

# Moving from print to electronic: a survival guide for Greek academic libraries

Based on a paper given at the 26th UKSG Conference, Edinburgh, April 2003

Starting on 1 January 2003, all members of HEAL-Link (Hellenic Academic Libraries Link, that is all academic and most research libraries in Greece) cancelled all subscriptions from 13 major publishers and replaced them with electronic-only access. HEAL-Link was established in 1998 as part of a project funded by the Ministry of Education and EU structural funds. HEAL-Link's aim was to revive the slow fading away of Greek academic libraries due to lack of adequate budgets. It not only managed to survive the termination of its funding in 2002 but also expanded the number of electronic resources it offers to its members.



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## Introduction

At the end of 2002, all members of HEAL-Link (the Hellenic Academic Libraries Link) cancelled all their print subscriptions from 13 major publishers and thereby moved to electronic-only access for the majority of their journal collections. This sounds like quite a drastic step, especially coming from a southern European country which would not have been expected to embrace new technologies to such a degree. The next few pages explain how Greek academic libraries managed to turn a seemingly hopeless journal collection situation into expanded access to scientific information.

## Background

Greece is the member state of the European Union that allocates the least money for research and technology. Yet the country spends the most money of any EU country by far, as a percentage of gross national product, for defence. Because the government traditionally allocated so little funding for research and technology, for decades Greek academic libraries suffered from inadequate and stagnant budgets. Since all academic and most research institutes in Greece are funded by the

state, there were unfortunately no exceptions to the rule.

While libraries everywhere have had problems over the past thirty years with the skyrocketing cost of print journal subscriptions, Greek libraries faced a continuous losing battle. Moreover, libraries in Greece do not have a long history of co-operation. With the exception of a national programme for decentralised interlibrary loan of journal articles, begun in the early 1990s as an initiative of the National Documentation Centre, our libraries have operated in isolation. Although the national programme for interlibrary loan proved to be a success, because our collections are so limited, we have had to turn to the British Library Documentation Centre for interlibrary loan services and pass high costs directly to users.

## A study and its results

In 1995, the Ministry of Education to the Greek Universities and Technology Educational Institutes issued a call for proposals for funding to upgrade library systems. In addition, the Ministry decided that it would offer funding in support of co-operative library activities through

Publisher	Service	Licence agreement
Elsevier	ScienceDirect	1200 electronic journals
Springer	SpringerLink	439 electronic journals
Academic Press	IDEAL	174 electronic journals
Kluwer	Kluwer Online	750 electronic journals
MCB	Emerald	152 electronic journals
OCLC	FirstSearch	12 bibliographic databases
Wilson	MegaFile	1400 journals   100 of them full Text

Table 1: Licence agreements signed during 1999-2000

a project-named 'horizontal action'. A number of committees were appointed to study possible action plans. One of these groups was charged with studying the possibility of national-level co-operation in regard to journal collection development in higher education institutions. The committee decided to undertake a pilot project in three discipline areas (physics, chemistry, and informatics) across the science faculties of the universities. The committee followed conspectus methods using specific conspectus software.

The project lasted for a year. It entailed a detailed study of the syllabi of the departments involved, the specific research areas of these departments, and of the associated journal collections. Journal subscriptions were evaluated in terms of the perceived needs of the departments, appropriate level of study (undergraduate, graduate, research level), and specific research interests involved. The results revealed that all libraries in the disciplines under study had been left, after decades of inadequate funding, with nothing more than core journal collections. Committee members realised that further reductions were simply impossible. Any funds saved by cancelling peripheral titles would be marginal. Faculty members in the departments were suspicious of co-operation initiatives, yet they accepted cancellations when there were no available funds for expanding subscriptions and there was no other way out.

