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Fathallah, J.

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Open Access Monographs: Myths, Truths and Implications in the Wake of UKRI Open Access policy

Judith Fathallah

Publications and Research (Pure), Lancaster University, United Kingdom
j.fathallah@lancaster.ac.uk, orcid.org/0000-0003-0202-5749

Abstract

The UK Research and Innovation funding council announced its latest Open Access Policy on August 6, 2021. This policy applies to all UKRI funded research, and thus constitutes a significant move towards OA as an academic standard. For the first time in the UK, OA is to be mandated for academic books – this means that both monographs and edited chaptered books must be published Open Access from January 2024, though a 1 year embargo is permissible. As the infrastructures, business models and workflows supporting OA book publishing are currently lagging behind journals, especially in the Arts and Humanities, many researchers and institutions have responded to the policy with some consternation, even whilst supporting the aims and ethics of OA publishing.

This article explores some of these apprehensions and questions raised by institutions, academics and by librarians regarding OA book publishing in a UK context, especially regarding funding and sustainability. It aims to dispel certain myths around OA book publishing in general, particularly the notion that Book Processing Charges are a necessary or even desirable element. The article then presents some of the varied models and systems currently in use and development, particularly the work of the UKRI/Research England funded COPIM project (Community- Led Open Access Infrastructures for Monographs), one of the aims of which is to build ways of delivering more sustainable revenue sources to OA publishers. It focuses in particular a key and soon to be launched output of the project: the Open Book Collective.

Keywords: Open Access; scholarly publishing; open access monographs; UKRI; policy

1. Introduction

UK Research and Innovation (UKRI) is the main public body that organises research funding for UK academics. Its councils cover the range of academic disciplines, from arts and humanities to the hard sciences, and applications for funding are made directly to the relevant council. UKRI announced its latest Open Access (OA) policy on August 6, 2021. The policy applies to all UKRI funded research and constitutes a significant move towards OA as an academic standard. All journal articles arising from a UKRI grant that are submitted for publication from April 1, 2022 must be made OA immediately, with no embargo, but significantly for our purposes here the policy also applies to monographs and chapters in edited books published from January 2024, though a 1 year embargo is permissible. This means that books and their content must be fully OA 1 year after publication, but authors and publishers may withhold open access until that time, if they so wish. As the infrastructures, business models and workflows supporting OA book publishing are currently lagging behind journals, especially in the Arts and Humanities, many UK researchers may now be seriously considering the ramifications of OA book publication for the first time, and receiving the UKRI announcement with some questions. Moreover, the announcement brings into sharp focus how Plan S¹ principles may be pragmatically applied by national funding bodies. Researchers beyond the UK may thus be interested to observe how this shift in a national policy relates to their own research context, as major public funders across Europe commit to an OA future.

This article explores some of the apprehensions and queries raised by institutions, academics and librarians regarding OA book publishing, including their sustainability. It aims to dispel certain myths around OA book publishing in general, particularly the notion that Book Processing Charges (BPCs) are a necessary element. The article then presents some of the varied models and systems currently in use and development, particularly the work of the UKRI-funded COPIM project (Community-Led Open Access Infrastructures for Monographs). The COPIM project is keen to develop a solution which explores the potential of collectivisation as a way of moving away from the notion that open access content providers are in competition with one another (the real competition, from the perspectives of many of the publishers involved in COPIM, lies in the far larger for-profit publishers that dominate the landscape of scholarly

communication). This is both a political position which considers cooperation, transparency and sharing as fundamental values of OA (see Bilder et al., 2020), and a pragmatic answer to some of the challenges facing OA books. The COPIM project as a whole is committed to supporting open infrastructures, and to resisting profit-seeking in the landscape of OA publishing and distribution

