Exploring mutuality

A report on independent open access publications in the social sciences

Mutual aid
Mutual learning
Mutual reliance

report prepared by
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LIBRARIA | *Est. 2015*

☞ *A cooperative approach to scholarly publishing in the social sciences*

"Cooperate for Open posits that, for a certain set of publications, stability and space to innovate are better achieved through the forging of social infrastructure."

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Executive summary

In early 2020, Libraria received support from a group of U.S. research libraries to pursue a feasibility study for the Cooperate for Open project. The project, which focused on born-OA, diamond OA, and/or scholar-led open access publications in anthropology and adjacent fields, aimed to identify a model for sustaining these publications, while reducing the risk and workload often associated with this segment of the publishing landscape.

This feasibility study gathered data through a survey conducted in late 2020, which resulted in 53 responses, and a series of discussion groups held in January 2021 with a total of sixteen individuals representing seventeen publications. As the findings outlined below demonstrate, the publications represented in this study present a cohort defined by difference in certain respects, but united in shared motivations and priorities.

Key findings of the study include:

- The majority of our participants intentionally chose to remain between, or outside of, institutional funding arrangements because they prefer autonomy to the strictures often imposed by funders' requirements.
- Participants were more interested in expanding their capacity through experimentation that pushed the boundaries of their fields or otherwise marked their publications as unique, rather than establishing support for day-to-day operation costs.
- While pre-existing ties among participating publications were limited, participants were enthusiastic about developing relationships with peer publications.

This report argues that leveraging the diverse strengths and resources of this cohort of publications calls for an approach defined by cooperation and reciprocal support. The conceptual framework that most closely reflected the aspirations and principles shared by participant publications was that of mutual aid. Mutual aid can be said to prioritize forms of support and care offered within a community—where support is not predicated on adherence to norms or standards, and resources are directed toward local or context-driven solutions.

Situated among a growing number of initiatives and networks formed to support open-access publications through the provision of technical infrastructure and novel business models, Cooperate for Open posits that, for a certain set of publications, stability and space to innovate are better achieved through the forging of social infrastructure. The report provides a set of recommendations for next steps that Libraria could take in the coming year tailored to facilitate the development of a community of practice among these publications, including establishing a community-owned knowledge base, a seed grant program for supporting experimentation, and toolkits targeted at particular issues this cohort faces, such as burnout and reliance on volunteer labor. Using cooperation as a guiding principle, participating publications will have the opportunity to build ties of mutuality and, ultimately, reliance, through shared resources and dialogue.

Among the benefits of cooperation highlighted by participants, perhaps the most promising was that of speaking with a unified voice to surface the distinctive perspectives and orientation toward scholarly publishing that these diverse publications share. As one participant noted, "a unified voice is necessary to show that there is something happening now. That this is not just a few people having fun with their little journals, but that it's a larger wave of change."

Introduction

Libraria is an advocacy and consulting network of researchers, formed in 2015 following a flurry of interest and advocacy around open access within the discipline of anthropology. These public conversations coincided with calls for alternatives to partnerships with for-profit publishers that included models like a publishing cooperative, which had been circulating at least since Raym Crow's (2006) persuasive argument that a cooperative would better reflect a conceptualization of society-owned journals as a discipline's shared resources. By 2015 Libraria's co-founders, Alberto Corsín Jiménez, John Willinsky, and Giovanni da Col had weighed in on what a discipline-wide approach to open access might look like (Corsín Jiménez, Boyer, et al. 2015; Corsín Jiménez, Willinsky, et al. 2015). In the same year, Libraria's first research project brought together publishing organizations in anthropology and archaeology[1] to explore opportunities for "flipping" subscription titles to open access in a coordinated way.

In the years since, Libraria has conducted research projects in different corners of the open access landscape, all motivated by the same question: What does it mean to support open access publishing? In the course of these varying projects, Libraria's work has been shaped by the recognition that open access looks different at various scales, and that publications need models calibrated to their institutional and intellectual context.

Cooperate for Open

This study brings to bear Libraria's experience with the cooperative model,[2] newly focused on a specific intersection of born-OA publications, diamond OA publications, and scholar-led open access publications that, in one way or another, do not fit neatly with conventional expectations of scholarly journals. This intersection of publications demonstrates the many affinities and differences that cross-cut the open access ecosystem.

Born-OA represents an inclusive category of open access publications in that it is defined only in opposition to flipped journals: i.e., journals that once operated on a subscription or paywall model, but then became open access. As such, born-OA publications are quite heterogeneous. For some regions where open access infrastructure has been established for decades (Latin America, in particular), there are many prestigious and well-established journals that were born-OA. By comparison, in contexts without that level of infrastructural support, born-OA signals relatively young publications established expressly as open access pioneers, as well as online-only publications that never had a reason to establish a subscription model. To complicate matters further, in the past decade or so there has been a boom in born-OA journals created by for-profit publishers to harvest article processing charges or APCs en masse, some of which "mirror" and trade on the reputation of prestigious non-OA journals.

Diamond open access is a comparatively specific designation in that it differentiates not-for-profit OA publications from the recent co-optation of gold open access models by for-profit publishers to generate revenue through APCs.[3] As the cOAlition S study of diamond OA journals notes, almost all diamond OA journals are born-OA journals, which in turn signals that diamond OA functions as a specific designation, highlighting its separation from for-profit publishing actors (Bosman, Frantsvåg, et al. 2021: 7). Scholar-led is also a relatively new designation. As with diamond OA, scholar-led is by definition nonprofit, and more specifically refers to cases where researchers maintain primary decision-making roles.[4] Scholar-led represents a unique badge held by those participating in a scholar-led countermovement to for-profit scholarly publishing and professionalized publishing more broadly.

