

User-centering and constant communication. Lessons learnt from the Open Repositories 2019 in Hamburg, June 10–13. A short congress report

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Open Repositories (OR) is an international conference dating back to the Noughties. *OR 2019* put *users* with their perspectives and their possible impacts on infrastructures at the forefront.¹ The conference ran under the motto „All the user needs“. It focused on the reception of and familiarity with open repositories by people or even machines.² Accordingly, users and their needs and behaviour were the topics running through the presentations. As stated, *OR* as a conference format dates back more than a decade. This not only indicates a long tradition, but also the stability and solidity of the topic itself: Open repositories have obviously become an integral part of scholarship, as well as of library and information systems.

The conference lasted for four days. It was divided into a workshop day and three panel days, the latter consisting each of two panel sections, separated into five tracks running parallel. Taking the broad spectrum and the overlapping structure into consideration, this report does not aim to describe the conference and its results in an exhaustive way.³ Rather it presents a series of

¹In their talk on „Jisc Open Research Repository: Delivering a compelling User Experience“, Davey, Fripp & Kaye [Jisc, UK] expressed the following: „The repository isn’t the need [...] the need is the thing the repository does. The repository is kind of the symptom of a whole set of needs that lie outside of the repository.“ (Davey, Fripp & Kaye, 11 June 2019, <https://lecture2go.uni-hamburg.de/l2go/-/get/v/24954>, approx. 9:55-10:05, last retrieved 6 August 2019). See also Jeff Gothelf in his keynote „Outcomes over output: A user-centric approach to building successful systems“: „Just because you can build it, doesn’t mean you should build it.“ (Gothelf, 11 June 2019, <https://lecture2go.uni-hamburg.de/l2go/-/get/v/24934>, approx. 44:06, last retrieved 6 August 2019); this is by the way, the aspect that his differentiation (cf. Gothelf/Seiden 2016: 34 and 21: „Our goal is not to create a deliverable or a feature: it’s to positively affect customer behavior or change in the world—to create an outcome.“) between output (just build something) and outcome (build something causing a real, measurable change) boils down to.

²Cf. <http://archiv.gwin.gwiss.uni-hamburg.de/or2019/cfp/>, last retrieved 12 December 2019. Hicks, Phillipps & Andrews [University of North Texas Libraries, USA] (the talk was held by William Hicks), 11 June 2019, <https://lecture2go.uni-hamburg.de/l2go/-/get/v/24757>, last retrieved 8 August 2019 covered this aspect by showing which „Links for Robots“ (17:35, on the slide blended in) they provided in their repository; Hicks, Phillipps & Andrews referred to „IIF-manifestations of the objects“ (17:45), for example.

³By now, most of the content of Open Repositories 2019 is available online, cf. <https://lecture2go.uni-hamburg.de/l2go/-/get/l/5134>, last retrieved 5 August 2019. It can also be found in a Zenodo community (not yet available/under construction, cf. for current information: <http://archiv.gwin.gwiss.uni-hamburg.de/or2019/>, last retrieved 12 December 2019); long-term archiving should therefore be ensured. The recorded material is referred to in the text at hand, by naming the authors, and, if applicable, citing the corresponding part of the video in minutes and seconds. Affiliations of the contributors, referred to in this text, are noted down in square brackets; specifications follow the data available on *OR2019*’s conference agenda (cf. <https://www.conftool.net/or2019/sessions.php>, last retrieved 10 September 2019), written down here in the report solely at first mention.

snapshots focusing on the sustainability of structures, which was one of the themes addressed at the conference. Soft factors like user-centric approaches, as well as constant external and internal communication are keys to sustainable (infra-)structures for open repositories.

The conference started with a workshop day, followed by an opening keynote (Gothelf), several panels, poster and ideas challenge presentations and a closing keynote (Piwowar). In accordance to the description on the conference's website,⁴ repository *practice* stood centre-stage. Not surprisingly, numerous projects (in different stages) facilitating several approaches were presented and discussed throughout the four conference days – from a very deep and detailed user-centered design (Galligan [Rockefeller Archive Center, USA]), to remarks on institutional issues one should be aware of when it comes to forming sustainable organisational patterns (Notay, Moore & Duke [Jisc, UK]). The presentations were not only wide-ranging in terms of the „locations“, and the methods shown, but also concerning the relevant topics such as presenting scientific audio material in a repository (Plank, Drees & Ogunyemi [Leibniz Information Centre for Science and Technology, Germany]), providing scientific images (Sohmen, Blümel & Heller [Leibniz Information Centre for Science and Technology, Germany]), and preserving (all around) country music (Boulie [Country Music Hall of Fame and Museum, USA]). In short, open repositories were not only discussed in relation to text items, nor was the focus solely on the academic sector, but also considered cultural heritage.

Many of the talks reflected the user-centric approach by sharing the results of research into user needs. Methods applied were: building focus groups, doing expert interviews, surveys, testing, and shaping personas (e.g. Géroudet [Université de Lille, France]; Plank, Drees & Ogunyemi). Applying a mixture of these methods to create helpful products seems to be at the core of repositories' efforts on behalf of users. Further, Davey, Fripp & Kaye underlined the importance of navigating and supporting users through the „journey“⁵ they go on, for example when depositing something, as well as general design principles such as the appropriate harmonisation of colours.

