

Two novices' impressions from the PKP Sprint in Helsinki, 15th–16th of June 2022

By John David Didriksen and Rune Nilssen

Abstract

The present paper is a brief overview of our impressions of the PKP Sprint in Helsinki, 15th–16th of June 2022. Main focus will be on the groups where we were present. We hope the paper can be of use for those who have not yet attended a PKP sprint, and maybe an encouragement to sign up when there is a chance.

Keywords

Public Knowledge Project, PKP, PKP Sprint, Open Journal Systems, OJS, Open Monograph Press, OMP, academic publishing, open access, open science

About the authors

Both authors work in the library at the University of Stavanger (UiS), in the Department of Resources and Publishing. John David Didriksen is a senior librarian and has been working with open access and research data management for several years. Rune Nilssen is a system manager, and has earlier worked for 10 years in the ICT department at UiS.

Introduction



Figure 1. Photo: Anne Haapanen, The Federation of Finnish Learned Societies

Founded in 1998, [Public Knowledge Project](#) (PKP) is an organization that develops open source software for academic publishing. In 2001 Open Journal Systems (OJS) was released, to provide an open platform for publishing academic journals. Open Monograph Press (OMP) was released in 2013 (Public Knowledge Project, n.d.a).

PKP is not a big organization – its core team consists of over 30 full- and part time staff – so PKP’s international community of users have played a vital role in the success of PKP’s open-source software worldwide. [The PKP Community Forum](#) is an important online resource where software users can get technical support, share plugins and best practices, and suggest improvements to PKP software, among other things. PKP is “committed to creating a diverse, equitable, and inclusive working environment and scholarly communications ecosystem” (Public Knowledge Project, n.d.b).

One of the ways PKP keep in touch with their community is so-called Sprints. PKP describe Sprints as “free, fun, and interactive events for our community to come together to brainstorm important tasks, set priorities, and work together to make our open-source software better” (Public Knowledge Project, 2022). Sprints gather users with different roles in the community and are arranged a couple of times a year, at different places in the world. The first one was in Montreal in 2016, and the most recent one was in Bogota, a couple of weeks after the one in Helsinki. The Federation of Finnish Learned Societies were hosting the event in June 2022, at Aalto University.

At the University of Stavanger (UiS) we have been using both OJS (Open Journal Systems) and OMP (Open Monograph Press) since 2018. The two of us writing this paper have quite different roles and backgrounds when it comes to working with the software. John David Didriksen is a librarian, and has been working with open access for several years. Recently he has also worked with research data management. He has no background in programming. Rune Nilssen, on the

other hand, is a very experienced programmer, and has earlier worked 10 years in the ICT department at UiS. He then also participated in introducing OJS and OMP at UiS but has, at the time of writing, only been working a few months with this full-time in the library.

The present paper is a brief overview of our impressions, as new members of the community. Main focus will be on the groups where we were present. We hope the paper can be of use for those who have not yet attended a sprint, and maybe an encouragement to sign up when there is a chance.

Day 1, 15th of June

Alec Smecher, lead developer for PKP software, was hosting the joint meetings during the event. He started by addressing the concern both John David and several others in the room were having: You don’t need to be a programmer to take part in a Sprint! When the about 25 participants introduced themselves it also became clear that a small majority had no technical background. Many were there because of their role as editor or journal manager, roles that don’t require programming skills. It was underlined that in a Sprint it is important with different voices. Any issue should be seen from all perspectives, not only the technical side.

Working on specific issues in groups is the main object of a Sprint. After introductions we were told to choose which group to participate in. It became evident that there are a lot of issues coming in from an active and ambitious community, and time is, as always, the most lacking resource. Most issues we could choose from were unfortunately not covered during this sprint, and will have to wait for another time.

Participants were divided into six groups. We chose a group that discussed development of a tool to remove old incomplete submissions and inactive users. Anti-Jussi Nygård from The Federation of Finnish Learned Societies was leading this group. He came into it expecting it to be mostly about deleting submissions that were left incomplete or with no data, and deleting spam user accounts – this was before the discussion started, and then we got a glimpse of the dynamics of an active and knowledgeable community. From our different perspectives as users with different roles, several issues were brought to the table: How much data should the editor be able to see in an incomplete submission? If he or she can see abstracts or files it may actually be against GDPR and scientific conduct. What if a user has been inactive for several years? Should this user be removed? What about users that are retired or moved to other jobs, and therefore have inactive email-addresses? Should they be removed, and how can this be done? How do we choose which submissions to delete, and which users to remove? What should be the criteria?