### Taking action

The steering committee for electronic resources proposed and the governing body of the 'horizontal action' approved that, instead of expending effort for marginal gains in terms of co-ordinating print journals collections, the institutions should leap ahead and form a

consortium, to be named HEAL-Link, in order to co-operatively access electronic resources. An action plan and a budget were approved in June 1998 by the chairman of the governing body, under the support of the steering committee who had done the negotiations. During the next year and a half, the chairman of the governing body, who is also the chairman of HEAL-Link, signed licence agreements with the publishers and providers shown in Table 1.

Through these agreements Greek academic institutions gained access to 2500 research-level journals, 12 basic reference bibliographic databases, and through Wilson's databases, to another 1200 full-text journals intended for the undergraduate students.

### Access concerns and solutions

Once the decision was made to license electronic resources, one of the first concerns of the steering committee was how users would gain easy access to these products. Within our financial limits, the steering committee for electronic resources, in co-operation with the webmaster for the HEAL-Link homepage, developed a plan for the integration of services.

A homepage was established which, among other things, provided an alphabetical list of all electronic journals in the HEAL-Link collection, with links at the journal tables of contents at the corresponding publishers' homepages. The system administrator and webmaster for HEAL-Link homepage developed a metasearch engine that, when users enter keywords, simultaneously searches all of the journals from all our publishers and returns the results, sorted by publisher name, with links to the articles. These steps are depicted in Figures 1 and 2.

Our next step was to enable subject searching capabilities. A librarian assigned Library of

Figure 1

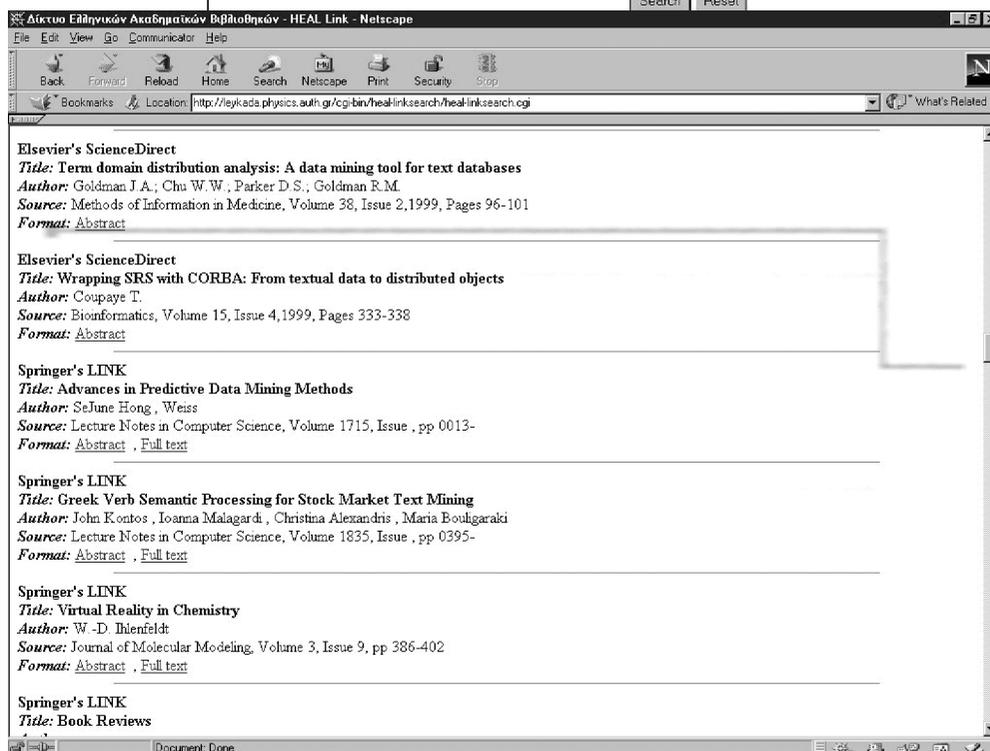
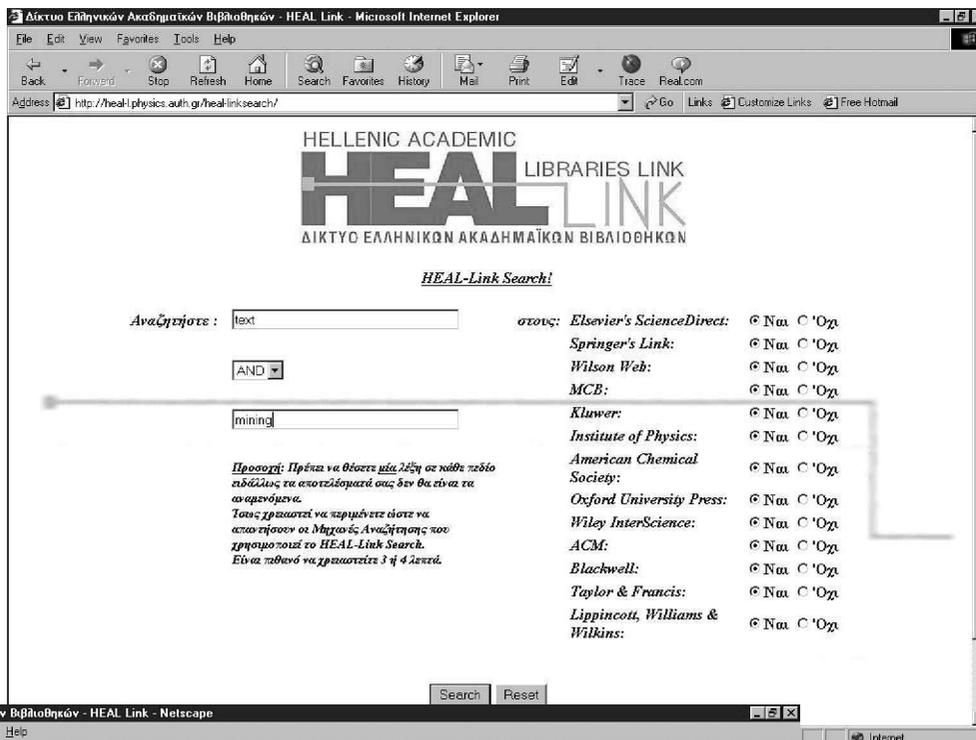


