

PASTEUR4OA Briefing Paper: Open Access Monographs

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Introduction

The scholarly monograph is of major importance to research in humanities and social science disciplines and any transition to Open Access (OA) needs to take this into account. However, unlike for journals, whose production processes scale more easily with digital technologies, academic book publishing is still firmly rooted in a print-first production process that relies on significant upfront costs for potentially small readerships. Consequently, economic considerations weigh heavily on the publication decisions of presses who juggle the need to publish rigorous, disciplinary-focused academic scholarship with whether the book will recuperate its costs.

While a move to Open Access will have to take these factors into account, OA also allows for the reassessment of monograph publishing practices that could reinvigorate the form, function and accessibility of long-form scholarly works. This briefing paper provides an overview of the Open Access monograph landscape, outlining the case for OA books, the costs involved, the potential for innovation, the current business models and the possible areas for policymaker intervention.

The argument for Open Access monographs

Much like Open Access in general, the case for OA monographs is compelling: digital technologies allow scholars to share academic works, many of which are publicly funded by grants and salaries, at near negligible cost and could remove financial barriers to research access. As library budgets decline and journal subscriptions increase, libraries dip into the money used to purchase monographs in order to rent scientific journals (ARL Libraries 2012). This has a disproportionately negative impact on humanities and social science (HSS) disciplines that rely on the monograph as a significant driver of research. Open access could therefore provide access to policy-makers, journalists, charities, independent scholars, researchers outside the global north, and simply those without access to a well-stocked university library.

In fact, the current state of monograph publishing actually strengthens this case for two reasons. Firstly, the average academic has nowhere near enough access to all the books they require: monographs are expensive for the individual scholar and libraries cannot buy all the books every scholar needs. The access gap for monographs is therefore even starker than for journal articles. Secondly, monographs themselves are, in general, more understandable to a wider readership than journal articles – they are written with a broader audience in mind, with lead-in/lead-out materials, greater context and often more accessible (and copyedited) language than the average journal article. Not only do OA monographs decrease the current research access gap, they also have the opportunity to extend and reach a new readership interested in HSS research. This is especially important in the current global political climate: a thriving public sphere requires informed and engaged citizens who can understand and interrogate various social and historical contexts, seek political and economic alternatives and explore the nature of

humanity through arts and culture, all of which can be nurtured by providing digital access to long-form HSS research.

The Costs of Monographs

Though there is a compelling case for OA monographs, one must ask why academics cannot simply self-publish their monographs like many already do on sites such as Lulu or Amazon's Kindle? The primary reason is that publishing involves more than simply releasing a digital file onto the web; manuscripts are improved via peer-review and editing and are professionally presented in accordance with disciplinary norms. Furthermore, publishing houses often connote a level prestige or editorial rigour that universities rely on for their academic reward structures (promotion and tenure, grant funding, job opportunities, and so on). Rightly or wrongly, then, a wholesale move towards academic self-publishing is unlikely to happen any time soon.

The routes to Open Access monographs are complicated by the significant upfront costs needed to create the book's first copy. Though digital distribution may be inexpensive, the costs of administering peer-review, editing, typesetting, copyediting, etc. are not trivial and require substantial investment to produce the book in the first instance. However, these costs are not fixed, nor are they particularly well known, and so it is worth briefly exploring some of the literature here.

A recent report by the Ithaka S+R consultancy aimed at shedding light on the total cost of monograph production (Maron et al. 2016). The study looked at the publication of 382 monographs in 20 American university presses by asking press staff to report the direct costs, overheads and staff time associated with each monograph. The presses were organised into four groups ranging from those with fewer than \$1.5 million dollars in revenue to presses with over \$6 million in revenue. The report found that the average total cost per title across the four groups were \$30,091 (smallest publishers), \$44,906, \$34,098, \$49,155 (largest publishers) across the four groups. The average here looks likely to be many tens of thousands of dollars, and in fact, the highest reported monograph cost was \$129,909.

