



10 Key Interviews

INSIGHTS INTO THE SUSTAINABILITY OF
OPEN INFRASTRUCTURE SERVICES

01

An Invest in Open Infrastructure project
More info: www.sparceurope.org/ioiinterviews



ABOUT THE PROJECT

Gleaning Insights

Research and scholarship is underpinned by a variety of tools, technologies and services ranging from for-profit commercial solutions and offerings from vendors to community-owned, open technologies and infrastructure. We often hear about the challenges for open infrastructure tools and services to scale, maintain, and compete in the broader market.

The 10 interviews comprised in this project highlight some of the key decision-making points, funding mechanisms and models, and other learnings from a series of commonly used services and technologies used to support research and scholarship. These include both for-profit and not-for-profit services, highlighting perspectives on sustainability across the sector.

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WHO WAS INTERVIEWED?

Overview

EDP Sciences

Featured in this document.

Code Ocean

Dryad

Mendeley

F1000 Research

Figshare

Our Research

arXiv

Redalyc

4TU.Research.Data



Interview: EDP Sciences

**"Gold OA? Diamond?
Regardless, you need a
sound and solid
business model for
sustainability.
Partners are key."**

Agnès Henri, Managing Director (France)

EDP SCIENCES

Agnès Henri, Managing Director



At a Glance

Type of activities:

Publisher of academic books and journals and service provider (publishing services for institutions and learned societies)

Life-cycle stage:

Founded in 1920, now mature and reinventing itself

Current legal structure and funding model:

A European company (French SA statut - société anonyme), charging customers for the services provided. Following 2019 acquisition from co-owners (four French learned societies) now 100% owned by CSPM (China Science Press & Media Ltd), known also as Science Press, which in itself is 74% owned by the Chinese Academy of Sciences

Technology:

Proprietary

Sustainability

'A sound and solid revenue model for Open Access that covers our cost of providing the services, regardless of the model (gold, diamond or anything else).'

Piece of Advice

'Work with the researcher. Listen to what they want, and be aligned with them. I see publishers who are against Open Access and repositories. You can't stay in these old positions. To drive your company and bring value-added service, you have to listen to the community and understand what they want: openness and transparency.'

EDP SCIENCES

EDP Sciences (EDPS) is a 100-year-old, medium-sized publisher and service provider (publishing services for institutions and learned societies) formerly owned by four French scientific associations. In 2019, it was acquired by CSPM (China Science Press & Media Ltd), also known as Science Press, the publishing arm of the Chinese Academy of Sciences.

Original vision

Managing Director Agnès Henri explains that as a medium publisher, EDPS realised that 'Open Access was an opportunity to start again from scratch.' The advent of the Internet, electronic subscriptions, and licenses in the 1990s presented a challenge and a formidable opportunity for a small publisher such as EDPS. 'As a small player, we were not able to offer bundles of titles and make deals with libraries; the portfolio was simply too disparate with not enough titles in any particular discipline and a small sales force.'

Originally, EDPS was a private company with learned societies as shareholders. 'The legal entity is what is called in France a Société Anonyme, which is an independent, private for-profit company. All financial benefits that are not re-invested in the company go to the shareholders, and in this case, the scientific community. As the shareholders are not-for-profit societies, in some other countries this

model would be regarded as not-for-profit.'

Because of its close relations to learned societies, EDPS has always focused on maintaining partnerships with researchers and listening to their needs to create new services and business models. 'That focus was in the DNA of the company from the beginning, as ownership was in the hands of learned societies from the start. The origins of EDP Sciences began in 1920 when two journals, Journal de Physique and Le Radium, merged and became the Société du Journal de Physique et le Radium in order to serve the scientific community at that time.'

When Open Access rolled out, EDPS decided to take the opportunity to respond to researchers' needs. 'Our mission has been to be a partner for the researcher: to listen to what they want and to see what we can do to work with them to go into the direction they want. For example, in physics, from the beginning we've worked with arXiv and have

authorised the author to put their paper there without any embargo.'