As a member of the international cOAlition S group and signatory to the Plan S agreement, UKRI is committed to a wider movement towards open access of publicly funded research (Wingham, 2021). Few academics would object to the principle of making research more widely available: OA publication is not only an ethical good, but demonstrably increases citation and impact (Draux et al., 2018; Holmberg et al., 2020; Neylon et al., 2021), though admittedly much more data is available for journals than books at the present time. Increased citation benefits both the reputation of the author and the scholarly community as a whole. Moreover, whilst the UKRI has signalled that although OA requirements for the next Research Excellence Framework² will not be more stringent than UKRI policy for funded research (that is to say, an output which adheres to UKRI policy will automatically be eligible for the REF), increasing movement towards Open Access is anticipated in further REF requirements. Yet even before the UKRI policy was officially announced, concerns had been raised regarding the financial sustainability of OA book publishing, and the effects this might have on academic careers. This is not new: reporting on the 2018 Knowledge Exchange Stakeholder Workshop on Open Access and Monographs. Adema (2019, p. 22) writes that that ‘there is still a lot of mistrust and misinformation surrounding OA for monographs from many authors and their learned societies’ and ‘concerns over costs, funding and quality issues were high on authors’ agendas’. With respect to the new UKRI policy which is the subject of this article, *The Times Higher Education (THE)* ran an article which unfortunately focused exclusively on BPC models, in which publishers charge a fee to the author, their funder, and/or their institution to make the work open. The *THE* warned:

“Without extra research funds to pay for the book processing charges associated with open access publishing, many scholars might be denied the opportunity to publish, warned Marilyn Deegan, professor of digital humanities at King’s College London. “In arts and humanities, without monographs you are unlikely to progress in your career,” said Professor Deegan, who added that she had

recently been told by a publisher that it would cost almost £10,000 to publish an academic book in an open access format” (Grove, 2020).

Certainly, BPC costs can be prohibitive to authors and institutions. But this is far from the only model of OA book publishing, and indeed, sits at odds with the values-based models and systems of several leading OA publishers. We'll explore this further below.

2. The Policy on Books

As noted above, this policy update means that for the first time, all monographs resulting from UKRI funded research must be published OA from 2024, with an optional embargo for up to twelve months. The preferred licence is CC-BY, the Creative Commons licence permitting free sharing, adaptation and translation of a work in any form so long as the original author receives proper attribution. As of this writing, misinformation is already spreading on Twitter that the CC-BY licence is mandatory. However, UKRI has received feedback from researchers in the humanities and social sciences that ‘a CC BY licence could enable misquoting and/or misuse of some research, particularly on sensitive topics’ and thus permits the CC BY-ND license as an ‘exception’ (UKRI, 2021a, pp. 4–5). It has not yet been clarified whether any specific conditions must be met for this exception to be applied, but we can observe that researchers’ concerns regarding sensitive material and distribution have been acknowledged. Under this license, the original author must be credited and no alterations may be made. Moreover, recognising that the OA publishing infrastructure is less developed and more varied for monographs than for articles, the UKRI also allows the CC BY-NC licence, which prevents an OA work from being repurposed for commercial ends. The granting of a 12 month embargo period allows publishers to recoup on initial investment through sales before it comes into effect, which UKRI considers an appropriate balance point between public interest in the work and publisher sustainability. OA exemptions will apply regarding the use of substantial third party materials which are already in copyright if the cost of licensing these is prohibitive, though again, it is currently unclear precisely how these will work in practice. Finally, exceptions to the OA policy will apply where the only suitable publisher for the work is a specialist unable to offer OA, and when the publisher and author deem the output to be a trade book (UKRI, 2021b, p. 8).