Figure 2

Congress classification and subject headings to each of the journals accessed by HEAL-Link. A hierarchical (tree-like) search facility was developed that guides users from the general, i.e. the subject category, to the particular, i.e. the subject heading.

Before long, all of the electronic journals were heavily used and the action plan was considered a success. These steps are shown in Figures 3 and 4 (overleaf).

### Funding issues

Initially HEAL-Link was comprised of 32 academic institutions in Greece. In the summer of 2000, 21 more institutions joined, funded by the Ministry for Development and the Ministry of Agriculture. Today HEAL-Link includes 57 members. The organisation manages with little overhead. The consortium pays for only two employees, a system administrator for HEAL-

Figure 3

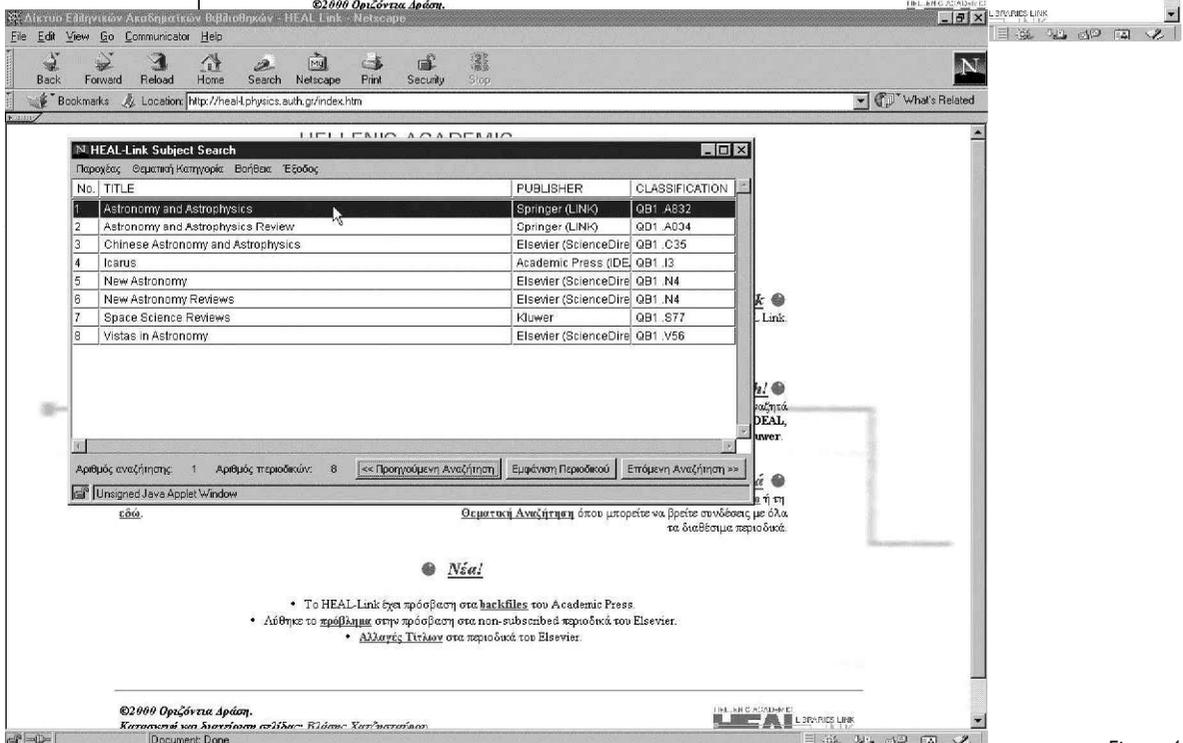
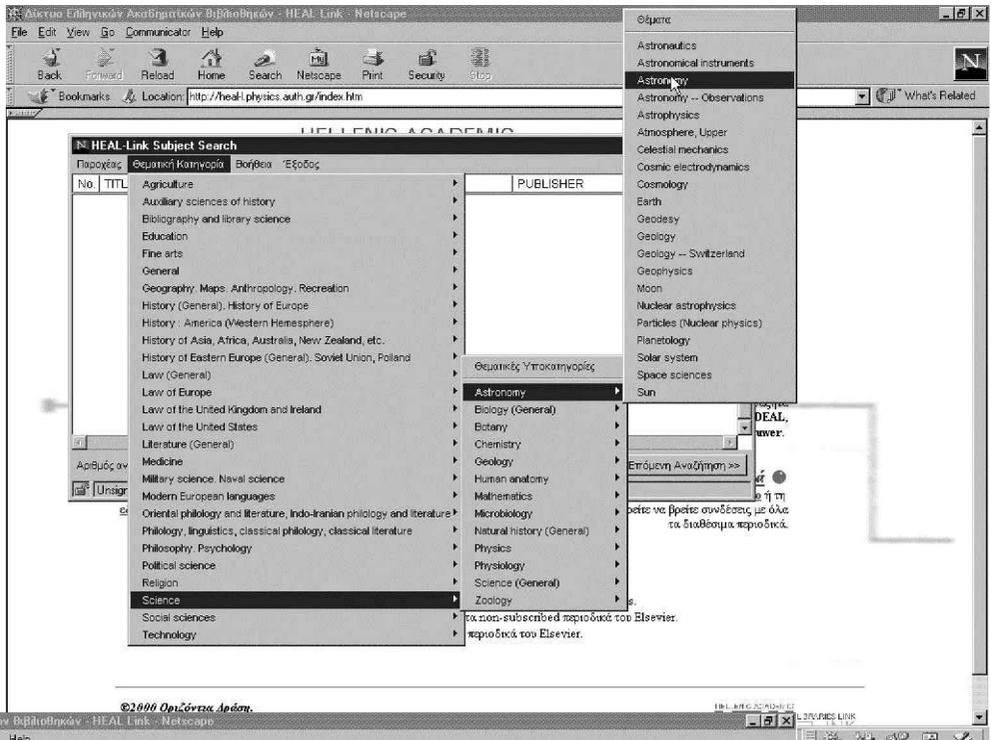


