

**Open Access in Caribbean Libraries, Archives and Museums: Opportunities, Challenges and Future Directions**

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**Introduction<sup>1</sup>**

Libraries, archives, and museums in the Caribbean<sup>2</sup> and globally are challenged to manage their operational budgets, engage their user communities, develop innovative services and function as gateways to open access (OA) resources. In 2018, through the Association of Caribbean Universities Research and Institutional Libraries (ACURIL) 48th Annual Conference in Santo Domingo, Dominican Republic, Caribbean participated in a discourse that recorded and captured the nuances of OA usage and management in the region.

From the Budapest Open Access Initiative (2002) onset, Caribbean librarians signed on to support the OA movement and implement strategies to benefit libraries and research institutions. However, through professional conversations, it was recognized that a groundswell of OA activities was taking place as information professionals implemented tools, and derived solutions to address new and emerging challenges. The time was appropriate for a regional conversation about OA that would provide an overview of activities, foster collaboration and identify strategies to overcome challenges. The ACURIL 2018 Conference provided a platform for Caribbean information practitioners and researchers to highlight diverse projects and achievements underpinned by the common denominator of OA. The products from some of these presentations are now accessible in volumes 5 and 6 of the Caribbean Library Journal (CLJ).

These publications feature the multi-faceted nature of the OA movement and its impact on libraries and other regional research/information service agencies. The theme of these editions is *Open Access in Caribbean Libraries, Archives and Museums: Opportunities, Challenges and Future Directions*, and the sub-themes are: 1) The Global and Caribbean Contexts; 2) Policy,

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<sup>1</sup> The works cited in the introduction, unless available in the reference list are all part of Volumes 5 and 6.

<sup>2</sup> According to ACURIL (2017), the Caribbean includes the archipelago, the mainland countries (including the Guianas), and the states of the US which border on the Caribbean Sea or Gulf of Mexico. <https://acuril.org/about-acuril/>

Strategy and Advocacy; 3) Innovation and Trends; 4) Professional Development and 5) User Education. The volumes represent three firsts. It is the first attempt to collaborate with ACURIL to highlight the papers emanating from the annual Conference. It is also the occasion for which the CLJ has Guest Editors preparing the volumes, Kumaree Ramtahal, Lorraine Nero, Niala Dwarika-Bhagat, and Marisol Florén-Romero. Each volume features seven articles, and for the first time, there are five articles from contributors of the Spanish-speaking Caribbean, which heralds the diversity within the professional body that is ACURIL. The compilation serves as an introductory reader and fills a geographic gap by bringing Caribbean experiences into the scholarly conversations surrounding OA.

Overall, the articles suggest that OA is beneficial to the region even as the challenges are encountered and managed. Open access has the potential to reduce textbook costs, as indicated by both Ramsingh (2021) and Stewart (2021). Ramsingh (2021) notes that open access textbooks reduced the costs in Florida and proposed that this can have a similar effect in the Caribbean because many textbooks used in the tertiary education sector emanate from US publishers. Another benefit of OA is the enhancement of teaching and learning, as demonstrated by Lebrón-Ramos (2021) who outlines how OA can be used in virtual reference services. Carrasquillo (2021) shows that librarians can impact instructional design and explored how functional diversity in educational resources can be accommodated in platforms such as Udemy. In a region where it is still difficult for libraries to secure funding to implement and maintain library management systems (LMS) and online access, open-source tools can propel this change as discussed by George, Bernard and Sayrange (2021). Librarians contemplating the implementation of open source LMS can benefit from the University of Guyana's case study.

In addition to the benefits, the articles tease out some larger issues relevant to the Caribbean:

- What is the nature of open access?
- What are the historical roots of OA?
- How have we practiced this concept in the past without the banner of OA?

The MedCarib project established in 1989, from inception, aligned to principles of OA since the objectives were “to make medical and health information free, discoverable and

accessible” (Barreto cited in Alleyne Cumberbatch et al., 2021). The experiences from the project as outlined by Alleyne Cumberbatch, Adams-Baptiste and Ganessingh (2021) also provide insights into the challenges and strategies that should be considered to ensure the sustainability of OA projects. It is evident from this case that a push organization may be necessary in collaborative ventures to keep long-term projects going. Stewart’s (2021) overview of successful international projects shows that a common characteristic among them is the presence of a driving institution, even if collaborators are involved.