Each of these designations gestures to its own community of practitioners and models of support, and there is a significant degree of similarity, if not outright overlap, among them. Many of these publications are backstopped to some extent by research-performing institutions like universities; however, the publications highlighted in this report tend to be precariously situated beside, rather than within, existing frameworks of support, with minimal or no operating budget. While, as this report will discuss, this can be a strategic decision to remain unfettered to a single funder, platform, or model, there are also clear consequences. Because larger-scale and society-owned journals are readily identifiable to Plan S and other top-down initiatives, there is a concern that independent publications of various shapes and sizes may fall through the cracks. It is precisely because of this illegibility that such publications are more vulnerable to disappear[5] or to be subsumed into the growing apparatus of for-profit OA. While much attention has been paid to flipping highly visible journals to open access, less attention has been paid to this more diffuse, less institutionalized community that has operated in the open with varying degrees of capacity over the past two decades.

Rather than downplaying differences for the sake of fitting these publications into a pre-existing mold, Libraria aims to find a model to sustain these publications and allow them to continue experimenting, while reducing the risk or workload associated with their operation. By establishing a cohort that invites difference rather than expecting conformity, this project seeks to leverage the diverse strengths and resources of these publications by facilitating cooperation and reciprocal support.

Reengaging scholars and repoliticizing open access

In September 2019, Libraria participated in a workshop at the London School of Economics, "Academic Freedom, Academic Integrity and Open Access in the Social Sciences." Organized by Andrea Pia, the workshop brought together nearly a dozen open access publications from this intersection of born-OA publications, diamond OA publications, and scholar-led open access publications in anthropology and adjacent fields, as well as OA platforms and publishers, to discuss the role of scholar-publishers in the humanities and social sciences. Through the conversations that ensued, participants developed a clear consensus that the publications they represent should seek support through a community of peers who, together, might better address the distinctive challenges they each faced.

The following year, participants in the workshop published a manifesto articulating their shared convictions. This text, "Labour of Love: An Open Access Manifesto for Freedom, Integrity, and Creativity in the Humanities and Interpretive Social Sciences," outlines their frustrations in complying with a system that does not reflect their intellectual engagements, as well as their investment in building toward alternatives (Pia, Batterbury, et al. 2020). Two of the manifesto's themes trace a throughline from the initial conversations at the LSE workshop to the Cooperate for Open project: (1) to repoliticize open access and (2) to reengage researchers as the primary agents of scholarly communication.

"Repoliticizing open access" references the critical work of researchers to challenge the all too seamless shift of open access into a new, for-profit model dominated by the same oligopoly of publishers. When open access is reduced to yet another frontier to be commoditized, a more expansive history of open access as part of radical, experimental publishing is lost.[6] Here, open access is more than just a means of distribution; it is, instead, the baseline for broader social, intellectual, and ethical projects. While enabling open access could thus be interpreted as a technocratic fix, it could also be interpreted more expansively as fostering the sociality of researchers working together to publish differently. This more capacious understanding of open access situates its work among political projects that extend beyond access as such, including fair labor practices and the decolonization of knowledge.

"Reengaging researchers as primary agents" refers to the importance of facilitating such discussions among researchers themselves. Particularly in disciplines like anthropology, science and technology studies, and media studies that are critically engaged with the form and function of scholarly publishing, the importance of engaging scholars, and, in particular, editors as scholar-publishers, in transformative efforts is clear. Building a community of practice *among*, rather than a set of best practices *for*, these actors may not only enable open access, but enrich it by bringing the critical perspective of their disciplines to bear on publishing so as to imagine robust alternatives.

While aspirations for alternatives propel such efforts forward, these can often outpace the deliberate growth necessary to build a sustainable publication. As Jason Baird Jackson (2018) and Ilana Gershon (2018) identified amid the fallout from the *HAU* scandal, open access projects bear burdensome expectations to build themselves "bigger, better, faster," as they are expected to meet the metrics and standards of the very system that some see themselves as working against.

As Janneke Adema and Samuel Moore (2021) note, expectations for consistently increasing scale fail to acknowledge the non-scalable aspects of small projects, or add to already overburdened workloads of early career scholars. For such publications, building toward capacity or increasing scale can in fact narrow potential futures, since markers of success that are defined by the market often lead back to market-based solutions. Given these cautions, a future for these publications might better be defined by resilience and flexibility as a means to sustainability, allowing for experimental iteration so that each publication can set its own pace.

When searching for a conceptual framework that would encompass these motivations and principles, we arrived at mutual aid. Mutual aid can be said to prioritize forms of support and care offered within a community—where support is not predicated on adherence to norms or standards, and resources are directed toward local or context-driven solutions. The structure of mutual aid networks also serves as a means of building scale for a support structure without expecting nodes of the network to scale up themselves. The benefits of using this framework are discussed further below.

Developing a social infrastructure

The technological infrastructure that has been built in support of enabling small-scale journals has grown immensely over the years, due in large part to open infrastructure projects and increasing library support. Cooperate for Open, as a complement to such work, seeks to supplement that technological layer with a social infrastructure to support communities of publications such as the cohort identified for the purpose of this feasibility study. By augmenting horizontal bonds and emphasizing experimentation and mutual learning among a cohort of publications in anthropology and adjacent fields, Cooperate for Open is well-positioned to demonstrate that, in such collaborative spaces, it is the relationships themselves that prove transformative (Adema and Moore 2021).

On this terrain, Libraria is positioned to mobilize support for, and lay the foundations of, a cooperative. In early 2020, Libraria received support from a group of U.S. research libraries to carry out a feasibility study seeking to answer the following research questions. The findings and recommendations outlined in this report will articulate how this could be accomplished in the coming year.