Figure 4

Link and a librarian. The steering committee for electronic resources is a 4-member committee of librarians from different universities who participate on a voluntary basis. The server is hosted by the Aristotle University of Thessaloniki.

The consortium is governed by a 34-member committee with one representative from each academic institution, regardless of size. Although HEAL-Link has no legal structure, from the very

start the rectors of all member institutions agreed to sign a statement of understanding. Among the points in the agreement was a requirement that academic institutions were bound to retain print subscriptions to journals from publishers that we had an agreement with; in return, HEAL-Link paid the electronic access fees. One of the universities, the National Technical University of Athens, was appointed to administer the finances of the consortium.

Financial support from the 2nd European Structural Funding that HEAL-Link received through the Ministry of Education ended in 2000; an extension was granted for another year, until the 3rd European Structural Funding Programme began. This funding will continue until 2006. We were confident that not only would the funding be extended, but also that the consortium would get new funds in order to be able to negotiate with additional publishers. But in November 2001, the Ministry approved only a fraction of the requested HEAL-Link budget. There was just enough support to cover our financial obligations till the end of 2002, the year that marked the end of all our multi-year publisher agreements.

We thought that the obvious solution was to transfer the access fees to the universities with the corresponding print subscriptions. Unfortunately this was not a workable solution. Although there are 57 HEAL-Link members, 10 carry the main load of funding by virtue of having the most significant collections. Because journal prices were increasing yearly, but library acquisitions budgets were not, every year HEAL-Link member libraries had to cut journals from publishers other than those with which we had negotiated the licence agreements. The ten libraries that were carrying the greatest loads all experienced problems renewing their print subscriptions, and five were carrying two-thirds of the total cost of print subscriptions in HEAL-Link.

Because the governing body of HEAL-Link was not empowered to find a solution, the steering committee decided to take the problem to the next meeting of rectors. The rectors of the Greek academic institutions meet four times a year to talk about policy issues. These meetings are attended by the Minister for Education. In a short report, the steering committee focused on the journal renewal situation at a number of major institutions; it suggested that the only viable solution for renewing the licence agreements would be to drop print altogether and move to electronic-only access. Much to our surprise, the rectors decided that not only should we move to electronic-only for the publishers whose licence agreements were awaiting renewal, but we should also take the same step with as many journals from other publishers as was feasible. They instructed all member institutions to cancel

all print subscriptions to the publishers that HEAL-Link had or would have an electronic access agreement with. Finally, the Ministry decided to offer extra funding to cover the outstanding shortfalls of the journals subscriptions of the universities.

Moving to electronic-only access meant a major change in cost allocation among the academic libraries. In the electronic-only environment, there are no print subscriptions on which to base costs, and every participant shares exactly the same level of access to content. The transition was an opportunity to redistribute the cost of the journal subscriptions among all the members, not according to the costs of their print subscriptions, but according to a formula that would help allocate the cost to each member according to its size and budget.

In co-operation with the steering committee, a committee of vice-rectors studied the matter and suggested an algorithm. The third consecutive meeting of rectors that discussed this issue decided that the amount of money needed to cover the portion of the HEAL-Link budget devoted to access to electronic resources should be top-sliced at the Ministry according to the algorithm before budgets are forwarded to the universities. That concept was a major success! The solution would have made musketeers happy: 'One for all and all for one!'

