The Status Quo of Digital Research Practice and Publications at the Hungarian Academic World Today
Experience report

The scene of academic research and the major issues it is facing in Hungary:

The major scenes: These are the Hungarian Academy of Sciences, the universities and, to a lesser degree, private enterprises when they pay for research done at the institutes of the Academy or the universities.

The major sponsor of research is the state while private companies are becoming more and more important actors through the so-called „innovation contribution”. This is paid by big companies the allocation of which to research units is coordinated by the authorities. Big companies do have a say in the way it is used.

The authority in question: National Research, Development an Innovation Office which now includes the Hungarian Scientific Research Fund (Országos Tudományos Kutatási Alap, OTKA), an office which formerly worked independent from the state. The incorporation of OTKA by the National Research, Development an Innovation Office met with heavy criticism by many.

Humanities and social sciences are in a disadvantageous position from several aspects. (1) Only the state finances such research since private companies are not interested in them. If they do sponsor such type of research then it is the result of private connections. Even in the case of the publication of academic books the publisher expects his costs to be fully reimbursed. (This is why it is still common in Hungary that research institutes disseminate their research output in humanities themselves without involving a professional publisher in the process which makes then the distribution and the inclusion of such books in book trade difficult.)

90 % of the funds allocated by the National Research, Development an Innovation Office (NKFIH) is spent on applied research since big companies donating the money are unwilling to sponsor basic research. A fragment (about 3 million Euros per year) of the funds provided by the state (less than 30 million Euros each year) is allocated for basic research in the humanities. For the publication of academic
books one can apply separately to universities, the Hungarian Academy of Sciences or to the National Cultural Fund.

The major actor in academic research is the Hungarian Academy of Sciences (MTA). Legally MTA is a public body whose operation is regulated by a law on the Academy passed by the Parliament. MTA is an independent public body. However, the funds for its operation are provided by the state in the Act of Law – Budget Law since MTA lost its assets in 1948. MTA has income from patents, international and national grant applications 98% of which is spent on research in natural science.

All Hungarian researchers who have received their PhD can be a member of the public body of MTA which is about 15,000 people now. Academic committees within scientific sections carry out the work of MTA. A major milestone in an academic career in Hungary is to receive the title of Doctor of Science (DSc) of the Hungarian Academy of Science which is legally independent of the researcher’s career at his university. However, it is in practice impossible to be awarded the title of university professor without the title of Doctor of Science (DSc) since habilitation and PhD is only sufficient to attain the title of associate professor. To become a member of MTA is the peak of one’s academic career. The number of its members, however, is limited to 365. MTA has research institute where the number of researchers currently are 5,200. The number of researchers working in research institutes in humanities is between 400 and 450.

Three scientific sections of the Hungarian Academy of Science are in humanities or social sciences. These professors participate in the work of the scientific sections and their committees and in fact represent the majority of the professors active at universities as well as in research.

Hungary has established a centralised system to keep track of scientific output initiated this time not by the state but the Academy of Science, with the support and full agreement of the Hungarian Accreditation Committee, the Hungarian Rectors’ Conference, the Hungarian Doctoral Council, and the Hungarian Scientific Research Fund.
Establishing and maintaining a database of scientific output called the „Store of Hungarian Scientific Publications” became mandatory on May 26, 2015 when it was included in the Bill on the Hungarian Academy of Science that was passed by the Parliament. The President of MTA is responsible for setting up and maintaining this database. He then delegated this job to the Library and Information Centre of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences. Let me add here that the initiative came from the area of natural science and the bibliographic database was created as a science metrics one in the first place. It means that we register citation index of each book (in part in cooperation with WoS and Scopus databases and in part by entering data manually). The citation index has met serious resistance from among the researchers in the area of humanities.

In Hungary it is mandatory for an author to enter the metadata of any scientific output created from public funds (no other type is known in Hungary) into a central database and to upload the pdf version of the published book in the Repositories of Academy’s Library (REAL) which is, upon the order of the President of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences (Open Access Mandate of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences (MTA), is public. Publishers have the right to set an embargo before the content is made freely accessible on the internet but the members of the scientific community can access these publications in any case at their workplace.

The database called COMPASS includes the databases which are available through subscriptions in Hungary and also the ones developed in Hungary.

Both the MTMT database and the Digital Library called REAL are being developed retrospectively through the cooperation of MTA, the National Széchényi Library, the major universities and a private company (Arcanum Kft) spearheading digitalisation of contents in humanities in Hungary. All the journals and series of books and other publications of the Academy of Sciences, founded in 1825, have been digitalised. By the end of 2018 these contents should be made public and accessible on the internet. The major goals of the cooperation are the following:

- On the level of metadata (bibliographic database): It is in the interest of universities to keep track of the scientific output of their faculty. The National Széchényi Library developed a bibliographic database called HUMANUS which
includes ALL research output in the area of humanities and not just scientific articles (MTMT database). County and city libraries are in charge of bibliographies containing data on local history while research institutes develop bibliographies of their respective fields with a more detailed description than libraries. It is in the interest of all parties to share records and to record a particular article or book only at one place.