While they feared that this could have negative consequences for subscriptions (as researchers would be able to read preprints for free), EDPS quickly realised that Open Access and repositories did not represent a threat. 'The community expected it from us, and of course in the beginning we were a bit afraid it would lead to cancellations of subscriptions, but we didn't see that happen at all. On the contrary, it gave more visibility to the papers, it served the needs of the author and made them happy, and it had a positive effect on us as the publisher. Cancellations happen if libraries run out of funds, not because a paper is available on arXiv or HAL in France.'

Encouraged by such developments, EDPS sought to continue to innovate in Open Access publishing models. 'In 2013, we decided to go further in Open Access and created new Open

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Access titles, and also flipped some titles. In 2016, we launched our Liberty APC model where authors can choose their own fair price to publish an article. Nowadays, we are also working on other models, like “Subscribe to Open,” where we recently announced a ground-breaking open-access roll-out across the EDP Sciences maths program. In 2022, we plan to introduce this model for more titles.’

Growth and sustainability challenges

The fact that EDPS was owned by learned societies ultimately created sustainability challenges. ‘Until 2000, the French Physical Society was the only shareholder. Between 2000 and 2018, several other learned societies joined as shareholders (Société Chimique de France; Société Française d’Optique, and the Société de Mathématiques Appliquées et Industrielles). Those four learned societies were the sole owners of the company and were responsible for its governance.’

‘The owning societies of EDP Sciences were

small entities compared to US, UK or Germany, as in France there are many smaller societies that cover a certain discipline. EDP Sciences (with 50 staff) was growing too big for these smaller societies, with the external developments and ambitions of EDP Sciences, for example our plans to expand into China. If EDPS would get into any kind of trouble, the societies would not have been able to support us. Also, but more importantly, they did not have the funds to invest in us in order to allow us to grow and develop more quickly and go further in Open Access. To develop, EDPS needed to make investments, and the societies didn’t have the resources to support that.’

Opportunities, considerations and choices

Looking back, Henri reflects on how EDPS being a production more than a publishing house affected its ability to grow. ‘Our main problem is that 20 years ago, we were not really a publishing house, but more a production house. We had journals, produced them, sold the subscriptions, but we had no

editorial vision. We should have thought more about how to build a consistent and stronger portfolio in a certain field, instead of spreading across many disciplines.’

When Open Access as a publishing model gained strength, EDPS faced new challenges. ‘At the time, when I joined EDPS 25 years ago, the impact factor was of no importance. Now, it is what is driving everybody, despite initiatives like DORA. So it is very difficult to start a new Open Access journal, because you are not indexed, and the stronger players here are Clarivate and Scopus. They are dominant, and we are too small to be considered by them when we launch new journals. Even if we do a good job and follow all the rules.’

‘So, in hindsight, we should have focused more on an editorial strategy 20 years ago. Where we actually put our efforts and money was in technology, building a proprietary platform, a proprietary submission tool. This helped us build a reputation of quality service with the societies. But growing and sustaining our publishing activities was a major challenge for EDP Sciences.’

So in 2016, the shareholders took the decision that they wanted to sell EDPS and started looking for a strong partner to keep the company alive and give us a chance to develop. We had discussions with several international publishers. We quickly realised, however, that these publishers would simply have taken the titles from EDP Sciences and brought them into their own portfolios, and would have closed the company in France and consequently EDPS would have ceased to exist. It was important to our shareholders that EDP Sciences, its brand and its staff remained, and would be supported with its development, not closed and the business absorbed elsewhere.'

In 2017, discussions started with CSPM (China Science Publishing & Media Ltd., popularly known as Science Press), the publishing arm of the Chinese Academy of Sciences (CAS). The serious negotiations started two years ago and at the end of 2019 the four societies sold their shares to CSPM who became the full owner of EDP Sciences. Whilst this may not be such a long time in terms of a company purchase, to the staff it was a long time.

