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Libraries: Are we neutral or brutal?

Posted on July 6, 2017 by Wilma van Wezenbeek

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The past weeks I attended two events related to open science. The first one was in Lisbon, Portugal, and was a [RISE](#) high-level workshop on “Research careers and the European funding system: How to make open science a reality”. The second one was in Visby, Gotland, Sweden, and was a [seminar](#) on open science, where I gave a brief outline of what we have been and are doing in The Netherlands in relation to [open science](#).

When I prepared my statements for the first workshop (where I participated in two panels) I created another acronym: FECS (if you say it, one might hear “facts”); i.e., we should be able to offer our researchers Flexibility, Evidence, Consistency and Support. In relation to open research data, I argued that it is important to provide relevant and to-the-point **support**. At our TU Delft Library we have developed an [open science training](#) for PhD’s, so we help our researchers doing the right thing. We understand that there is no obvious solution for all research; you have to take into account that the scientific processes are different per discipline. **Flexibility** is key – at TU Delft we incentivize the culture of sharing data by the following approach: we say that the lowest level of sharing your data would be within your own research group. To do this takes already management of your data and proper stewardship. Once you have done that, you have created the basis for further opening up if possible and relevant, with our mantra: “as open as possible, as closed if necessary”.

Evidence for reuse of research data is not so easy to obtain, but needed to set good examples. At 4TU.Centre for Research Data we have collected [case studies](#) to inspire other researchers.

Consistency lies at the level of the departmental heads and executives. We are not just talking about open access to publications (articles, books, reports) or research data, we are (at least at the universities) opening up our primary processes and campuses, work or materials that have been provided with public money.

The leaders in research organisations in general should be aware that a change is needed at different levels. To mention just a few things that passed along:

- Research integrity is perhaps more important (relevant to think about) for mid- or senior researchers
- Research organisations should give their staff time to think
- Choose your research (grant) evaluators carefully
- Open science should be embedded in current practices and codes of conduct, not being or leading to its own criteria (guidelines)

There was so much we wanted to address in Lisbon. In the active part of the workshop on the second day I really liked the ambition for the subgroup I participated in: “enabling researchers to share components of their research as early as possible”.

<https://librarian.tudl.tudelft.nl/2017/07/06/libraries-are-we-neutral-or-brutal/>

The open science seminar in an open place (garden) in Sweden is difficult to report from for me. My talk was in English, but everything else was in Swedish. However, I think that the [Swedish Library Association](#) (they co-organised it with the Organisation for Science and Public) appreciated the contribution I made. It is essential that we are moving along in the same direction in Europe, so that we continue to make progress in open science. We need other countries, apart from The Netherlands, to be daring and sharing as well. Brutality (in the good sense of the word) is something we librarians sometimes need to learn a bit. Now that the Chairpersons of the universities are involved in the Dutch negotiations with the bigger Publishers, we see that this is rewarding to do. I liked the discussions I had with the SLA staff. The SLA is a member organisation for all libraries, including research, public and special libraries. At the [Almedalen](#) meeting the SLA clarifies the role and position of libraries for the politicians, who walk around and participate in panels. I always say that the Library offers neutral ground, so that other people can have debates and take their positions. That is why Studium Generale fits very well in our Library. [Karin Linder](#) (Secretary General at SLA) wondered whether that was not too naïve: Librarians are also knowledgeable, can verify facts, and people can trust and rely on their library, does that make us neutral? During our discussion however we concluded that both positions are true. All libraries should be educating (or helping) their patrons so that they can make their own balanced decision and formulate their own opinion, based on trusted material – that is what we are doing, and should be doing, and it is a very important task. However, to bring this about so that others understand this role, requires some brutality.

After I wrote this blogpost, I noted that the bottle I took with me (I collect beer bottles) was from the Brutal Brewery – such a coincidence!

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[open science](#), [research data](#), [research integrity](#), [TU Delft Library](#)