The steering committee still had to work out how the steps that would be taken would be achieved through the maze of Greek bureaucracy. They had to determine how the universities' budgets would be top-sliced, whether the Ministry would directly pay for HEAL-Link invoices or transfer funds to one of the institutions to make payments on behalf of the group, and whether the General Secretariat for Research and Technology of the Ministry of Development would pay the portion allocated to the research institutions. In two meetings that took place at the Ministry of Education, the General Secretary for Education, the General Secretary of the Ministry for Development, and a committee of rectors decided that not only would the funding be centralised, but the government would not deduct the cost of electronic resources from the already limited budgets of the universities. The Ministry decided to provide extra funding to cover the cost of the HEAL-Link e-journal deals.

LC subject categories	LC classification	Percentage of journals per LC subject
General	A	0.67
Philosophy. Psychology. Religion	B	2.90
Auxiliary Sciences of History	C	0.29
History	D-F	2.07
Geography. Maps. Anthropology. Recreation	G	2.30
Social Sciences	H	14.52
Political Science	J	1.21
Law	K	3.80
Education	L	3.90
Music	M	0.29
Fine Arts	N	1.19
Language and Literature	P	2.44
Science	Q	25.33
Medicine	R	18.89
Agriculture	S	1.90
Technology	T	11.49
Military Science. Naval Science	U-V	0.18
Bibliography. Library Science. Information resources	Z	2.03
Unclassified	N/A	4.58
<b>TOTAL</b>		<b>100.00</b>

Table 2: HEAL-Link's journals coverage per subject, using LC classification

### Subsequent developments

After this decision was made, the steering committee went into intense negotiations. They renewed all of the standing licence agreements and signed a number of new ones with the following publishers:

Association for Computing Machinery (ACM)

American Chemical Society (ACS)

American Institute of Physics (AIP)

Blackwell

Institute of Physics (IOP)

Lippincott

Oxford University Press

Taylor & Francis

Wiley

Starting with January 2003, all HEAL-Link members have access to the journals from 13 major publishers (over 7000 titles). Internally, HEAL-Link has been the driving force in the development of a national policy on academic

libraries. Externally, the major advantage of HEAL-Link in its negotiations with the publishers is that it *is* the Greek market. There is no opportunity for members to opt in or out. All of the deals cover all academic and research institutions in Greece.

Although the strongest subject coverage within HEAL-Link's journals is in the area of science, there is significant coverage of medicine, social sciences, and technology. The percentage of journal coverage per subject, according to the Library of Congress Classification, can be seen in Table 2.

Apart from FirstSearch, until these developments took place, HEAL-Link had not signed any national agreements for bibliographic databases. But our users need access to content. What is the point of giving them the opportunity to find bibliographic citations when they cannot readily retrieve the actual articles? In fact, during 2002, on top of the national agreements, HEAL-Link has signed a small number of agreements for smaller groups of its members where the cost is divided

Licence agreements	Number of institutions
Web of Science	35
MATHSCINET	14
Oxford Reference online	7
CSA (all databases)	11
Ulrich's	7
EI COMPEDEX	3
Dissertation Abstracts	5
OECD	3

Table 3: Group agreements for members of HEAL-Link

and totally covered by them. Agreements that have been signed are listed in Table 3.

**Conclusion**

We believe that the HEAL-Link homepage, which we would like to see become a portal, has been instrumental in providing easy access to the content of all the journals. As previously noted, all of the 7500 journals can be accessed either by title or by keyword search. By May 2003 a new version of our portal, shown in Figure 5, will become available and users will not only be able to search alphabetically, by keyword search or by subject heading, but they will be able to create their own ‘myheal-link’ profile.

