

12th EAHIL Conference. DISCOVERING NEW SEAS OF KNOWLEDGE
Technologies, environments and users in the future of health libraries
Lisbon, Portugal, 14th - 18th June 2010.

TRAINING IN SCIENTIFIC WRITING AND OPEN ACCESS PUBLISHING IN EUROPE AND LATIN AMERICAN COUNTRIES: COMMON GOALS IN DIFFERENT SCENARIOS

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INTRODUCTION

The betterment in production and dissemination of scientific information in the field of public health represents a shared commitment for the globalization of knowledge respecting the right to health. The promotion of dissemination initiatives in the area of public health and health-related disciplines based on Open Access (OA) to research results represent a common task (including technical and ethical issues); furthermore, it involves an increasing number of scientific institutions and universities in Europe and Latin American countries.

To this goal, collaboration networks have been created both in Europe and Latin America to promote the dissemination of scientific outputs.

This paper will focus on the activities of the project NECOBELAC which is based on training in scientific writing and open access in public health.

NECOBELAC PROJECT: OBJECTIVES AND METHODOLOGICAL ISSUES

NECOBELAC is a project (www.necobelac.eu) funded under the 7th Framework Program of the European Commission (2009-2012), within the theme Science in Society, and it is coordinated by the Italian National Health Institute (ISS - Istituto Superiore di Sanità, www.iss.it). NECOBELAC is the acronym of “Network of Collaboration Between Europe and Latin American-Caribbean Countries”. The Project is aimed to promote training activities in scientific writing and to strengthen the dissemination of information according to the

scientific communication model based on Open Access (OA) to research results. The action area is public health.

The essential goal of NECOBELAC is to promote a bidirectional exchange between Europe-Latin America/Caribbean Countries, which will overcome the Eurocentric vision relying on an unidirectional transfer of knowledge towards Latin America. The creation of a network among the research institutions and universities in Europe and Latin American and Caribbean countries and its implementation through the establishment of new collaborations are tools to improve the knowledge of local needs and skills in order to better finalize the project objectives.

All NECOBELAC partners play a significant role within the OA movement at both national and international level. They are: the Istituto Superiore di Sanità (ISS) Italy, the Consejo Superior de Investigaciones Científicas (CSIC) Spain, the University of Nottingham (UNOTT) United Kingdom, BIREME/PAHO, Brasil, the Instituto de Salud Pública (ISP) Colombia, the Universidade do Minho (UMINHO), Portugal.

Each partner contributes to the NECOBELAC work program with its expertise and infrastructures.

The ISS (www.iss.it) promoted the core idea of the Project, acting as both producer and publisher of scientific information in public health (the ISS research staff produces about 1,800 published papers per year and its own institutional publications include a quarterly peer-reviewed journal, a monthly newsletter and a series of technical reports). Since 2006, the institutional repository of the ISS has been setting up, complying to OA principles (DSpace ISS <http://dspace.iss.it/dspace/>). It is operating as a focal point for the scientific papers produced by the Italian research institutions in the biomedical area (currently holds more than 28.000 items).

Project partners are actively involved in the main networks created for scientific dissemination both in Latin America (Virtual Health Library www.virtualhealthlibrary.org, SciELO www.scielo.br/) and in Europe (SHERPA www.sherpa.ac.uk DRIVER www.driver-repository.eu. www.openaire.eu/, etc.). Moreover, several Project partners have institutional roles in the European Association of Science Editors (EASE www.ease.ac.org).

This background contributed to raise common expectations towards the idea of integrating the existing initiatives in the health information services. Moreover, the existence of collaborative initiatives carried on by the Partners favoured a progressive aggregation of experts and institutions oriented towards a democratization of knowledge, particularly in the field of public health and health-related disciplines. The joint efforts of all Partners and their background of experiences represent an investment aimed at launching and stimulating new collaborative activities.

The wealth and variety of the informative resources available in the two Continents enable the cooperation network by guaranteeing mutual benefits to all the involved countries.

These aspects characterise the key feature of the Project. The leading idea is to promote a cultural change in a bi-directional approach (Europe-LAC) for the benefit of all stakeholders in the information chain.

