although there are some disadvantages too. Consortia, in general, are tailored to meet the unique needs of their membership. Consortia purchasing projects have become a basic tool that expand collections and support cooperative technological development for libraries. Library consortia are considered as a coalition between libraries, publishers and vendors. They often provide a reasonable price in a win-win situation for all stakeholders. Thus, libraries have increasingly turned to consortia as a way of brokering better prices and rendering rapid and efficient services to information seekers. However, library consortia are facing new challenges, such as increasing expectations and a static budget, fair use, archiving of information, pricing strategies, measures of effectiveness and licensing e-resources (2009, p. 9).

The measurement of gains from contracts based on the Big Deal model should not be interpreted in exclusively financial terms, but rather as a function of the efficiency of teaching and research by the university community, expressed as the output of academic papers and improvements in teaching.

However, not everyone accepts that all of this material is actually used. Some sceptics believe that in the Big Deals (and the like) there is a good deal of wastage and that the availability of such huge digital resources to the user inevitably means that a good deal of these titles, and many of their articles, go unused, or are little used (Nicholas & Huntington, 2006).

With this study we intend to present and analyse some statistical /bibliometric indicators of the Portuguese Scientific Production, seeking to associate them with the emergence of the Portuguese consortium. The appearance of the b-on consortium in 2004 has revealed very encouraging results, both in terms of the consumption of scientific content and scientific production. B-on is an undeniable success showed by the interest produced in the scientific and academic national community, revealed by the number of institutions that have decided to provide their users with access to its collection, besides, the nature of these institutions and the users they represent. Finally, by the consistently increasing level of the usage statistical volume.

B-on is e-only, i.e., it provides access only to electronic contents and with its appearance it became possible to the entire academic and scientific Portuguese community - teachers, researchers and students –the simplified access to articles in full text from a relevant set of online scientific journals published by some of the most important publishers and owners of international scientific databases.

With almost ten years of existence it seems appropriate to evaluate the usefulness and availability of electronic collections provided by b-on, evaluating the real needs of users through the analysis of usage statistics, as well as seeking to realize the usefulness of this quantitative and qualitative increase of the electronic information has had on the Portuguese scientific output between 2000 and 2010.

In spite of the fact that b-on was initially an initiative focused on the academic community, it incorporates besides universities and polytechnics, R&D institutions, public administration institutions, non-profit institutions and hospitals.

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