On the level of digital contents: The National Library, the Library of the Academy of Sciences, the universities, the county libraries and ARCANUM Ltd. (HUNGARICANA), they each develop their own digital libraries. The MTA Library operates a search engine, shared by all, for the contents of qualified repositories (Unfortunately we are faced with many problems since a lot of different systems have been implemented in such a small country. We have been working on the unification of these systems.)

We aim at achieving our common goal together by including a pdf version of each scientific publication into the system called REAL of the Library of the Academy of Science. Storing copies of each publication digitally at several places is also a question of security.

The system of publishing academic books in Hungary is rather gloomy. After the change of regime in 1989 several small publishing companies were founded the majority of which have gone out of business by now. The ones still active are on the verge of closing down since we are talking about an output of 100 to 500 copies for each academic book and it is impossible to publish them and make a profit at the same time. The Hungarian Academy of Sciences also sold their publishing house in 1996 and its new majority Dutch owner is not interested in publishing books in Hungarian or in books about scientific output in humanities. As a result of all this humanities have been left out of publication opportunities.

The result: Many university or academic institutes, libraries, archives and museums, therefore, publish their own academic output themselves and only a small number of books is published by professional publishing houses (with support from the state, a foundation or a local government). Therefore book trade cannot operate
well these days. One of our aims today is for the publishers and libraries to develop a shared database for the books in print. There is, however, a silver lining to this rather gloomy picture: in order that the books are read and cited, their authors and the institutions publishing them are willing to offer their academic output as open access to the Hungarian Digital Library and the REAL Digital Library of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences while posting them also on their own websites.

It is important to note that the offices responsible to allocate public funds for research such as the Hungarian Scientific Research Fund (OTKA), the National Cultural Fund (NKA), the Hungarian Academy of Sciences (MTA), and the universities, etc. offer financial support to the publication of scientific data only if the output is accessible freely and if the authors or the publishers send a digitalised copy to the REAL Open Access resources system of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences. The same library is also in charge of preserving and making accessible the reports prepared by the national research projects.

The Library and Information Centre of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences proposed the following scheme: libraries should offer an Open Journal System platform to the universities and the research institutes of the Academy so that these publish their journals on this Open Journal System platform and thus avoid professional profit-oriented publishers. This would also make bibliographic data process automatic and allow the use of international ID numbers (DOI, ORCID, etc.) in a more widespread manner.

The majority, especially the older generation of Hungarian researchers in humanities insist on publishing in hard copy. However, a growing number also consider digital publication important as well when saying that it is important to publish their scientific output both digitally and in paper format. There are few who claim that digital publication is sufficient in itself.

A new phenomenon has emerged when research teams in humanities develop their own digital libraries which are „specialized systems”. They do not only digitalise old literature and sources but also compare them with each other, annotate old expressions and also identify names and place names. To sum it up, they do more
than develop a digital repository. These research teams in humanities have an ongoing day-to-day cooperation with libraries and archives.

Relationship among Hungarian researchers in humanities are of an „Eastern type” like everything else in this country. Leading researchers like to decide who the good and promising researchers are and they do not like science metrics methods. The younger generation of researchers are more favourable to and better at science metrics and make sure their output is reviewed, they cite one another, etc. and in general present themselves better. This creates a hostility in many others against science metrics.

The Austrian National Library and the Bavarian State Library are spearheading the publication of Hungarian digital contents, especially of older literature since they own the majority of Hungarian scientific literature. We, of course, are very pleased if these contents appear in digital form on the internet. In principle, the Hungarian Digital Library passes on the relevant data to EUROPEANA. Unfortunately the National Library in Hungary is in such a state that in practice this is not happening. There is a political side to this: each Hungarian government has created so far their own umbrella institution with their own clientele. These successive institutions are supposed to coordinate the digitalisation in the whole country. Neither the libraries nor the institutes of the Academy cooperate with these ad hoc umbrella institutions and resist passively the unprofessional solutions provided by these.

For us a European academic gateway is of utmost importance and usefulness. Our Library has the required organisational and technical experience. Furthermore it would be vital to have access to a European grant which leaves funds for development in the member states especially for technical solutions. Therefore what is required is not the general European Union call for applications where there is money for meetings to develop a shared concept and a shared platform to solve technical issues but no funds are available for either the contents and its expansion or the technical development of the systems maintained by the cooperating partners.