This report adds a level of empirical data to the debate that was previously missing. Nonetheless it would not be reasonable to conclude based on this data that Open Access books need to be this expensive to produce. It is likely that these presses select titles at least partially for their economic return. As such, a great deal is spent on marketing and commissioning, all with the hope of recuperating costs through title sales. This is not to say that these services are not valuable but, rather, that an OA world might not require the same level of revenue-driven labour as a sales-based distribution model, particularly as the costs are likely to be borne at least partially on the supply side.

Thus, at most, all this study can tell us is how a traditional, market-based publishing model currently operates. While it is certainly a useful snapshot into the inner workings of university press operations, the study does little to us what the costs of OA monographs could be. This is similar to a point made by John Sherer, director of UNC Press, in his blog post 'The Cost to Publish a Monograph is Both Too Low and Too High' (2016) where he argues that the study should not be used as a benchmark for subsidising the cost of OA monographs because '[...] a digital first, Open Access dissemination model should be much less expensive for presses to utilize than what they're currently doing.' There is, therefore, good reason to believe that new Open Access publishing practices could be cheaper than conventional monograph publishing.

One press operating such a model is Open Book Publishers (OBP) who publish Open Access monographs in the humanities and social sciences. In a blog post entitled 'Introducing Some Data to the Open Access Debate: OBP's Business Model', OBP's co-founder Rupert Gatti sheds light on the costs associated with their book publishing programme (2015). For the 18 books published between September 2014 and August 2015, OBP had a total outgoing of just under \$190,000 that Gatti breaks down to costs of \$10,512 per title. Over half of this sum (\$6,369) refers to the editorial, production and

staff costs entailed in creating the book's first copy and the remainder is allocated to the costs of sales, distribution and overheads.

Open Book Publishers clearly make Open Access monograph publishing a low-cost pursuit. That said, the OAPEN study of 46 open-access books published by Dutch presses came to a similar figure of \$13,750 dollars, with first-copy costs of \$6,747 similar to the figure reported by Open Book Publishers (Ferwerda, Snijder, and Adema 2013). These costs are also similar to those advertised by the University of California Press as part of their Luminos books programme for Open Access monographs in the humanities and social sciences¹ and by Ubiquity Press (who work with the University of California on Lumios)². This evidence makes the case that Open Access monograph publishing may well be cheaper than traditional toll access, and certainly more transparent about said costs, though what the differences are does remain to be seen.

Another understanding of the costs of monograph publishing is through a philosophy of 'getting things done'. For example, Open Humanities Press – a scholar-led OA publishing collective – references the academic 'gift economy' entailed in producing OA books and journals.³ As Gary Hall writes: 'Most of OHP's funding comes indirectly: via publicly funded institutions paying our salaries as academics, librarians, technologists and so forth' (Hall 2015). For this reason, many of the associated costs come from researchers gifting their time in order to establish a progressive alternative to traditional commercial publishing. The larger and more distributed the network, and the more passionate its members, the easier it is to sustain through individuals each gifting small amounts of time. It is not therefore possible to speak of the cost of an average monograph in this context, though there are of course financial costs involved and much more needs to be done to help sustain scholar-led publishing.

In the case of Open Book Publishers and Open Humanities Press, these are not-for-profit publishers that appear to run on a shoestring. Their aim tends more towards resilience than maximising a financial surplus and larger publishers can likely absorb greater costs per monograph. While there is likely some cost fluctuation between different publishers, the important thing to note is that there is evidence OA will drive down the costs of monograph publishing, while allowing anyone to freely read the work. With this in mind, a great deal hinges on the various models for providing Open Access monographs, and we will now explore the benefits and drawbacks of some of them.

Models for OA Monographs

Book Processing Charges

As is common for Open Access journals, many book publishers pay for OA through levying a processing charge to cover the costs associated with production and, in some cases, to cover the perceived loss of revenue from making the digital book freely available. Charges can range from \$5,650 (Brill) to \$8,500 (Manchester University Press) at the lower end of the scale, up to \$17,000 (Palgrave) at the higher end.⁴

Book Processing Charges (BPCs) can work where research is grant funded and authors have money to cover these costs. For example, the Wellcome Trust has a policy that all the monographs and book chapters based on research funded by the Trust should be made openly accessible and they will provide funding to cover any processing charges.⁵ This is also the policy of the European Research Council who

¹ See: http://www.luminosoa.org/site/why_oa/ [accessed 04/05/2016]