We're not going into more detail about the impassioned discussions during this group work, but we assume everyone was a bit surprised by the complexity of the issues. It was really interesting to reflect on them together, and it was a few interesting and inspiring hours for everyone present. When all the groups presented their work at the end of the day it became obvious that this was a shared experience.

Intermission: Conference dinner

All decent conferences have a common dinner at night, giving everyone a chance to meet and dine. PKP Sprint is no exception. Due to the pandemic, many of the participants had not been to a physical conference since 2019, so it was great to meet some new and interesting people. Extending your network and getting to know people in the community on a personal level is one of the most important parts of any physical conference – two years of pandemic have proven that neither Zoom nor Teams can compete with a physical conference when it comes to this. Even though the community surrounding PKP may seem large, only a few persons are very active, including the staff at PKP. Several of them were present at this Sprint, and it was great to meet them and get insight into how they work, and how we can work together with them.

Day 2, 16th of June



Figure 2. Photo: Anne Haapanen, The Federation of Finnish Learned Societies

On the second day the groups continued working, hopefully to conclude the work with a definite result. The goal of every Sprint is that there should be no homework, but it was admitted that this is not always possible. After the discussions on Day 1 the next step will often be to either write documentation or do some programming, but more complex issues will have to be discussed in the [PKP Community Forum](#) before making any decision. PKP is a very democratic organization, and everyone can make their voice heard.

In the group discussing incomplete submissions and inactive users it was time to start developing the tool, as an add-on to the software. It is important during a Sprint to do some actual work, not only discuss it.

Development procedures

For Rune, participating in the Sprint was all about getting insight into how OMP and OJS are developed. It is really all about Git and Github. Git is a tried and tested tool for source code collaboration and version control, and Github is the largest host of Git repositories in the world.

As always in cooperative development, a large part of the work is about communication and discussions, as mentioned earlier.

What ended up being created during the sprint was a PHP command line tool to clean old incomplete submissions, designed to be used by site administrators. Antti Jussi Nygård had raised the issue as early as 2019, and since then the support of the issue had increased enough through discussions on Github for it to be given a high priority. It seemed ideal for doing in a short two-day sprint, because there was a real possibility it would be ready enough at the end of the sprint to be submitted for review/QA and further testing.

It was very interesting for Rune to follow the coding process, as Antti Jussi Nygård and Dulip Withanage through an iterative process of coding, testing and committing code changes to Git cooperated to create a functioning tool as the end result.

When this tool to clean incomplete submissions will be included in any official release remains to be seen, but it is there now, [on Github](#), ready to be merged into the main branch of the OJS code.

Famira Racy has also made an [overview of this group’s work](#) in the PKP forum.

Translation of documentation

As mentioned earlier, John David has no background in programming, so he thought it was better to join the group working with software documentation. Good documentation is crucial for open software, since many users are involved at different times, with a great variation in competencies and experience. During this day, the group worked on translating the documentation into different national languages. This is an ongoing project for PKP, lead by Emma Uhl. Translation has started into quite a few languages, but it appeared that neither Norwegian nor Swedish were among those. The very first articles were translated into those languages that day, so John David felt he was doing pioneering work.

The software used for translating documentation is called [Crowdin](#). It is very easy to use, and everyone can take part in the work. That being said, there is a

lot of documentation to be translated, and it is very time-consuming work. To make this happen in any country, the whole community in that country will have to be a part of the process. Hopefully this can be managed, so the documentation can reflect how international the PKP community actually is.

Towards the end of the day there was also time for some information about issues of special interest, before all the groups made a final presentation of their work. There was no doubt it had been two productive days, developing tools that will be useful for the whole community.

Closing remarks

The PKP Sprint shows the value of the community for PKP. Without participation and input from system users all over the globe the software would soon stagnate and lose competition with other systems, which will often be proprietary. Therefore it is important to feel as a part of the community, and share our knowledge and competencies with each other.

Being a part of this is also great fun! Participating at the PKP Sprint was a real pleasure, and we encourage everyone that has the chance to sign up for the next one!

References

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