Feasibility study questions

1. How do we support a cohort of publications defined by difference rather than similarity? Specifically, how do we support scholarly publications in their many forms of experimentation rather than presuming they will adhere to the conventional form of a journal?
2. What does building capacity and sustainability mean for this cohort of publications?
3. How do we build away from the precarity and serendipity that tenuously hold these publications together?
4. Where are their needs, and how can resources most efficiently be brought to bear in meeting them?
5. What might mutual aid among born-OA, diamond OA, and scholar-led publications look like?

Review of comparable studies and initiatives

This study was informed by a series of reports, studies, and surveys of the open access landscape in the social sciences and beyond that have, over the past decade, yielded a set of shared priorities and principles:

- Importance of providing direct support for the production of open scholarship rather than using mechanisms such as APCs (Fuchs and Sandoval 2013) or subscriptions (Reinsfelder and Pike 2018; Holcombe and Wilson 2017).
- Importance of building on partnerships defined by shared priorities outside of for-profit entities, e.g., research libraries, university presses, and library publishers (Kennison and Norburg 2014).
- Importance of pooling resources in community-owned projects that resist monopolization by for-profit actors in order to facilitate an alternative economy for open access that aligns with principles and values of the scholarly community (Aspesi, Allen, et al. 2019; Skinner and Wipperman 2020).
- Importance of building flexible systems that reduce duplication of effort and demands for resources (Alperin, Fischman, and Willinsky 2008).

These principles have animated a number of cooperatively inclined solutions over the past several years, including projects that pull like-minded open access journals into networks such as the Fair Open Access Alliance, the Free Journals Network, and the Radical Open Access Collective. There have also been significant successes in the use of cooperative models, most notably with the Open Library of Humanities cost-pooling model. The Cooperate for Open study serendipitously coincided with the cOAlition S-funded OPERAS survey of diamond open access journals, which provided a comprehensive assessment of diamond journals and further informed the more specific focus of this study (Becerril, Bosman, et al. 2021; Bosman, Frantsvåg, et al. 2021).

While this study is heavily indebted to insights derived from these other projects and initiatives, Cooperate for Open's perspective offers an alternative approach to building capacity and sustainability. Many initiatives and resources are available to enable born-OA and diamond OA journals to further formalize and establish themselves as legible scholarly journals. As the cOAlition S study identified, there are thousands of journals running on open infrastructure tools like OJS that rely on the further availability of resources to facilitate their adherence to best practices and to mandates such as Plan S.[7]

However, there are also a significant number of scholarly publications that have intentionally set themselves apart from the increasing formalization and standardization of the journal form. These publications might appear to be the most precarious, unsustainable corner of the open access ecosystem, and yet such assessments are all but predetermined when the metrics used to map that ecosystem presuppose the intended goal. All too often structuring metaphors of landscape surveys or assessments can lead us to focus on a comparative lack of resources or on absent markers of prestige or impact.

According to the standards and assumptions that undergird such approaches, too many of the open access experiments highlighted in this study appear to fall short. Yet these publications collectively demonstrate that vital, rigorous scholarship is not only found behind paywalls or stamped with impact factors. Instead, it is often the case that publications deviating from, or experimenting with, the form of the scholarly journal offer a much needed counterweight, providing the basis for a promising alternative economy for the valuation of scholarship.

If we shift our focus to center the engagement and curiosity of scholar-publishers, and the experimental projects that result from it, as a resource for sustaining a more diverse publishing ecosystem, then we see that this corner of the ecosystem is thriving. Such projects flourish in anthropology, science and technology studies, and other disciplines that are well-situated to engage critically with the technocratic apparatus that structures most academic publishing. This nascent community of practice could figure as a site for the collaborative redefinition of best practices that better reflect the priorities of the community themselves, rather than metrics and standards imposed upon them. The question then becomes how best to enable these publications themselves to lead, and to position the scholar-publishers behind them as agents in defining alternate paths for scholarly publishing.

Methodological notes

The feasibility study was designed in the fall of 2020 and carried out from November 2020 through January 2021. The priorities for the feasibility study were to identify potential participants, gauge their interest in participating in a cooperative, and then use their feedback to design a cooperative model that would best fit their needs.

Study participants, selection criteria, and data collection

Publications selected for potential participation were identified through two methods. Publications that participated in the 2019 LSE workshop that catalyzed this project were automatically invited to participate, which resulted in the participation of 6 publications. Publications identified through the search strategy described below resulted in the other 26 participating publications.[8]

The selection criteria were established iteratively during the course of the search. We tried to avoid setting hard-and-fast exclusion criteria up front, though some concessions were made given the scope of the feasibility study. The most significant limitation resulted from the primary researcher's own language ability, which effectively limited participation in the study to publications either publishing or operating in English—though it did not foreclose the possibility of non-English publications participating in Cooperate for Open down the line.[9] Despite this limitation, we did reach out to potential participants at non-English publications, and in some

cases the point of contact was able to participate in the study in English. The study was open to participants regardless of location.

From the outset, the Cooperate for Open project sought to identify a unique community of open access publications that prioritize experimental forms of publishing and the independence needed to engage in them. Because these features correspond to a qualitative assessment of any given publication and how it is structured, we developed criteria that would act as proxy indicators. The selection criteria were also informed by earlier studies (Naim, Stranack, and Willinsky 2017; Bell 2017) that informed our best estimates of who would be receptive to considering a cooperative model.

The first, and arguably most clearly defined, criteria was that the publication's content should be open access, and moreover should reflect Fuchs and Sandoval's definition of diamond open access: "not-for-profit, non-commercial organizations, associations or networks [that] publish material that is made available online in digital format, is free of charge for readers and authors and does not allow commercial and for-profit re-use" (2013: 438).[10] We therefore excluded open access journals owned or published by for-profit publishers, open access models reliant on APCs, and those with embargos.

