



Free availability of knowledge – Open Access at DLR

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By Marco Trovatiello

International Open Access Week will be held from 21 to 27 October 2013. Universities, libraries, research centres and government institutions around the world will join in events and activities to demonstrate the benefits and advantages of open access, the principle of unrestricted availability of scientific results, and to promote experience, inspiration and participation. The motto is clear: 'Helping to make Open Access a new norm in scholarship and research'. The German Aerospace Center (Deutsches Zentrum für Luft- und Raumfahrt; DLR) is also participating in a number of activities.

Open Access is a term used to describe the free availability of scientific documents on the Internet. Its objectives are to achieve maximum dissemination and rapid availability of scientific information. The benefits for publications, such as greater exposure, frequency of quotation and the facilitation of search engine discovery are obvious, but there are other valid aspects that underpin the value of implementing open access in science.

Experts at Open-Access.net, a cooperative project between the Free University of Berlin and the Universities of Bielefeld, Konstanz and Göttingen, believe that it is also about greater internationalisation of science, promoting the efficiency of research through timely discussion of research results and "the availability of research results for application-oriented target groups and the general public." In summary, it is about education and innovation as key elements of our society.

Johann-Dietrich Wörner, Chairman of the DLR Executive Board, is convinced that: "The frequently expressed concern that others will make use of one's hard-won research results can be addressed using the following principle: 'If someone develops something relevant on the basis of my work, then my ideas have been confirmed in the best possible way'."

Jutta Graf, Head of Scientific Information and Open Access Officer at DLR, is convinced that her organisation is on the right track: "Back in 2006, DLR supervisory bodies passed a resolution, which we promptly put in place by setting up ELIB – a public database. Each member of the scientific staff is required to upload their publications, apart from their confidential reports, of course, Graf explains. This procedure is defined in an internal DLR publication directive.

ELIB is not intended solely for bibliographic entries, it is also there to make full texts freely and publicly available. "At the moment, we have 71,000 entries in ELIB, 852 of which are from publications in open access journals, and 20 percent are uploaded as full text versions," says Graf, giving a summary of the current status. This is an important step towards ensuring free availability of DLR research results.

Involvement in the Helmholtz Open Access Coordination Office is also an element of the DLR strategy in this field. The office backs all members of the Helmholtz Association in the implementation of open access and is controlled by a working group that includes Jutta Graf.

Paul Schultze-Motel from the Coordination Office outlines its work as follows: "You could say that we are the working group's executive branch. We support and advise scientists at the Helmholtz Centres on how, in practical terms, they can implement open access for publications and research data." The office is equally responsible for interfacing along the road to Open Science, a principle intended to simplify public access to science and research results and data. "All Helmholtz Centres will benefit from this; DLR of course, too," Schultze-Motel continues.

If problems recur, DLR is well forearmed, for instance with regard to the so-called 'sting' by the science journalist John Bohannon. The review systems that some open access journals maintain are inadequate or do not function at all; these journals' sole concern is to publish as many articles as possible and thereby maximise their profits. The DLR publication policy maintains lists to accommodate this, hence ensuring that DLR staff members do not publish in this type of journal.

Open Data and Open Science are strategic issues for DLR. "Research results and data that were paid for by public funds should be made available free of charge to scientists and the general public," Jutta Graf points out. She is currently undertaking a survey to ascertain which data at the DLR institutes and facilities are suitable.

For 10 years now, the World Data Center for Remote Sensing of the Atmosphere, operated within the DLR Earth Observation Center, has led by example. Adhering to the principles of Open Science, the web portal offers free access to a constantly growing repository of satellite data – on the ozone layer, trace gases, cloud dynamics, the weather and much more. The data relating to ESA's Mars Express mission, in which DLR plays an important role with the high-resolution stereo camera HRSC, is also made freely available following an embargo period of six months.

Science communication at DLR has also taken a new path in recent years, adopting a more 'open' slant; for quite some time now, free creative commons licenses have been used for photographs, animations and other video material to which DLR owns all rights.

Contacts

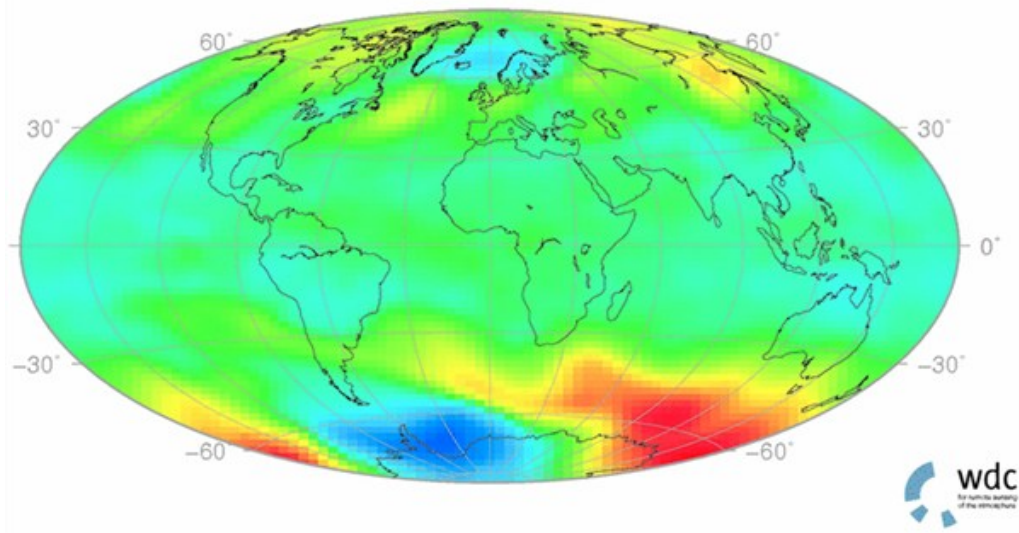
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Open Access logo



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Example of data freely available from the WDC



Observation of atmospheric ozone – an example of the data that are freely available from the World Data Center for Remote Sensing of the Atmosphere (WDC-RSAT), which is operated by DLR. For the full version of the image please click on 'download'.

Credit: DLR.

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