The OA policy, then, is significantly less stringent for monographs than it is for journal articles, and we will return to some of these exceptions in the conclusion. The lead time is also much longer. UKRI states

“Our different requirements for long-form outputs recognise: the less mature open access landscape for these outputs; that these are new requirements that will have a more significant impact on some disciplines (such as the humanities); and the diverse publishing ecology of presses which is intrinsic to sustainability of long-form publishing”. (UKRI, 2021a, p. 6)

For support of OA books specifically, UKRI has ring-fenced £3.5 million per annum of a £46.7 million overall fund. Anna McKie in *THE* reports that some academics take issue with this:

Sarah Kember, director of Goldsmiths Press, said that providing only £3.5 million for books out of a budget more than 10 times that was a “clear indicator of the funding bias” towards the sciences and article publishing, “despite calls, during the review process, for more support for arts, humanities and social sciences” (McKie, 2021)

Meanwhile Paul Ayris, chief executive of UCL OA Press, was concerned that ringfencing funds might ‘become a green light for publishers to charge as much as they possibly can’ (McKie, 2021) in BPCs instead of actively benefiting the development of OA book publishing. Similarly, Cambridge Librarian Samuel Moore notes that ‘open-access books have been pioneered by scholar-led publishers and university presses, most of whom do not charge book processing fees, and so these publishers need to be able to access the block grant to support their not-for-profit activities’ (McKie, 2021). The worst possible outcome of a ring-fenced BPC fund would be the creation of a new market wherein publishers compete to price each other out of business, commercialising and homogenising the budding OA space. In Adema’s report, Kember expressed,

“The problem with monographs is part and parcel of the problem with the academy, namely its increasing domination by a neoliberal rationale; OA policy exacerbates the problem by over-emphasising commercial innovation and under-emphasising other values around invention, experimentation, and social intervention through publishing: these are very important to Goldsmith Press. We should avoid reducing creativity to market competition.” (Adema, 2019, p. 11)

Book Processing Charges may have their place in the publishing landscape, and no doubt will be used across a range of models for the foreseeable future. But they are not particularly sustainable – or reliable, or indeed equitable. They privilege funded researchers, wealthy institutions, and established academics on permanent contracts (Nature et al., 2019, p. 14; Speicher et al., 2018). In other words, they penalise those researchers and institutions least able to bear the burden. Moore (2021) argues that expensive BPCs [...] ‘remove risk for commercial organisations wanting to publish open access while allowing them to monetise books as they have always done’ and fears that a poorly-regulated block grant ‘will cement the BPC as the primary business model for open access books’. This in turn ‘will create a two-tiered system whereby researchers with funding can publish open access books, while those without cannot’ (Moore, 2021). Academics from less wealthy institutions and nations, as well as those at the start of their career, are likely to be penalised should this come to pass. The effect on researchers will be unfair, and the effect on scholarly fields will be stultifying. On the other hand, properly administered support that actually invests in sustainable alternatives to BPCs would be a significant step towards a fairer and more diverse academy. Nonetheless, in a hopeful statement, UKRI promises to ‘provid[e] funding alongside the policy that will aim to support different open access models’ (UKRI, 2021a, p. 6). This is cause for optimism, and would suggest this is not simply a fund to pay Book Processing Charges on a case-by-case basis but a longer term investment in transforming the infrastructures of academic publishing.

3. Academic Concerns about OA Monographs

A survey by De Gruyter suggested that the majority of academics feel positively about OA publishing – but the strength of that feeling does not correspond to how often they choose an OA venue in which to publish (De Gruyter, 2016). Over 90% of De Gruyter’s respondents were based in European countries, and they do not specify the remainder, but there is no comparable dataset for UK academics specifically. De Gruyter’s results, whilst limited, are certainly understandable. Academics have real and legitimate concerns about OA that need to be ‘addressed and not simply managed’. (Adema, 2019, p. 9). In addition to concerns about funding and sustainability, Joe Deville and colleagues have located four key areas of concern around OA monograph publishing, which they categorise ‘(1) professionalism, (2) scale, (3) quality,