The identification of a well-focused operative strategy able to meet the specific information/training needs in this domain is ensured by NECOBELAC focussing on the specific sector of public health. This favours the interconnections with health-related

disciplines to promote scientific knowledge as well as to improve health information dissemination.

An initial survey through questionnaire had been performed in order to know the different local setting and to obtain an scenario of institutions to be involved in Europe, Latin America and Caribbean countries. The present phase of NECOBELAC Project is characterised by the implementation of a training program conceived in terms of adaptability and flexibility to different settings.

NECOBELAC TRAINING PROGRAM

In consideration of the different socio-cultural backgrounds and the necessity to create a network of institutions sharing common objectives, the NECOBELAC training strategy envisages two levels of training activity.

- 1) Training for trainers (T1), performed by NECOBELAC partners as teachers and by local experts. Training activities re envisaged both in Europe and Latin America during the project term.
- 2) Local training (T2) based on replication of NECOBELAC training at local level, performed by participants in T1 activities and local experts, according to local needs. T2 activities can be developed also after the project term.

The main characteristics of the two-level NECOBELAC training activity are briefly outlined as follows:

■ TRAINING 1 (T1)

- Participants are experts
 - scientific writing
 - open access
- Plenary discussions Working groups
- Role of future trainers in NECOBELAC T2

■ TRAINING 2 (T2)

- Participants are not experts
 - scientific writing
 - open access
- Ad hoc training programs
 - Local requirements
 - Technical issues
 - Socio-cultural-economic issues

The first NECOBELAC training course for trainers (T1) was held in Sao Paolo (Brasil) in April 13-15, 2010. The Course program, the abstracts of the training modules, and the presentations are available in the NECOBELAC website in the four project languages (English, Spanish, Portuguese, Italian) at <http://www.necobelac.eu/en/training.php>

Here follows an outline of the basic structure for a NECOBELAC T1 course as re-defined in the Sao Paolo Project Meeting (April 16, 2010) on the basis of

- the results of the evaluation questionnaire filled in by participants at the end of the course;
- the considerations by the project partners actively participating in the course.

The structure of NECOBELAC T1 Course (Figure 1) envisages initial and final plenary sessions, focused on project aims and including the NECOBELAC community development, and general issues related to scientific publications and open access publishing models. Much time will be devoted to working group activity in Parallel sessions (Scientific publication or Open Access) in which participants are grouped according to their interests and experiences.

