Abstract: This talk will review the public impact of developments in open access to research on education, professional practice, and public policy, with consideration given to legal, economic, and academic freedom issues, as well as to the very design of scholarly communication systems. The Public Knowledge Project has been conducting research on public interests in the new openness of research for nearly a decade, and as a result, continues to explore how the creation of new reading environments for the online publication of journals and books can provide a wider range of readers with what might otherwise be the missing context for the work they are now able to discover online.