and (4) discoverability & dissemination' (Deville et al., 2019, p. 1). Academic librarians also have distinct but related concerns, and workshops conducted by COPIM with librarians specifically highlighted the last factor, around the difficulty of getting OA books into libraries due to lack of reliable metadata and established workflows (Deville, 2020; Gerakopoulou & Rudmann, 2020). These concerns are not new: in 2018 the British Academy expressed concern that the 'proliferation of new online journals with lower standards of peer review and editing' that have accompanied shifts to OA might be replicated in the monograph space (British Academy, 2018). After all, publishers do more than publish: they assess, review, edit, typeset, market, and more. Most OA presses – particularly those which do not mandate BPCs – are small, with few or no full-time staff, and lack the human and material resources of larger presses. A realistic assessment of OA publishing must accept this factor as a challenge. But this does not mean that OA presses have lower standards or produce less rigorous work than traditional ones. In fact, contrary to the perception that OA publishers have less rigorous procedures for review of manuscripts, all the presses surveyed by Deville et al. had similar rates of rejection and acceptance to traditional publishers (2019, p. 15). OA seems to retain some association with 'vanity publishing', whether or not a BPC is charged, but the figures simply do not bear this impression out. The answers do not lie in reverting to publishing giants but in supporting professional development of library and academic publishers, allowing them to make use of the links and connections they already have with the academic community to better serve their needs.

There is no reason why academic- and library-led publishers with a values-based OA mission cannot match the professionalism of traditional publishers, provided they are sufficiently funded and staffed. They may not match the scale – indeed, they may not want to – and one of the advantages of the consortium models of publishing we'll explore below is that it allows small and diverse OA publishers to take advantage of economies of scale whilst maintaining a diversity of approaches.

Related to the question of professionalism is that of 'quality'. Quality of course is a loaded ideological notion inflected by structural inequalities, wealth, geography, gender and other factors. In UK academia, 'quality' of outputs is traditionally judged by peer review, funder assessment and ultimately the REF – whether or not these judgements are always fair, this is the

system that UK academics are currently working within. One goal of radical OA presses might ultimately be to change this system, but academics may worry that publishing outside of a traditional, big-name publisher or a select group of old university presses in order to satisfy the OA criteria will negatively affect the way their work is received and reviewed. This is particularly true for those in an early stage of their career and those on temporary contracts. It is heartening to note that one of the plan S principles states:

“The Funders commit that when assessing research outputs during funding decisions they will value the intrinsic merit of the work and not consider the publication channel, its impact factor (or other journal metrics), or the publisher” (Plan S, Principles and Implementation, n.d.).

Such a commitment is important to the flourishing of an OA landscape, and many of us will be apprehensive until we see this principle in documented action. New open access presses can establish credibility via the reputation of their books and authors, by inclusion in recognised bodies such as the Directory of Open Access Books (DOAB), by joining the Open Access Scholarly Publishers Association and transparency over their rigorous standards for peer review and editing (c.f. Collins et al., 2015, pp. 24–25).

Workshops hosted by COPIM bear out that the challenge of discovery and dissemination of OA books is a significant one. This is further backed up by findings from Deville et al. (2019) and from Gerakopoulou et al. (2021). Because the OA landscape is fragmented, OA versions of monographs are at risk of being less discoverable than traditionally published books. Goudarzi et al. explain why this happens:

While the creation and dissemination of open monographs is not that different from the creation and dissemination of traditional, print monographs, the \$0 price tag for consumers can lead to unintended consequences [...] Distribution for a typical non-OA digital monograph routinely touches many third party systems, such as EBSCO or Amazon. These suppliers create or augment metadata generated by the publisher to improve discoverability by populating feeds intended for retail channels and library systems. Presses that underestimate the importance of this process do so at their peril as a lack of robust metadata can impede discovery and use of open content. Items with a \$0 price can be difficult to ingest into aggregator platforms (Goudarzi et al., 2021b, p. 8).