We then limited our search to publications in the interpretive social sciences. Reflecting Libraria's own center of gravity in the discipline of anthropology, the search began with a comprehensive evaluation of open access anthropology journals,[11] and then expanded to lists of open access publications in adjacent fields. We also used membership lists from relevant open access networks (e.g., Radical OA, Free Journals Network), and recommendations from participating publications over the course of the study.

We were most interested in publications that were scholar-led, with multiple touch points at which researchers were the ones making decisions about the publication. We excluded publications that were primarily initiatives of a single institution, such as "house journals." We also excluded publications with full-service agreements with publishers of any kind, while we included others that had piecemeal arrangements with university presses, and publications that were hosted or otherwise supported by library publishers.[12]

When we look at these primary criteria, we can see a core group, as well as many publications that only fit some of our criteria. While it was not necessary to actively exclude publications that did not fit these expectations, we did prioritize reaching out to publications that met two or more of the above criteria.

This search resulted in the development of a database of 386 publications, of which 187 publications matched, or nearly matched, these criteria (48% of publications).[13] This database also documents the reasons that certain publications were excluded for the purposes of the feasibility study so that, if other users wish to apply different criteria, the search does not need to begin from scratch. The most prevalent reasons for exclusion were that the publication had lapsed or was on hiatus, or that the publication was not independent or scholar-led, which included open access journals owned or published by for-profit publishers.

Invitations to participate

Invitations to participate were sent in three batches. In mid-October, eight publications were contacted (all participants in the LSE workshop), which resulted in six participants. From the first batch of publications identified through our search in mid-November, 61 publications were contacted, which resulted in 11 additional participants. From the second and final batch in mid-December, 64 publications were contacted, which resulted in 15 additional participants.

Throughout the study we were mindful that many, if not all, of the individuals we were contacting were under considerable strain due to the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, especially given that we were contacting them in relation to a publication to which they were likely voluntarily committing their time and resources. During the course of the study, we were conscientious to leave the door open for participants to opt in later than expected, or for publications to register interest without being able to commit to participation in the feasibility study. Still, our recruitment strategy did result in a significant rate of participation—the first batch garnered an 18% response rate and the second a 23% response rate. Overall, 133 invitations to participate resulted in 32 participants (24% response rate).

Survey

The survey instrument was organized around four domains in which a cooperative could conceivably provide benefits to participants.[14] These domains were:

- Knowledge sharing
- Labor sharing
- Cooperatively-sourced funding
- Cooperatively-owned tools and infrastructure

Respondents were asked to indicate which domain(s) would be of interest to them and the publications they represented. Each domain was then broken down further, and respondents could also offer their own ideas in an open response field.

In total, the survey yielded 74 recorded responses, 68 of which consented to the privacy notice and 53 of which completed the survey.[15] The survey could be completed anonymously, and just 32 of the 53 complete responses provided contact information and thus connected their responses to the publications they represented. We further guaranteed that all public presentations of the survey data would be given in aggregated and anonymized form. The survey responses were inconclusive in and of themselves, but demonstrated interest and provided the basis to begin conversations.

Discussion groups

In January, every individual that signaled interest in the discussion groups was asked to respond to a poll with their availability, and subsequently five meeting times were established across time zones. Sixteen individuals participated,[16] in addition to the two moderators from Libraria. An additional six individuals indicated that they would participate, but were unable to attend day-of.

All five discussions were held over Zoom, in English. The audio of each meeting was recorded and transcribed for internal use only.

The findings that follow are based on the survey results (n=53) and the comments made by participants in discussion groups (n=16). Questions asked during the discussion groups fell into the same four domains as the survey questions, and the findings section of this report is organized around these four categories. This study was not intended to make claims about open access social science publications in general, but to identify a particular subset of publications in order to determine their needs and interests. Consequently, the findings below present ideas mentioned just once alongside others that were mentioned several times; we note the relative strength of different findings where relevant.

Through the recruitment process it was clear that there was a high degree of self-selection in responding to our invitation. The participants who not only responded to the survey, but also gave an hour of their time in discussion groups, represented an invested core group willing to volunteer further time in pursuit of building toward a cooperative together. The ideas they generated, not only as individuals in conversation with one another, are instructive as to the needs of small-scale open access publications and provide a roadmap for next steps.

Study findings

Over the course of this study, some participants expressed hesitations about whether they should be included at all, fearing that their publication's deviation from the form of the traditional scholarly journal would make them outliers. In describing their publications, they would identify as "a tiny zine journal" or qualify the position of their publication as one that "sits - oddly, I would say - at the cusp of academic, academic journal and public-facing scholarship." Far from identifying them as outliers, though, these and other comments signaled precisely the open-ended, experimental mode that we sought to identify:

> "[We are] a very small journal that has a pretty low ... low-flying sounds unambitious. We're ambitious, but we're just not particularly concerned with an endpoint, or a destination in terms of what the journal looks like."

> "We are kind of experimenting to see what's going to happen."

Some participants represented the relatively staid, well-established journals of scholarly associations strongly rooted in state-provisioned infrastructure, while others are more akin to small, experimental DIY publications—labors of love held together by a few dedicated scholar-publishers. Most participants fell somewhere in between, adhering to the form of a scholarly journal in some ways and finding opportunities to experiment in others. This cohort of journals proved to be an ecology unto itself that exemplifies the kind of diversity necessary for a thriving

ecosystem (Barnes and Gatti 2019; Shearer, Chan et al. 2020). Through both the survey and discussion groups, study participants reported interest in working together in the following domains.