² See: <http://www.ubiquitypress.com/site/publish/> [accessed 04/05/2016]

³ See: <http://www.openhumanitiespress.org/about/community/> [accessed 04/05/2016]

⁴ See: Brill <http://www.brill.com/brill-open-0>; Manchester University Press <http://www.manchesteruniversitypress.co.uk/openmonographs/>; Palgrave <http://www.nature.com/openresearch/publishing-with-palgrave-macmillan/publication-charges/>; [accessed 21/04/2016]

⁵ See: <http://www.wellcome.ac.uk/About-us/Policy/Spotlight-issues/Open-access/Guides/WTP058225.htm> [accessed 21/04/2016]

provide funding for BPCs to all ERC-funded authors publishing OA monographs through its FP7 programme.⁶

However, BPCs are simply not workable at scale for the humanities and social sciences where the majority of work is not grant funded and publishing subventions are limited. Furthermore, the large discrepancies between BPCs from publisher to publisher indicate that there is a significant lack of transparency associated with the BPC. Without this information, and in the absence of equally distributed pots of funding for authors, BPCs can only work in specific situations but cannot be seen as a way of transitioning to Open Access monographs.

Freemium

The BPC model works under the assumption that publishers will not make any further revenue from digital copies of their Open Access monographs. A different approach is the so-called freemium model that sees publishers release an Open Access version of their title, often in a restricted form, with the hope of recuperating costs by selling print and enhanced digital editions (such as epub and pdf). A notable exponent of freemium is OpenEdition (part of the Centre for Open Electronic Publishing) who release all their works in html form while charging institutional members and readers a fee to access the enhanced digital editions.⁷

Open Book Publishers also fund part of their operations through freemium with each title openly accessible in html form with downloadable pdfs and epub files at a fee. In addition, Punctum Books operates a similar model they term 'Graduated Open Access', offering low-cost digital editions for a temporary period of six months after which the pdf will be openly accessible, along with low-cost print editions.⁸

The main problem with freemium and graduated Open Access is that it remains to be seen whether the model will prove sustainable. In fact, Open Book Publishers couples this model with support from publishing grants, library memberships, and donations (Gatti 2015). Freemium can therefore be one component of a successful OA book publishing programme but, ultimately, Open Access monographs require collective action at the supply side to make them sustainable.

Consortia Funding

One way of making Open Access monographs scale is through consortia funding, whereby academic libraries each pay a small amount of money to cover the costs. This spreads the financial burden over a large number of libraries, thus decreasing the risk, allowing presses to publish monographs without fear of not being able to recover costs.

One such example is Knowledge Unlatched (KU) who have so far funded the publication of 28 Open Access books from 13 publishers by pooling the costs from roughly 300 libraries and are in the process of funding 78 more (Montgomery 2014). From the 28 books published in the first round the average fee charged by each publisher was \$12,000, which is at the higher end of the spectrum for what is essentially a book-processing charge, especially as these are first-copy costs and publishers are still expected to generate revenue from the sale of print and enhanced digital versions. Still, competing consortia would be able to apply downward price pressure in order to reduce costs.

Consortia funding is a successful approach and a number of different publishing operations are exploring its potential, such as the Open Library of Humanities who publish journals in the humanities and social

⁶ <https://www.openaire.eu/postgrantoapilot> [accessed 21/04/2016]

⁷ <http://www.openedition.org/14043> [accessed 21/04/2016]

⁸ <https://punctumbooks.com/uncategorized/press-release-graduated-open-access/> [access 21/04/2016]

sciences and may experiment with books in future⁹. However, one problem is that it is very labour intensive to set up the consortia in the first place (as representatives generally have to visit each library to convince them to take part), and there is no guarantee that each visited library will be on board, and so there is a high barrier to entry. Nevertheless, once it is set up, the consortia could be a powerful tool for sustainable and equitably-funded Open Access books.