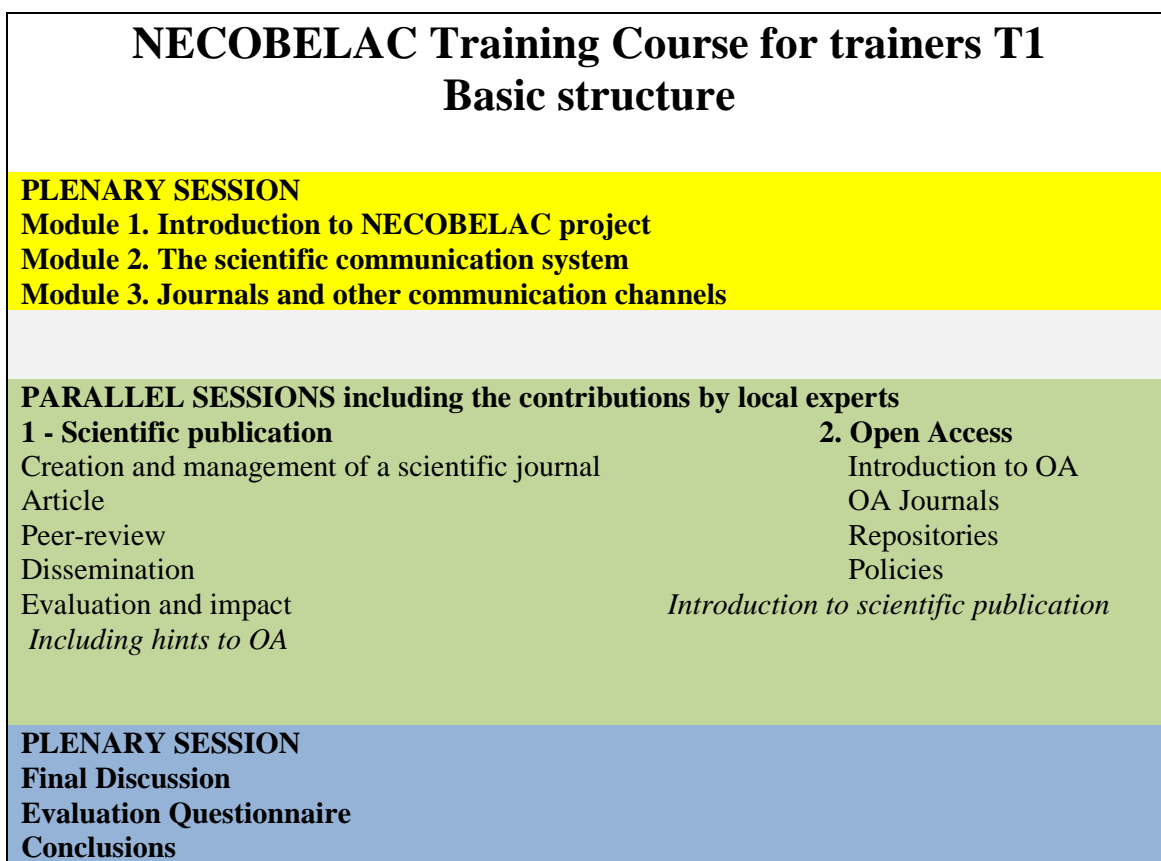


Figure 1. - Basic structure of NECOBELAC training course (T1)

The innovative online training tool used in NECOBELAC training is based on topic maps (<http://code.google.com/p/ontopia/>) allowing the best use of technologies according to different scenarios.

In brief, topic maps use the semantic web to represent online resources and their associations:

- TOPICS represent concepts (people, objects, modules);
- ASSOCIATIONS represent relationships among concepts
- OCCURRENCES represent information sources.

The use of topic maps is very suitable as a cross national training tool of the NECOBELAC project, which includes different socio-cultural scenarios. The topics of scientific publication and open access, in fact, are linked to online resources, and it is possible to select the most appropriate way to utilize them, according to specific interests and local needs.

The development of NECOBELAC topic maps is in progress. The basic scheme, as presented in the first training course in Sao Paolo, is reported below. Figure 2 refers to Scientific publication and Figure 3 refers to Open Access; they are closely linked one another, often pointing at the same occurrences.