Knowledge sharing

Knowledge sharing accrued the most interest in the survey, with 42 of 53 respondents indicating interest in knowledge sharing in one form or another; however, there was less evidence of pre-existing horizontal connections among publications than expected. If participants did have connections with peer publications, these tended to be content-based collaborations (through coediting special editions or sharing content across platforms) or otherwise hinged on serendipitous connections between individuals. This was reinforced by several comments indicating that relationships with others at comparable publications were the result of happenstance rather than intentional networking; one participant noted, "it just so happens, we have a friendship with some of the people who publish that journal," while another said, "people know each other somehow."

Despite the relative absence of intentional connections made for the sake of mutual support, there was considerable interest in establishing such relationships. When asked about doing so, participants prioritized creating community among like-minded publications. This was also reflected in the interest in the survey response "Knowledge sharing within cohorts of similar publications" (29 respondents) as compared to "Knowledge sharing among all members of a cooperative" (20 respondents). Elsewhere, it became clear that interest in building community with similar publications was not only around similar content, but also in terms of shared principles. For instance, "like-minded" was a term used in opposition to "profit-oriented," with one participant emphasizing selectivity in what other publications they would "associate" with. Another noted: "I think these are the kinds of networks that we think of when we want to be part of, you know, projects that are close to our philosophy."

Participants indicated interest in discussing best practices and standards around topics specific to the publishing process (e.g., DOIs, preservation, accessibility), as well as wanting to have space for conversations inflected by critique and the possibility of alternatives. Strategic planning was mentioned several times as a benefit of engagement with peer publications—in particular, with longstanding open access journals that could act as mentors.

Labor sharing

There was considerably less interest in exploring potential models for labor sharing than anticipated. While 21 of 53 survey respondents indicated interest in some form of labor sharing, in discussion groups a distinction was introduced between labor that editors felt comfortable taking on themselves (e.g., copyediting), labor that may typically be part of the publishing process but that was not seen as strictly necessary (e.g., typesetting), and very specialized labor that garnered the most interest. This distinction narrowed discussion of labor sharing to specialized knowledge sharing more akin to consulting (e.g., legal advice, specific accessibility-related concerns).

Only one survey respondent indicated interest in sharing a managing editor, and there was no other mention of labor sharing for core positions at publications. Interest in opportunities for sharing labor focused more on additional capacities, like translation (both in to and out of English) and developmental editing (particularly for authors who were not native English speakers). These suggestions flagged an interest in building out capacities in ways that addressed inequity in publishing and engaged broader publics, rather than meeting the day-to-day needs of the publication.

Shared funding

While 29 of 53 survey respondents signaled interest in cooperatively-sourced funding, participants in the discussion groups were not especially eager to delve into the details of a shared revenue model, in line with Bell's findings (2017). As one participant put it, "we are less interested in sharing money or resources because we don't have them." A notable exception was participants' interest in applying for third-party funding as a cooperative. In general, participants had more interest in discussing sharing costs than pooling revenues, which is reflected in the subsections above and below on labor sharing and shared infrastructure/tools.

While the idea of shared funding models was not a high priority, the participants' comments about their selection of funding mechanisms was enlightening and provided some of the most useful insight into the context in which these publications operate. For many participants, funding was not presented as an unalloyed good and comprehensive support from a single entity was not seen as desirable. Though this study intentionally sought out journals precariously situated among, or outside of, funding sources, we had not anticipated that for most participants this was an intentional decision. Based on comments in the discussion groups, most sources of funding were perceived as having too many strings attached and were associated with limitations and an undue burden of reporting. A significant amount of time in discussion groups was spent in explaining the particular context relevant to each publication and a review of the most likely sources of support, typically followed by reasons that the publication had decided against pursuing funding through those sources.

Often, funders were not seen as ideal partners for participants because their priorities were not understood to be aligned with those of the publication. In some cases, national funders would support local language publications only, or alternatively would only support English-language publication for the sake of international visibility. Other funders required impact factors, or other metrics that would have necessitated a shift in the publication's form or format. In each of these cases, the participants indicated it was better to maintain autonomy than to receive funding. While university support was often more flexible, participants emphasized that funding was generally tied to the editor's position at that university or to an editorial board member's affiliation. By comparison, university library support (most often mentioned in conjunction with an instance of OJS) was seen as beneficial without introducing limitations, beyond maintaining some affiliation to that library's parent institution.

Shared infrastructure and tools

25 of 53 respondents signaled interest in shared infrastructure and/or tools, but conversation in discussion groups demonstrated limited interest. Interest generally fit into two categories: interest in larger projects for visibility or discoverability and interest in developing shared resources. The latter could easily be folded into the discussion of knowledge sharing among participating publications above. Participants were particularly interested in collaboratively developing shared resources like toolkits that integrate basic information with "practical advice" tailored to their scholar-publisher perspective.

In regards to larger projects, several participants emphasized that, to them, open access was closely tied to public-facing scholarship and making researchers' perspectives available to supplement and inform public conversations. These suggestions, in terms of infrastructure, all center on visibility and discoverability. Similarly, 15 survey respondents indicated interest in "Searchable portal of publications, with each on its own platform," which was borne out by comments made in discussion groups regarding the sharing of new issues or any web-first content the publication might generate.

Participants also indicated interest in forming peer groups among publications using the same platform (this suggestion was only mentioned in relation to OJS) to collaboratively troubleshoot, "crowdsource solutions," and potentially advocate for new capacities.

Emerging themes and priorities

The intention of this feasibility study was to identify the needs that must be met in order for participating publications to increase capacity and build toward sustainability. However, it quickly became clear that the publishing industry's standard definition of increased capacity (i.e., more issues, more articles, quantifiably more content) was not at all how these publications approached capacity. Instead, when asked what was next for their publication, several participants described small experiments that they hoped to have the time or resources to carry out. Instead of defining stability through growing in size, participants described carving out a specific role or specialty within the ecosystem of their discipline's publications. From this perspective, it was easier to understand why there was little to no competitive undertone when discussing sharing knowledge or skills among peer publications. For the participants of this study, becoming more unique held more promise than meeting the expectations of a traditional scholarly journal, and vying for status and readers through impact factors and rankings.