Also of interest were approaches that focused on the sustainability of structures, such as the management of persistent identifiers (PIDs) being a key element of repositories. Notay, Moore & Duke's talk (the presentation was held by Balviar Notay and Monica Duke) about building an ORCID consortium in the UK included a „business plan for sustainability“.⁶ Sustainability was drilled down to 1) „developing infrastructure“, 2) „maintaining integration“, 3) „engaging the community“, 4) „developing the business model“, 5) „communications planning“, 6) „gathering and synthesising the requirements“ and 7) „international engagement“.⁷ Notay, Moore & Duke linked (added) value, and communication with sustainability. Consequently, they underlined, that the question of costs is not the only matter to consider when planning wider institutional

⁴ „The annual Open Repositories Conference is a practitioner based conference that brings together people from higher education, government, libraries, archives and museums to focus on repository infrastructure, tools, services, and policies.“ <http://archiv.gwin.gwiss.uni-hamburg.de/or2019/23/>, last retrieved 12 December 2019.

⁵ Davey, Fripp & Kaye, 11 June 2019, <https://lecture2go.uni-hamburg.de/l2go/-/get/v/24954>, approx. 05:21, last retrieved 7 August 2019. Another aspect mentioned was accessibility. Not only Davey, Fripp & Kaye referred to this topic, but also Hicks, Phillipps & Andrews, 11 June 2019, <https://lecture2go.uni-hamburg.de/l2go/-/get/v/24757>, last retrieved 7 August 2019, presenting the processes undergone in terms of a redesign of the University of North Texas Libraries' repository, cf. especially 07:20-07:40.

⁶ Notay, Moore & Duke, 12 June 2019, <https://lecture2go.uni-hamburg.de/l2go/-/get/v/24860>, last retrieved, 2 August 2019, approx. 07:23.

⁷ Ibid., approx. 26:55-27:29.

structures, such as a consortium.⁸ Therefore, they worked with the metaphorical phrase „Sustainability requires spinning plates“.⁹ In addition, they raised the issue of PID interoperability being important for sustainability. The challenge is to find a balance between the diversification and the association of structures.

Adaptability to the ever-changing user behaviour was also addressed in this context. Lee Boulie presented a project on Music Row, a part of Nashville in the US that, with many music studios located there, has played a decisive role in music history. Recent efforts from the Country Music Hall of Fame and Museum were summed up with the phrase „Meet Them Where They Are“.¹⁰ According to Boulie, access points in cultural heritage institutions tend to be apps and video games, while „classical anchors“, like institutional homepages, are losing significance. As the conference’s motto already reflects, and as Boulie’s talk proved, users are at the core of open repositories. This statement seems to be true for users in terms of readers and authors as well as library services: As Zhang et al. [Oregon State University Libraries and Press] showed, it is a challenge to foster openness by increasing green open access deposit rates, without also adding to the workload of library staff who must process and accompany these deposits. Oregon State developed and implemented an automated system (based on Web of Science), which is called Easy Deposit 2 (ED2). This system sends out emails inviting deposit, containing a short text with links to click on. The process of depositing is reduced to uploading a file, and then confirming the publication on ScholarsArchive@OSU. Authors do not need an account in order to contribute to the repository. Zhang et al. however, emphasised that fostering openness in a manifest and sustainable way depends on research culture and the users’ attitudes. One of the points also named, was the importance of statistics about items in the repositories.¹¹ Contributors are highly interested in download and view rates, a factor that seems to reflect the like/dislike and rating-behaviour to be observed in everyday life.

Furthermore, a wide range of repositories was presented, e.g. scientific videos in an open repository hosted by TIB Hannover (Plank et al.)¹², Vanhaverbeke and colleagues [KU Leuven, Belgium] presented University of Leuven’s new repository LIRIAS 2.0¹³ to show that the exten-

⁸Cf. *ibid.*, approx. 23:48-23:58. In this context, it could be added, that within the panel „All Together Now? The role of service providers in open source communities“ (cf. <https://lecture2go.uni-hamburg.de/l2go/-/get/v/24920>, last retrieved, 6 August 2019, the question of the need of commercial stakeholders in the field of open repositories was raised: Mark Bussey from Digital Curation Experts (DCE) mentioned in his contribution to that issue: 1) Commercial providers do work together with a range of clients, so they are aware of the variety of challenges. 2) Commercial providers facilitate sustainability in a community whose institutions are in constant transition, he talked about „gaps“ (07:33) that naturally come into being, for example concerning focusses and training. 3) Commercial providers decrease obstacles small institutions may face when trying to participate in the open repository world (cf. for all approx. 06:40-07:50). Richard Jones from Cottage Labs added that except from that, the division between commercial and non-commercial providers within the open repository world seems to be „artificial“ because finally, it is about this: „serve ourselves by serving others“ (approx. 10:36).

⁹Notay, Moore & Duke, 12 June 2019, <https://lecture2go.uni-hamburg.de/l2go/-/get/v/24860>, last retrieved, 9 August 2019, approx. 27:13, slide blended in.