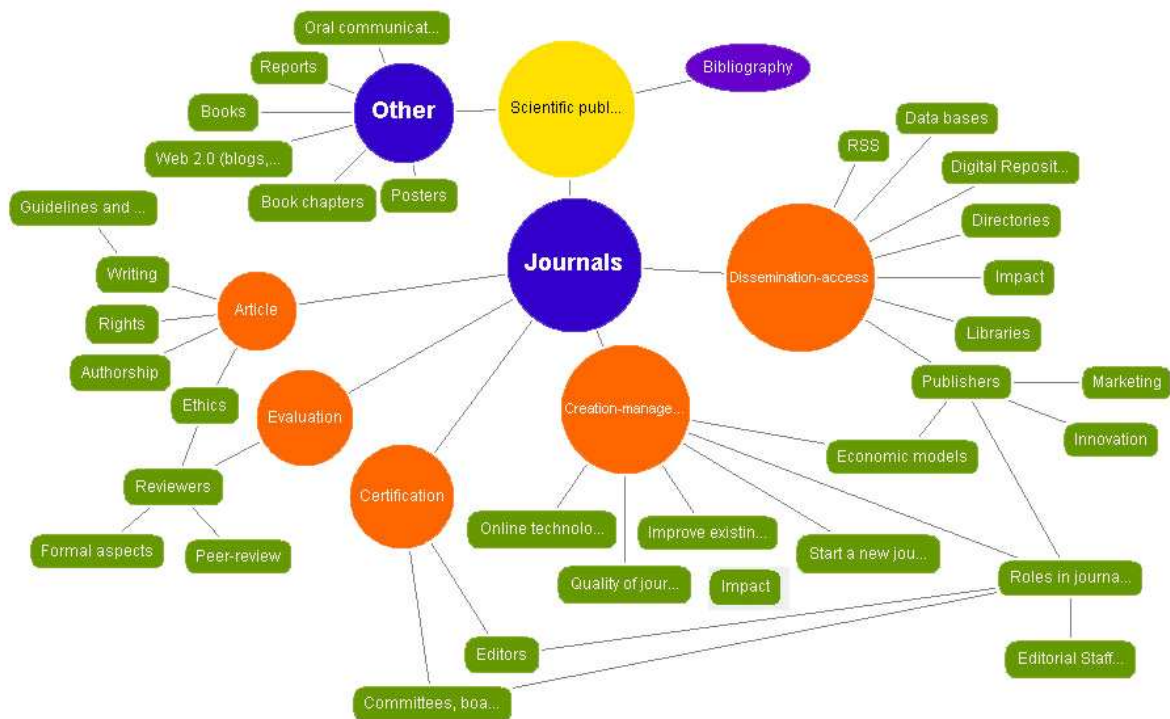


Figure 2. - NECOBELAC topic map for Scientific publication

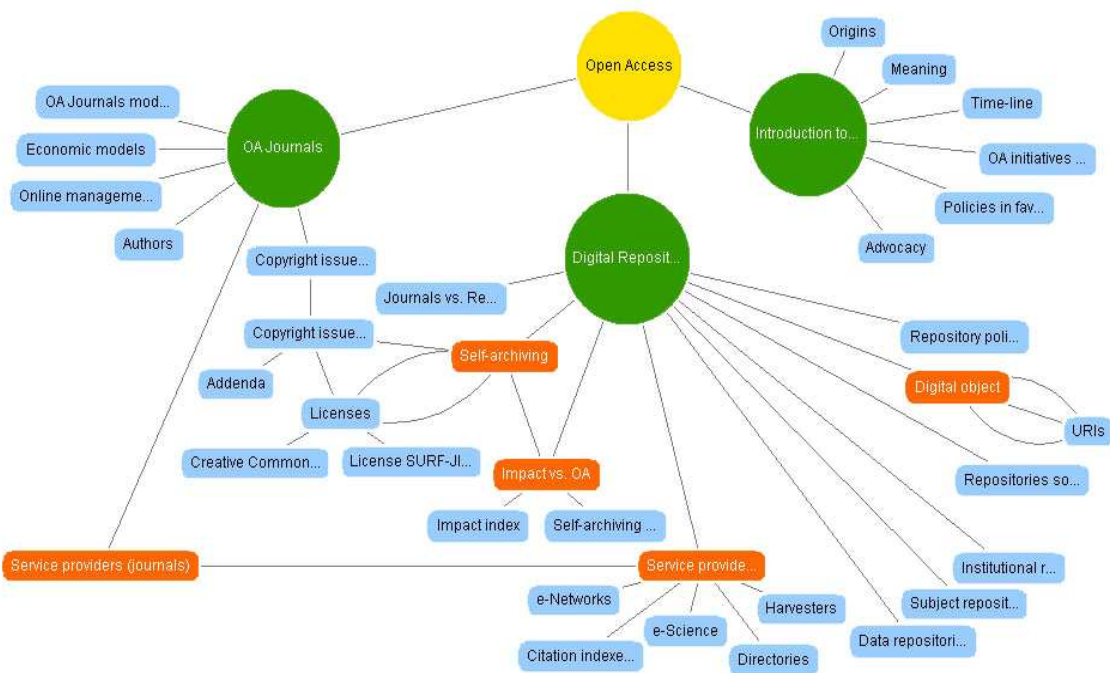


Figure 3. NECOBELAC topic map for Open access

CONCLUSIONS

The NECOBELAC training program provides useful tools, resources and feedback to improve health information dissemination to the benefit of all stakeholders in the information production and use. In this framework, training strategy involves local communities; in fact, the participants in T1 activities are committed to will replicate the course at local level, including also local experts (T2).

The existence of free online tools (NECOBELAC topic maps) together with the continuing activity of local trainers facilitate the sustainability of the project results also after the Project term.

New collaborations in public health research are also developing within the NECOBELAC community, promoting high-quality publication of research output in open access journals.

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