Participants articulated potential benefits of a cooperative as a body that could, through a unified voice, better articulate the quality and academic rigor of the publications as a cohort. Beyond peer knowledge-sharing, which could arguably be accomplished without a formal cooperative structure, nearly all of the benefits mentioned by participants were closely tied to visibility. As one

participant noted, association with other like-minded publications was a "badge" one chose to wear, and this "badge" of high-quality, open access content not only carried with it a certain cachet, but often had value in itself by counteracting the persistent assumption that open access publications lack the academic rigor of their paywalled counterparts. For potential funders and grant opportunities who often expect impact factors and other metrics to indicate what publications are well-regarded in their field, operating as a cooperative with shared standards could better communicate the quality of scholarship appearing in these publications as a cohort. For one participant, a unified voice was necessary "to show that there is something happening now. That this is not just a few people having fun with their little journals, but that it's a larger wave of change."

A mutual aid framework

Many existing frameworks that address cooperation and collaboration among peers could be relevant to the problem space described in this report, but in thinking about the project's distinctive priorities—both those established at the outset and those that emerged in the course of the feasibility study—the framework that most closely reflected the aspirations and principles shared by participant publications was that of mutual aid.

Mutual aid is by no means a new concept, but has gained new relevance during the COVID-19 pandemic. Peer-to-peer aid provides the timely interventions needed in the face of persistent problems and failures endemic to the larger systems that structure ongoing crises. As we are now in the thirtieth year of the "serials crisis," the relevance of this concept to the increasingly profit-driven scholarly communication ecosystem may already be clear, but there are a few points particular to the mutual aid framework that are worth drawing out further.

- *Resources should not be provided with preconditions or requirements imposed by external parties.* In the context of open access publishing, this point echoes participants' concerns about seeking funding that realigns the priorities of the publication or places an undue burden through reporting requirements. However, this would not prevent peers within the network from establishing expectations for members in order to maintain value-aligned cohesion.
- *Peers provide resources and assistance through transparency and consensus.* In mutual aid, progress is made through the equal participation of peers and shared responsibility for decision-making on some agreed-upon set of issues. Building toward a structure of shared responsibility has the potential to alleviate the problem of burnout that plagues the many passion projects in open access that are wholly kept afloat by individuals and may pose the most significant threat to their sustainability.
- *Scaling up through sharing context-specific solutions.* Rather than providing one size fits all solutions, mutual aid networks develop a light framework whereby "governance and innovation are local, but knowledge, support, and solidarity are networked and shared" (Spade 2020: 41). This fosters cultures of learning and adaptation that promote experimentation with new possibilities.

Perhaps most importantly, a mutual aid framework would pose the question of how scholar-publishers and their allies might meet their needs in a way that moves them closer to the world they want, rather than letting their time and resources further support a system that undermines progress toward an alternative. The aim of the Cooperate for Open project is not only to enable these publications to continue publishing, but to help these publications build capacity as active participants in a community of practice. Through repoliticizing the means of publication and reengaging scholars as publishers, experimental publications such as these build toward a more diverse and inclusive ecosystem of open access publications and lay the groundwork for an alternative economy for the circulation and valuation of scholarship.

Piloting the cooperative

The final section of this report outlines a series of possible next steps for the Cooperate for Open project as informed by the study's findings, as well as insights derived from similar previous projects. Libraria would play an active role in six of the following eight steps, continuing its role as convenor and facilitator over the course of a pilot stage, during which responsibility gradually would shift to the participating publications. Central to the success of this pilot stage will be identifying and mobilizing a core of 4-6 individuals from participating publications who are committed to building a foundation that may enable a more resource- and trust-intensive cooperative model in later stages.

1 Build a community of practice

The aim of this first phase should be to facilitate a social infrastructure that can sit alongside the existing technical infrastructure of scholarly publishing. As Bell identified, "ultimately, cooperative scholarly publishing initiatives are trust- and relationship-building exercises, which take time to develop" (2017: 28). Following the study's finding that horizontal relationships among these publications were less prevalent than anticipated, facilitating stronger horizontal bonds and building out a network of interested publications should be the initiative's first priority.

☞ **Libraria should provide a knowledge base to aggregate previously published content about publishing from participating publications.**

Libraria could take the lead on curating a collection of articles and reflections on different aspects of publishing, particularly with the critical perspective in which participants indicated interest. As a shared resource, this corpus of previously published materials could indicate the range of

interests and perspectives held by other researchers who are actively invested in the publishing process. While in its initial stages this knowledge base could consist of an informal aggregation of articles, it could over time expand to include the mini toolkits described by participants: one-page summaries that combine basic knowledge and best practices. The knowledge base could also provide a more robust supplementary resource to libraries that may only have capacity to support their faculty's journals administratively. This aligns neatly with the cOAlition S report that recommended the establishment of a Capacity Centre, which could work as a federated or networked structure of smaller communities of practice (Becerril, Bosman, et al. 2021: 22). As one such smaller community of practice, the Cooperate for Open knowledge base could both contribute resources to larger resource centers, such as the cOAlition S Capacity Centre, as well as adapting resources provided by such entities to the specific context of their member publications.

👉 Libraria should organize conversations about the identified topics.

This knowledge base would identify both topics and names that could anchor conversations among participating publications. Potential topics mentioned in the course of the feasibility study included DOIs (and their relative availability to publications not tethered to a single institution or otherwise on the periphery of scholarly publishing) and the republication of open access materials under CC-BY licenses by other publishers for profit. Over the course of the pilot stage, Libraria could act as a facilitator for such conversations, potentially bringing in publishing professionals or experts from other fields. Recordings of these conversations could then be added to the knowledge base.