It is therefore not surprising that librarians have told us that OA books can be hard for them to find due to the absence of consistent metadata. Searching for, assessing and categorising OA books can be a time-consuming process for librarians with already-busy schedules. In a neat illustration of how programming is political, lack of a price-point makes OA books hard for established systems to understand and categorise. The lack of a price point creates a barrier to access an open access monograph because established (commercial) systems that read and categorise books, including Amazon and ONIX feeds, do not recognise an item without a figure for 'price'. Thus the book is invisible to them unless it also has a priced option (see Stone et al., 2021; Watkinson et al., 2017). Librarians are familiar with these systems – which are ultimately designed to sell books – and furthermore they are popular because if one is not concerned with OA, they are efficient. Therefore, more publishers use them, and the system becomes more and more entrenched. Moreover, small OA presses don't have the established relationships with academic booksellers and platforms that traditional publishers do, and may not have the resources to develop them. This penalises both libraries and OA publishers themselves, as publishers will struggle to access financial and other support from libraries, risking the further entrenchment of BPC models (c.f. Gerakopoulou et al., 2021, p. 6). Listing in DOAB can assist with the discoverability of books, but developing the infrastructures of OA dissemination is one avenue that the ringfenced £3.5 million should certainly be invested in. The COPIM community has developed a system known as Thoth³, an open source application that ingests and standardises metadata from OA publishers and synthesises it into a searchable catalogue of metadata that is maximally readable. This is an important service for OA publishers and librarians alike.

4. BPC and its Discontents: Alternative Models for OA

So what are the alternatives to charging for Open? How can publishers sustain themselves whilst charging neither author nor reader directly? First, we should acknowledge that the publishing landscape is changing, and has been for some time. Adema and Stone write

A new wave of university presses is emerging. Common characteristics are that they are open access (OA), digital first, library-based, and they often offer a smaller set of services than a traditional publisher, blurring the line between

publisher and platform. In tandem, a small but notable number of academics and researchers have set up their own publishing initiatives, often demonstrating an innovative or unique approach either in workflow, peer review, technology or business model. (Adema & Stone, 2017, p. 3)

A library-based press may be defined as a 'set of activities led by college and university libraries to support the creation, dissemination, and curation of scholarly, creative, and/or educational works' (Lippincott, 2016, p. 187) and it is these presses as well as new university presses, often founded by scholar-publishers, who are making significant contributions to the OA monograph movement. Most library-based and new university presses have values and mission statements dedicated to the promotion and sustainability of OA monographs, including UCL, Huddersfield University Press and White Rose University Press, a joint venture of the Universities of Leeds, Sheffield and York. This does not mean these presses never charge BPCs. Like most OA publishers, their financial support is piecemeal. UCL Press declares that it is 'is subsidised to a large degree by UCL' but has income streams from 'print sales, BPCs, grants and consultancy' (UCL Press, 2021). Scholarly presses are more likely to be founded according to non-commercial, egalitarian values, and these will generally try to keep their BPC as low as possible, utilising other revenue streams as and when available. For example, UCL states that its mission includes a 'a strong commitment to research and publication ethics' and 'a commitment to equality, diversity and inclusion in all its activities'. Penier et al. (2020) published a wide-reaching report on revenue models for OA monographs that looked at a diverse range of scholarly publishers, noting the benefits and drawbacks of each model. Several researchers have noted that there will not be a one-size fits all solution to OA monograph publishing. Differing publishers, authors, fields and contexts have different needs, and we should be looking to create collaborative systems that foster and support a diversity of approaches (Operas, 2018; Sherman, 2014). We'll return to this in section 6 below. Penier et al.'s report was focused on the revenue streams rather than the cost structures of the publishers they analysed, though noted that costs need to be taken into account in the creation of real-world business models. This is as true of conventional publishing models as it is of OA.

There are several ways that publishers can generate revenue without charging BPCs. It may be earned providing services, and/or selling items (books, subscriptions, advertising space) in exchange for money. Some publishers have institutional support: a university, university library, research centre or

similar institution provides capital and/or support in the form of staff time and material resources. A third way is via subsidies from third parties, such as charities and non-profits, and the fourth is via consortia models: where groups of stakeholders such as libraries fund groups of publishers. As part of its OA Books Toolkit, the OAPEN network has provided a useful summary table of OA publishing revenue models (Figure 1).

