

**DARC-2 workshop on copyright and self-archiving**  
**12 April 2005**

**TEASERS: Digital access to scientific content in the African context**  
Titia van der Werf, Afrika-Studiecentrum, Leiden

**A. TEASERS**

**The role of established traditions**

Looking at the background and the characteristics of the knowledge economy in the North: the print tradition, the library as an established institution, the publishing and book trade industry, the legal frameworks, the marketing of information as a commodity, etc.:

- Are these pre-requisites for developing the knowledge economy in the digital age?
- Can Africa leap-frog into the digital age and by-pass the development stages of the print-based knowledge economy?
- In how far do print-based practices inhibit the development of novel access models in the digital environment?
- ....

**The role of publishers**

Looking at the characteristics of the new economic and technological environment of e-content: the licensing models, pricing modalities such as pay per view, the conditional access to back issues and moving wall constructions, etc:

- Although digital technologies can improve the distribution and access to publications significantly, publishers tend to raise more and more restrictions to access. This is coined as 'the erosion of access'. What are the effects on research and education in Africa?
- Open-access as an alternative model: opportunity or threat for future scholarly communication in Africa?
- ....

**The role of institutionalized practices**

The imbalance of the North/South information flows in the print era is being upheld in the digital era:

- Special book pricing policies for the African market by publishers in the North translate into special licensing agreements to databases via authorized agents;
- Online connectivity has not affected traditional practices of prejudiced peer-reviewing and quality-indexation systems in the North excluding African research from main stream academic journals;
- Open access content from the North aggravates the imbalance as long as there is no equal volume of open access content from the South;
- ...

**The role of innovation and change**

Novel academic networks and communication practices develop through digital connectivity: what are the potentials?

- South/South communications;
- Communications with academics from the Diaspora;

- Intensive use of email and messenger services in Africa facilitates communication, exchange, and ‘global village’ effects, also in the research community;
- The invisible college: can it work online?
- Opportunities for the exposure of African scholarship and the upload of African content to the North;
- ...

The exchange and use of scientific data between North and South: changing roles in the digital environment?

- Data gathering in the South and data analysis in the North;
- ...

The uptake of technological innovations in Africa (radio, mobile phones, email communications, etc.): opportunities and barriers for digital access to academic content?

- Dependency of content providers from the North (intermediaries, subscription agents, database hosting services, etc.)
- Dependency of technology providers from the North (Internet providers, etc.)
- Local content development;

## **B. DISCUSSION**

It is proposed to brainstorm a little on the teasers to get a feel of the issues at stake and to discuss the importance of these issues in relation to the DARC project and the DARE programme.

A key question is:

**In how far are initiatives such as the ‘self-archiving’ of scholarly content and the ‘open access’ movement, opportunities for the African Studies, in particular with a view to promote scholarly communication with and within Africa?**

Related questions are:

- Should the DARC initiative contribute to increasing awareness of the issues at stake?
- What issues need to be investigated more in depth and within which existing Research programme does it fit?

The teasers above could lead to the formulation of a set of **research issues** pertinent to a better understanding of scientific knowledge dissemination and creation in the African context. This in turn could feed into the current (policy) discussions:

- Action Plan of the UN World summit on the information society (WSIS)
- UNESCO’s theme Towards Knowledge Societies
- The World Bank’s knowledge economy debate
- The brain drain/gain/circulation debate
- The digital divide debate
- ...