From the north, Hanson (2021) presents a similar initiative to MedCarib in the form of the National Institutes of Health (US) programme to record health information. This case explains how all public-funded research become accessible to the public within a particular timeframe through government-supported portals. Hanson’s work demonstrates that a legislative framework and supporting infrastructure are tools that can also assure the sustainability of OA projects. Are there similar legislative approaches within the region? The circumstances regarding OA legislation in the Caribbean is an area that is open for further research.

Stewart (2021) notes some awareness among stakeholders about the need for open educational resources (OER) policies while discussing OER in an overview of several Caribbean territories. However, she states that “the efforts to implement are sparse and invariably, there is no policy” (Stewart, 2021). Therefore, another issue for Caribbean librarians to consider is what type of policies, legislation, and advocacy are necessary to support OA?

Even though policies may follow slowly, OA resources and data are available through different avenues. Howell Nash (2021) illustrates that open access data could reside in government websites, sometimes not packaged with the OA brand but are still accessible. She calls on librarians to not “overlook this source of information”. Howell Nash’s (2021) article causes us to wonder, what other sources of silent open-source data are available in the Caribbean, and how can more awareness be drawn to these repositories and websites? This is another area from which the regional scholarship can benefit.

In addition to Howell Nash’s (2021) challenge to librarians, others have also identified various roles for librarians in the OA environment. These include trainers, academic collaborators, compliance reviewers, creative commons advisors, and digital literacy advocates. There is scope

for librarians to guide the production standard, metadata, and representation of information online. The librarian as an innovator is the role most prominently highlighted by Hanson, Peltier-Davis, Ramtahal and Pierre Louis (2021) in the case of the Social Mediathon managed by the ACURIL Executive in the aftermath of hurricanes in 2017. The Caribbean, while beautifully unique, is also exposed to the effects of natural disasters such as hurricanes and volcanoes. As small states, Caribbean territories are called upon to produce solutions and compete with developed nations with larger budgets. The ACURIL team demonstrated that through social media and other OA tools, they could reach a diverse population to raise funds via the Social Mediathon, while incurring minimal expenses.

Most of the writers in these volumes are from an academic library background, and this is reflected in some of the issues addressed in the articles. For example, the Nieves-Ayala et al. (2021) case study discusses the need to archive institutional records via the institutional repository and create policies to support this at the University of Puerto Rico, Rio Piedras Campus. Similarly, the institutional repository is also addressed by Smart and Clarke (2021). Using the case of The University of the West Indies, these two authors examine the library's role as publisher of electronic dissertations and the implications for online rights management. While this is an expanded role, it requires that information professionals continue to educate themselves on copyright and new licensing structures such as Creative Commons to provide credible advice. It is within this context that Lebrón-Ramos ("Creative Commons", 2021) provides an overview of open access rights management.

Open access publishing is also causing academic librarians to reflect on their roles in the appointment, tenure and promotion (ATP) process. The involvement in the ATP process is essential since OA also has a darker side, as evident in the proliferation of predatory publishing. Academic librarians are called upon to educate faculty and guide their research away from these types of publications. Hanson and Buller (2021) provide a thorough overview of the ATP process and identified ways librarians can support it and guide faculty. Fake news is another undesirable by-product of OA with the increasing access to technology and the Internet. Herrojo-Salas and Montero de Jiménez (2021) explore the genesis of this concept and underscore the need to

interrogate this in contemporary society. The examples supplied in this paper can be used in digital literacy classes conducted by information professionals.

### Conclusion

It is hoped that these contributions will advance knowledge of OA in the Caribbean vis-à-vis the many opportunities that they afford in the face of declining budgets, and global economic crises. How regional libraries, archives and research institutions forge ahead despite these setbacks will add value to the profession and this body of knowledge. The editors also hope that information professionals engaged in scholarship expand the community of open learning and information sharing through the medium of OA.

### REFERENCE

Budapest Open Access Initiative. (2002). *Budapest Open Access Initiative*. Retrieved from <https://www.budapestopenaccessinitiative.org/>

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