A great deal has been written and said during the past few years about the ‘big deals’ and the role of subscription agents in providing electronic-only journals. HEAL-Link has quite heretical views on both subjects. Based on statistics that indicated that previously non-subscribed journals can be more heavily used than ones that are subscribed, we believe that the big deals are to our advantage and represent an excellent opportunity for our libraries to provide expanded access. Since our budget has always been limited, we have kept a close eye on usage statistics to make sure that we are spending our money wisely.

Table 4 shows that the journals that we did not subscribe to in print have received heavy use in the electronic environment. This data reinforces the results of our pilot conspectus study. First, we were right that our collections had been pared back to the core; second, our collections were not meeting the research needs of the universities. Instead, we had been acquiring what we had always acquired, whether those titles had been meeting needs or not.

Finally, we believe that subscription agents have a role to play in the new electronic-only environment. But this is not a one-suit-fits-all situation. As no two consortia are the same, the co-operation between each consortium and the subscription agencies its libraries use must be

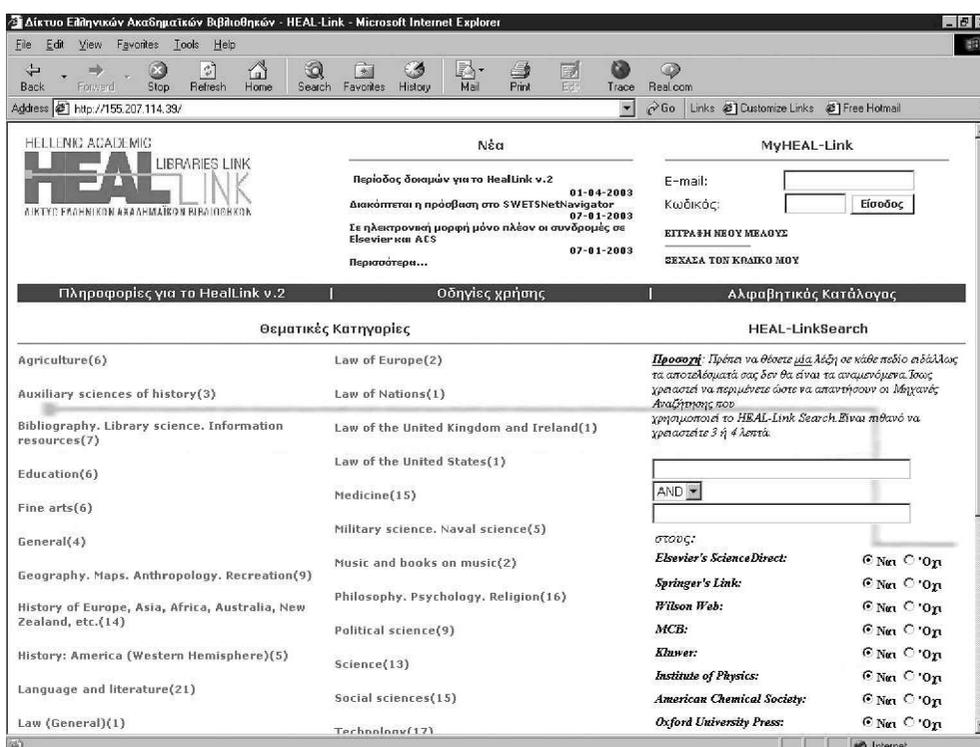


Figure 5

Publishers	Titles accessed (%)	Full-text downloads
Academic Press	58%	62%
Elsevier	47%	33%
Kluwer	57%	54%
MCB	75%	61%
Springer	61%	56%

Table 4: Non-subscribed journals statistics

tailor made. Since December 1998, when we signed our first licence agreement, Swets Blackwell's support has been instrumental in allowing us to achieve our goals.

The brave new world of electronic journals has given our libraries new opportunities and challenges. As new models of scholarly publishing develop, we look forward to facing further challenges and opportunities that will enable our libraries to achieve even greater access to the wide world of information.

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