¹⁰https://www.conftool.net/or2019/index.php?page=browseSessions&form_session=353 = https://www.conftool.net/or2019/index.php/24x7-P3C-108Boulie_b.pptx?page=downloadPaper&filename=24x7-P3C-108Boulie_b.pptx&form_id=108&form_index=2&form_version=final, last retrieved 7 August 2019, slides 8 & 9.

¹¹Cf. Zhang et al., 12 June 2019, <https://lecture2go.uni-hamburg.de/l2go/-/get/v/24853>, last retrieved 7 August 2019.

¹²Cf. Plan, Drees & Ogunyemi, 11 June 2019, <https://lecture2go.uni-hamburg.de/l2go/-/get/v/24777>, last retrieved 6 August 2019.

¹³The talk was held by Valérie Adriaens.

sion of formats and item types, such as „datasets, software & code“,¹⁴ is an important factor.¹⁵ Vanhaverbeke et al. also stated in their talk that „communication was really crucial“. ¹⁶ Constant communication does not only include asking and finding out what users need, but also monitoring their behaviour. A workshop on algorithmic awareness, held on the first conference day (Clark & Kaptanian [Montana State University, USA]), fitted well into this topic : The workshop raised the question of how to accompany and support users in a digital world, and it sensitised those on the providers' side, including librarians and developers, to the power of infrastructural decisions. Openness demands transparency and this involves algorithmic awareness being a part of information literacy.¹⁷

The conference was framed by two keynotes, the first held by Jeff Gothelf, a freelance coach and consultant,¹⁸ the second by Heather Piwowar, co-founder of „our research“, formerly ImpactStory, the organisation behind Unpaywall.¹⁹ Jeff Gothelf had a look at design principles, managerial decisions (keywords: design thinking and agile methods), and workflow models. Heather Piwowar talked about the growth and significance of the open repositories' community in general. Jeff Gothelf underlined, that „we live in a world where the dominant tech companies create the tools that we use every day [...] and those expectations come home to the systems that we build“. ²⁰ Piwowar's talks turned out to be a passionate speech for openness concerning software, but also in terms of the users and their needs. She said the memorable sentences „think of your users most broadly“,²¹ and „think about all the users you haven't met yet“. ²² Furthermore, she mentioned openness of the community by passing the knowledge gained over time.²³ In this way, Heather Piwowar's talk might be linked to the keynote held by Jeff Gothelf – and to his works on UX in general: By defining UX as „the sum total of all the interactions a user has with [a] product and service“ (Gothelf/Seiden 2016: 47), openness seems to be on top of this process, as users and their needs are, like the world itself, flowing. To find out what user experience is, it is necessary to keep in touch with users and to constantly communicate with them. Openness is appropriate to foster sustainable structures in libraries.

To sum it up: With its focus on „All the user needs“, 2019's *Open Repositories* covered a topic that affects all aspects of open repositories. One cannot divide the user's needs from the provider's, and the institutional perspective remains connected to the products and services. Having a closer look at the question of sustainability, lessons learnt from *OR2019* appear to be: sustainability can only be guaranteed by centering all efforts on the users and their needs. This in turn requires constant communication with users, as well as within teams and across institutions and

¹⁴https://www.conftool.net/or2019/index.php?page=browsesessionsform_session377presentationsshows=https://www.conftool.net/or2019/index.php/24x7-P7C-497Adriaens_a.pdf?page=downloadPaper&filename=24x7-P7C-497Adriaens_a.pdf&form_id=497&form_version=final, last retrieved 14 November 2019, slide/page 10.

¹⁵Cf. Vanhaverbeke et al., 13 June 2019, <https://lecture2go.uni-hamburg.de/l2go/-/get/v/24900>, last retrieved 7 August 2019.

¹⁶Ibid, approx. 07:15-07:17.

¹⁷Cf. for material: <https://github.com/jasonclark/algorithmic-awareness>, last retrieved 9 August 2019.

¹⁸Cf. <https://jeffgothelf.com/>, last retrieved 3 November 2019.

¹⁹Cf. <https://ourresearch.org/team>, last retrieved 3 November 2019.

²⁰Gothelf, 11 June 2019, <https://lecture2go.uni-hamburg.de/l2go/-/get/v/24934>, approx. 03:37-03:56, last retrieved 6 August 2019.

²¹Piwowar, 13 June 2019, <https://lecture2go.uni-hamburg.de/l2go/-/get/v/24979>, approx. 38:25, last retrieved 6 September 2019.

²²Ibid., approx. 38:39-38:42.

²³Cf. *ibid.*, approx. 24:00-25:30.

communities, and all those providing products and services. *OR2019*, with its long tradition of international exchange and openness itself is a good example of such efforts.²⁴

References:

Gothelf, Jeff/Seiden, Josh (2016): *Lean UX. Designing Great Products with Agile Teams*. 2nd Edition. O'Reilly.

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²⁴*OR2020* will take place in Stellenbosch, South Africa, cf. <https://or2020.sun.ac.za>, last retrieved 4 September 19.