Consequences of current funding model

'CSPM wanted to invest in EDP Sciences and keep the company as it is in France, and help it to develop. EDP Sciences regards itself as an international publisher, and the Chinese CSPM

was looking for an international publisher based in Europe, in order to have a European branch. They are in it for the long-term, and acquiring EDP Sciences is probably a small step in their long-term strategy. They are proud to be the owner of the publisher of Marie Curie and to be the first Chinese publisher with a European base and there are not so many European societies with our reputation.' We were also proud to have been chosen by a subsidiary of the Chinese Academy of Sciences, a top scientific institution in the world.

The academic community's response to acquisition by CSPM has not been entirely favourable, Henri admits. 'In our community in France, the reaction was not very positive in the beginning. There was even a petition on the web of researchers handed to the prime minister to stop the acquisition. But when the shareholders came to the community to explain that the future is uncertain, the sustainability is difficult and so on, people understood. But in some communities, there was this initial negative reaction, there was even a critical article in Le Monde.'

Henri sees no negative sides, however. 'The cooperation is very recent (November 2019), and COVID hasn't helped with visiting and meeting each other, but what we see is that CSPM is very respectful and don't want to interfere in our publication process and

relationship with our customers. It's only at the beginning; in a couple of years we'll know more. At the moment, the communication is a bit difficult, as both parties are non-native English-speaking and French and Chinese cultures are quite different. So we have to learn a lot about each other in order to go far in the cooperation.'

Future vision for sustainability

Although EDPS is rapidly exploring new Open Access models, subscriptions still form an important part of its income. 'We're in this transition to Open Access, and 40% of our revenue is still from subscriptions, so this is an important component of our income. But we are committed to Open Access and look into all possibilities to do so. Different approaches will be needed across disciplines: biology is certainly not like mathematics in this respect.'

Now owned by a Chinese company, EDPS is looking to expand into Open Access publishing in China. 'We all know that China is now the number one country in the world in terms of research output, and they invest a lot of money in research. So, they will help us to develop our portfolio and Open Access business in China. For that, with the support of Science Press, we have just hired three staff in Beijing to support editorial and marketing operations. They will also help us to contact institutions in China, as the Chinese

government recently announced that they want their researchers to also publish in their domestic journals, and we will be in contact with institutions who want to launch their own journal. We can provide our experience to build Open Access journals, regardless of the model (e.g. gold, diamond).'

The Managing Director of EDP Sciences sees this as a mutually beneficial situation: 'For us it really means we can develop our company and sustainability through our collaboration with CSPM. This is a true win-win partnership.'

Five years from now, Henri hopes to be sustainable, 'in that we have a sound and solid revenue model for Open Access that covers our costs for providing services, regardless of the model (gold, diamond or anything else). We will definitely have a portfolio in Open Access and will be a service provider for societies; we will publish journals, have a web platform and tools, and provide editorial advice to help journals grow. So, we want to be 100% Open Access and a publishing service provider to the scientific community, including the Chinese scientific community.'

'I expect our relationship with CSPM to be

strong and stable, as they have a very long-term vision. They aim to become the most innovative and reputable publisher which is why I can imagine them also acquiring other non-Chinese companies in the future.'

Advice for peers

Henri explains that EDPS's vision is strongly influenced by trying to change the traditional publishing hierarchy of academic journals. 'The main problem in publishing today is the evaluation of researchers and the evaluation of journals, which go together. We need something different than a journal level stamp. What is important is your paper and what is in your paper, rather than the reputation of the journal where it is published. For me this is the main issue and the origin of all our problems.'

Henri cautions publishers against resisting change. 'Work with the researcher. Listen to what they want, and be aligned with them. I see publishers who are against Open Access and against repositories. You can't stay in these old positions. To drive your company and bring value-added service, you have to listen to the community and understand what they want.'