👉 Libraria should host a channel for regular interaction among interested publications.

In discussion groups, participants indicated interest in some means of communication that would be more robust than a mailing list. A Slack channel was suggested, as well as a semi-regular Zoom hour (while open-source alternatives to these particular tools could also be identified, such as Mattermost or Jitsi). Given the many time zones represented in the feasibility study alone, there may be good reason to have both a synchronous and asynchronous option for participation.

2 Ensure capacity for experimentation

As identified over the course of the study, building capacity for these publications means enabling them to pursue their intellectual projects, however these are defined. Key to ensuring capacity for experimentation is lowering the risk of potential failure for any given experiment. In a community of practice, every "failed" experiment has value through lessons learned. A cooperative model is well-positioned to mediate or share risk so that the stakes of any given experiment is never so high as to threaten the stability of a single publication.

☞ Libraria should provide seed grants for piloting small experiments (pending the availability of funds to regrant in this way).

If an experiment is deemed a success by the publication that receives a grant, then it would be asked to offer a workshop for other interested publications. If the experiment was deemed unsuccessful, the recipient would still be asked to host a discussion and/or produce documentation as to why, so that every experiment contributes to the growing knowledge base shared by the cooperative. As identified by Adema and Moore (2021: 37), these are exactly the kind of open, reusable experiments that are adapted and used by the broader scholar-publisher community, multiplying their impact. This structure could also be used to pilot labor sharing or other ideas that were met with limited interest during the feasibility study, or to provide test cases for other open infrastructure projects or tools in search of communities of users.

☞ Core participants could use this program to develop governance structures for allocating funds among cooperative members.

Study feedback indicated that the amount of time absorbed in applying for, or reporting to, funders for small grants such as these often outweighs the benefits of the funds. This seed grant program then represents an ideal test case for cooperative members to outline expectations and stipulations for a system of resource distribution that would not present undue burden.

3 Encourage models of support that preserve autonomy

As both our study participants and the mutual aid framework identified, stipulations on funding could interfere with the autonomy and self-determination that define these publications. Funding, in many ways, is an added benefit rather than a limiting factor for this cohort, and many of the participating publications have maintained autonomy through balancing several sources of support rather than just one. Understanding how these publications have woven together support—approaching certain institutions for certain kinds of support—is valuable in itself, and crucial for understanding this corner of OA publishing.

As many of the participants attested, receiving support based on the publication's specific context—whether that be a university department, university library, or national funding—helps develop relationships for further support and alliances. In reflection of this, the cooperative should not position itself as a singular replacement for present revenue, or as a competitor to collective funding exchanges that are already administered through entities like Knowledge Unlatched and LYRASIS. Instead, members should be encouraged to maintain their more diverse sources of support, and to build on those connections as value-aligned partnerships that will benefit the publication in the long term. This flexible structure better reflects a more diverse ecosystem with fluid communities and networks that come together for different purposes, but resist wholly merging for the sake of one integrated model or system.

☞ Libraria should initiate, and core participants direct, the development of toolkits focused on how to identify and approach potential sources of support.

First and foremost, these toolkits could emphasize how participating publications could frame quality and value outside of impact factors and metrics, engaging institutions as active partners in building an alternative economy for the circulation and valuation of scholarship. These toolkits could also demonstrate the viability of an "unbundled" model of sustainability for scholar-led open access publications (LaFlamme 2021).

It is worth noting that, if the cooperative project were to go no further than this pilot, the deliverables listed already would remain. The knowledge base would remain as a static resource for scholar-publishers and their allies, as would the documentation of past experiments. The connections made among individuals at participating publications would also remain, building social capital that could be leveraged for future advocacy efforts.

4 Develop community cohesion

In order to develop a strong foundation for a true cooperative, Libraria would need to give participating publications the opportunity to see for themselves what cooperation can (and cannot) provide before expecting significant time or resource commitment—as Bell noted, an expression of interest should be the outcome of the piloting stage rather than what precipitates it (2017). Each publication would likely have to consider how being an active member of a cooperative might reshape how they articulate their staff's roles and time commitments; reflecting feedback received during the course of this study, having predictable time commitments and outcomes will be pivotal.

☞ Libraria could facilitate, and core participants lead, discussions toward developing criteria for cooperative membership.

Relevant topics mentioned in the course of the feasibility study included how publications run by editorial collectives address governance issues and how to combat fatigue and build sustainable leadership models. Through these conversations, consensus among like-minded publications may develop such that there is a basis from which to formally establish criteria for membership, organizational structure, and sources of support.

☞ The core participants could draft, and seek consensus with other interested publications around, formal articles of incorporation.

The language used to characterize the cohort of participating publications will serve many functions in that, as discussed previously in differentiating between born-OA, diamond OA, and

scholar-led OA, finding a shorthand way to denote standards and principles will go a long way in conveying quality and value to potential supporters. In order to build a framework for an alternative economy for the circulation and valuation of scholarship, peer publications must establish together the authority for asserting the value of their work. These steps toward visibility as a cohort could be as low-level as designing branding like a logo, establishing a public-facing website, or taking steps toward more durable infrastructure such as a single platform to aggregate the cohort's content. These articles of incorporation could also benefit from current work, like the recently published COPIM landscape analysis of community governance structures (Moore 2021), that assesses the benefits and drawbacks of certain models.

Mutual aid, mutual learning, mutual reliance

Exploring the benefits of mutuality was a recurring theme throughout the Cooperate for Open feasibility study. Mutual aid provided the guiding framework to establish the terms on which publications might enter into reciprocally supportive relationships. Mutual learning, in turn, framed the collaborative and experimental space through which these publications could, together, develop a community of practice as a peer-owned and -managed resource. Finally, mutual reliance defines one horizon for a project that seeks to develop mutuality as a form of resilience and support among like-minded, scholar-led publications. While this outline of potential next steps leaves decisions in the hands of participating publications, it provides a starting point for establishing a publishing cooperative structured around the value of mutuality.