All of these models have pros and cons, which are largely situational, and depend on factors such as the size and wealth of institutions associated with an OA publisher, the publisher's market and advertising reach, and the

Fig. 1: Open Access Book Models by OAPEN (2021).

Model	Description	Example publishers / service providers
Book processing charge (BPC) / Open Access fee	A fee is charged by the publisher in order for the ebook to be made open access; usually all ebook formats will be open access. The fee is typically paid by the author's funder or institution.	Bloomsbury, Brill, CUP, De Gruyter, Elsevier, InTechOpen, MDPI, OUP, Springer Nature (incl. Palgrave Macmillan), Stockholm University Press, T&F (incl. Routledge), University of California Press (Luminos)
Freemium	A version of the ebook is made open access or freely available at no charge to the author; the free access is subsidised by other revenue sources, such as sales of other e-formats, print sales, and/or library membership fees.	OECD, Open Book Publishers, OpenEdition, Open Humanities Press, Punctum Books
Institutional subsidy / New University Presses (NUP)	An institution subsidises publication at an open access press based at or associated with the institution. Fees may not apply or may be discounted; academics based at the institution may receive additional discounts or fee waivers.	Lever Press, UCL Press, University of Huddersfield Press, White Rose Press
Library Membership	Libraries or other institutions pay an annual membership fee to a publisher that underwrites some costs of making books open access; the member institution and/or its authors may receive additional benefits such as discounts on book processing charges (BPCs).	Open Book Publishers, Punctum Books, University of California Press (Luminos)
Library consortium ("Institutional crowdfunding")	Libraries pledge a fee towards making a collection of books open access, covering some or all of the costs between them. Once enough libraries have confirmed participation and the target amount is achieved, the collection is made open access.	Knowledge Unlatched, Transcript
Crowdfunding	Individuals pledge fees to make a book open access; once enough individuals have confirmed participation and the target amount is achieved, the book is made open access.	Unglue.it (typically in collaboration with publishers, e.g., CUP, OBP), self-published authors

publishers' relationship to university libraries and consortiums. In practice, most OA publishers use a piecemeal selection of methods. They might, for example, display a limited range of adverts from selected advertisers, such as universities. They might charge limited BPCs when book funds are available, and still receive some subsidy from an associated institution. They might cross-subsidise OA output from other sales activity, such as textbooks or trade copies. They might create a hybrid OA model where digital copies are freely downloadable and hard-copies offered for sale – this is a common option, and UCL, Huddersfield and Palgrave MacMillan all utilise it. Interestingly, this model doesn't seem to harm sales of print copies: Amsterdam University Press actually reported that sales of print books increased once they adopted it, and the broader effect seems to increase usage without loss of revenue (Penier et al., 2020, pp. 26–27). The disadvantage here is that the hybrid system creates the impression of OA being a 'lesser option' or poor relation of the 'real book', and hardcopy monographs are still the preference of a significant percentage of researchers, which may be why the print sale persists. Moreover, print copies with a fee will be picked up by metadata aggregators, making the book more visible – which may result in users paying for a copy without realising that an OA version is available. Conversely, some publishers such as OpenEditions offer a 'freemium' model along the lines of other subscription services, where a basic version of the book is available OA and users can pay more for an enhanced version with added features. It might be argued that this isn't really in the spirit of OA once again relegating it to a lesser status than traditional publishing. Most publishers seek both institutional support and donations from charities and individuals, to a degree – individual books have on occasion been entirely funded by Kickstarter campaigns (Penier et al., 2020, p. 17). The glaring issue, of course, is that none of the above are particularly reliable or predictable and make it very difficult for publishers to plan financially. A lack of transparency and information sharing on the costs and processes of OA monograph publishing also contributes to this problem (Goudarzi et al., 2021b, p. 8). Regarding OA infrastructure more generally, Invest in Open have created a shareable resource for librarians and other stakeholders to model costs and benefits of collective investments in OA, and the more the resource is used and shared, the more useful and reliable it becomes (Pugh & Thaney, 2021).