Policymaker Interventions

While there are a number of routes to Open Access monographs, it seems that a mixed model of revenue sources and business models is most appropriate for the time being. That said, it is likely that any policy interventions would need to coincide with significant investment in OA monographs. Importantly, new experiments in monograph publishing should be encouraged, especially if costs are to be reduced, and governments would be wise to fund progressive, scholar-led operations in monograph publishing. This is a similar point made by Geoffrey Crossick in his recent report 'Monographs and Open Access' commissioned by the Higher Education Funding Council for England:

It may be of value for policymakers to collaborate to monitor and evaluate, and perhaps facilitate, the development and implementation of business models for Open Access as a preliminary to introducing mandates. (Crossick 2015)

One such example is the co-operative publisher Meson Press, a spin-off of Hybrid Publishing that was funded by an EU project "Innovation Incubator" at Leuphana University.¹⁰ Publishing research on 'digital cultures, networked media, and cognate subjects', Meson produces beautifully designed open-access books in English and German and has been given the freedom to develop a 'sustainable and reusable' business model (Hybrid Publishing Lab 2016). Other presses in the UK are also using funding received from the RCUK grants distributed to universities as part of their policy for Open Access.

Such scholar-led initiatives permit levels of experimentation that more traditional publishers are unable or unwilling to attempt. This might be through publishing commercially less 'marketable' subject matter, as those of Punctum, Mattering Press¹¹ and Mayfly Books¹², or through books that play with the form of publishing such as Open Humanities Press' *Living Books about Life* series.¹³ This series bundles together CC BY-licensed content to create books that explore scientific themes through humanistic inquiry; each book is 'living' in the sense that it is never finished and always open to being updated.

Another way that Open Access monographs can be encouraged is through the global network of university presses currently seeing a resurgence in the Open Access era. For example, Goldsmiths Press has recently launched with a remit to publish short and mid-length monographs and 'non-standard modes and forms of communication', the first of which is a diary on the everyday life of an academic (Page 2015). Funding small groups of scholars interested in university-based publishing is an excellent way of cultivating a network of progressive monograph publishing. Governments, funders and institutions should facilitate this level of experimentation alongside the developing network of Open Access policies and mandates.

A successful example of this kind of publishing is the established network of 'e-presses' in Australia, many of which publish large numbers of freely available monographs each year.¹⁴ Such presses tend to be partially or fully subsidised by their institutions but the editorial processes are largely academic-run and/or housed within the university's library (Steele 2013). The largest of these is Australian National

⁹ <https://www.openlibhums.org/> [accessed 22/04/2016]

¹⁰ <http://meson.press/about/> [accessed 21/04/2016]

¹¹ <http://www.matteringpress.org> [accessed 21/04/2016]

¹² <http://mayflybooks.org/> [accessed 22/04/2016]

¹³ <http://www.openhumanitiespress.org/labs/living-books-about-life/> [accessed 22/04/2016]

¹⁴ <https://aoasg.org.au/oa-monographs-developments/> [accessed 11/05/2016]

University's e-press which 'has been established for more than 11 years and lists in excess of 650 titles', all of which published in free-to-read html, pdf, ebook and print formats (Missingham 2015). This ecosystem is strengthened by the far-reaching policy of the Australian Research Council which mandates that all scholarly books and book chapters be made open access within one year of publication.¹⁵

Finally, more services such as the OAPEN library¹⁶, the Directory of Open Access Books (DOAB)¹⁷ and Europe PMC¹⁸ should be encouraged to increase discoverability of OA monographs and allow university library to catalogue them more easily. As many OA monograph publishers are new and operate outside of the traditional book supply chain, it would be sensible for policies to facilitate the cataloguing of Open Access monograph content through new third-party services or incentivising libraries to work together on this.

Concluding Note

Open-access monographs are still in a nascent stage but represent an excellent opportunity to communicate humanities and social science work to a broader audience and create a new, vibrant scholarly commons. That said, new models need to be encouraged, especially if the costs are to be sustainable, and funders and policymakers should look to initiatives fostering a critical, experimental and transparent approach to scholarly communications.

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¹⁵ <http://www.arc.gov.au/arc-open-access-policy> [accessed 11/05/2016]

¹⁶ <http://www.oapen.org/home> [accessed 04/05/2016]

¹⁷ <http://www.doabooks.org/> [accessed 04/05/2016]

¹⁸ <https://europepmc.org/> [accessed 04/05/2016]

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