Notes

1 The journals and society publishers included the Wenner Gren Foundation (*Current Anthropology*), the European Association of Social Anthropologists (*Social Anthropology*), the Society for Cultural Anthropology (*Cultural Anthropology*), the European Association of Archaeologists (*European Journal of Archaeology*), the Society for the Anthropology of Work (*Anthropology of Work Review*), and the journals *Valuation Studies*, *Limn* and *Critique of Anthropology* (Bell 2017).

2 The PKP's Open Access Publishing Cooperative study (2015-2017) and the related study undertaken by Kirsten Bell (2017) have both informed the premise and assumptions of this feasibility study. Both projects were funded by the MacArthur Foundation and supported by the Public Knowledge Project.

3 The definition of diamond open access as provided by Fuchs and Sandoval is, "not-for-profit, non-commercial organizations, associations or networks [that] publish material that is made available online in digital format, is free of charge for readers and authors and does not allow commercial and for-profit re-use" (2013: 438).

4 For the purposes of this study, we used Lucy Barnes' definition of scholar-led (2018). While the Scholar-Led consortium (scholarled.org) is composed of open access *book* publishers, the definition does not preclude use of the term to describe journal publishers.

5 Often, without even provisions for digital preservation necessary to guard against the publication wholly vanishing (Laakso, Matthias, and Jahn 2021).

6 As exemplified by the alternative genealogies outlined by Moore (2020) and Kiesewetter (2020).

7 This is further supported by the recent report from the Arcadia-funded Next Generation Library Publishing project in which the majority of library publishing stakeholders identify interoperable, turnkey open infrastructure solutions (Ratan, Skinner, Mitchell, et al. 2021).

8 A list of all participating publications can be found in the appendix.

9 During the search for participants, relevant information was collected on potential participants at non-English publications so that later iterations of the project would be able to expand to additional language cohorts or caucuses.

10 This is perhaps one of the clearest divergences between the aims of Cooperate for Open and cOAlition S. While cOAlition S and the initiatives that it is considering in this space aim to bring diamond OA journals into compliance with Plan S (and therefore position them as open for commercial reuse), several participants in this study registered their concern with CC-BY licenses and flagged this as an issue that they hoped to engage with further.

11 This reflected the results of a DOAJ search for English-language anthropology journals, supplemented by Simon Batterbury's list of open access publications in anthropology, available at https://simonbatterbury.wordpress.com/2015/10/25/list-of-decent-open-access-journals/.

12 These piecemeal or limited arrangements could be anything short of a full-service publishing arrangement, for example publishing issues in print.

13 The database includes the cursory data collected on each of these publications in the course of assessing their fit for the feasibility study (URLs, short descriptions, platform type, etc.). If you or your organization would have use for this dataset, please contact join@libraria.cc.

14 A link to the full survey is included in the appendix.

15 A link to the compiled report of the 53 completed survey results is included in the appendix.

16 The full participant list is included in the appendix.

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Appendices

APPENDIX A. List of publications who demonstrated interest in participation through the survey:

1. *Anthropological Researches and Studies*
2. *Anthropology Matters*
3. *Approaching Religion*
4. *Cambridge Encyclopedia of Anthropology*
5. *Commoning Ethnography*
6. *Horizontes Antropológicos*
7. *Journal of Digital Social Research*
8. *Journal of Extreme Anthropology*
9. *Limn*
10. *NatureCulture*
11. *Shima: The International Journal of Research into Island Cultures*
12. *The International Indigenous Policy Journal*
13. *Cultural Anthropology*
14. *Otherwisemag*
15. *Allegra Lab*
16. *Anuac*
17. *British Journal of Chinese Studies*
18. *Made in China*
19. *Roadsides*
20. *Water Alternatives*
21. *Transformations: Journal of Media, Culture, and Technology*
22. *Identities*
23. *Glossa*
24. *Atlantis: Critical Studies in Gender, Culture & Social Justice*
25. *Dialogic Pedagogy*
26. *Fast Capitalism*
27. *Journal of Peer Production*
28. *On_Culture: The Open Journal for the Study of Culture*
29. *History of Media Studies / mediastudies.press*
30. *ACME: The International Journal for Critical Geographies*
31. *Fennia*
32. *International Education Journal: Comparative Perspectives*

APPENDIX B. Individuals who participated in discussion groups:

1. Ana Chiritou, representing *Anthropology Matters*
2. Eli Elinoff, part of the editorial collective of *Commoning Ethnography*
3. Agnieszka Joniak-Luthi, representing *Roadsides*
4. Tereza Kuldova, representing the *Journal of Extreme Anthropology*
5. Marco Di Nunzio, representing *Otherwise Mag*
6. Jessica Lockrem, representing *Cultural Anthropology*
7. Cristiane Miglioranza, representing *Horizontes Antropológicos*
8. Mathieu O'Neil, representing the *Journal of Peer Production*
9. Grant Otsuki, representing both the editorial team of *NatureCulture* and *eSTS*
10. Stanimir Panayotov, representing *Identities*
11. Andrea Pia, representing *Made in China*
12. Jeff Pooley, representing Libraria board, mediastudies.press and *History of Media Studies*
13. Johan Rooryck, representing cOAlition S and *Glossa*
14. Felix Stein, representing the Cambridge Encyclopedia of Anthropology
15. Gerda Wielander, representing the *British Journal of Chinese Studies*
16. Filippo Zerilli, representing *Anuac*

The survey instrument is available as supplemental material to the report (https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.4796764), as well as the survey results for all completed survey responses (https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.4813939).