One option that has the potential for more reliability and sustainability are consortia funding models, in which multiple libraries and/or other stakeholders fund one or more publishers to release OA titles via subscription.

There are various ways this can be translated into practice. The ‘Opening the Future’ (OtF) model pioneered by Martin Eve and Tom Grady uses subscriptions to backlist titles to fund the release of new OA content. So if an institution signs up to pay an annual subscription for three years, they are given perpetual access to closed access content the press has already published, plus the forthcoming OA content this subscription is helping to fund. This model has been adopted by the Central European University Press and Liverpool University Press so far. This both provides better value for libraries than buying individual titles while also providing tangible financial support to a new OA model. Utilising subscription payments for a back catalogue is certainly a useful option for some established presses wishing to transition to OA. Eve and Grady are developing a ‘toolkit’ that will provide guidance for publishers wishing to adopt the model (see: <https://www.openingthefuture.net/>). But as Jeff Pooley points out, born-OA publishers and those without a sufficiently established backlist of traditionally published titles cannot make use of it (Pooley, 2021). OtF is an excellent model for change in established publishers, but not so much for structural change that results in more born-OA publishers, or OA-as-default.

Perhaps the best known example of ‘subscribe to open’ for monographs is the Knowledge Unlatched initiative. Knowledge Unlatched has in a sense been very successful, with nearly 3,000 books made Open so far. However, one weakness of the model is that it focuses on unlocking individual titles, rather than transforming structures. Publishers decide on and submit titles for ‘unlatching’, some of which will then be selected for funding by the KU selection committee. Libraries then send orders and pledge financial support for said books, which KU distributes to the publishers. Workshops conducted by COPIIM with librarians tell us that most stakeholders prefer subscription models that are not focused or limited to individual titles, over which they may have little choice, and moreover, authors have no say or leverage in whether their books become OA. Moreover, since KU has begun to use a for-profit form of organisation, some have accused the venture of ‘platform capitalism’, and entering a spirit of competition that seeks to monopolise the OA space rather than sharing in the cooperative ethics of OA. Platform capitalism might be defined as co-opting and monetising the spaces, data, and relationships through which sharing and cooperation take place, and is typically associated with corporate entities like Facebook (see Srnicek, 2016 for a full discussion). Since KU’s acquisition by Wiley in 2021, these criticisms have

come to the forefront. The OA publishing collective ScholarLed has registered significant concern:

“Regarding KU’s under-publicised acquisition by [commercial society] full-stopp, and also question KU’s moves since 2016 into what increasingly looks like OA platform capitalism and rent-seeking, whereby those businesses, such as Facebook and Google, that are claiming to be ‘neutral arbiters and spaces of informational exchange’ are, in fact, ‘siphoning value from socio-cultural activity,’ and ‘rather than producing new value,’ they ‘simply coordinate virtual properties and charge for their use’” (Joy, 2019).

Following the Wiley takeover, COPIM noted similar recent acquisitions of OA publishers bepress by Elsevier (in 2017) of F1000 Research by Taylor and Francis (in 2020). COPIM members stated that this process

“reflects an ongoing consolidation of research infrastructure by major publishing corporations, and in particular the increasing attempts to monetise and, potentially, monopolise the infrastructures of open knowledge dissemination” (COPIM, 2021).

Nonetheless, consortium-funding co-operatives are one of the most promising avenues for a healthy OA book ecosystem. It has after all worked well in the journal space, as evidenced by the success of the Open Library of Humanities.

5. Cultural Challenges

But before we turn to our final section, which describes the work of the COPIM project in building such a collective, there is a final issue to confront, and it is a difficult one. This is the process of cultural change: in publishing, in acquisition, and in reward. By ‘reward’ in the sense of UK academia, we mean positive peer review, REF ranking, and acquisition of the cultural capital necessary to a scholarly career. Publishing monographs is a key indicator of cultural capital for academics particularly in the Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences, and much of this capital is still connected with traditional big name publishers. Stone writes that securing buy-in from library directors and institutions is a priority, as is ‘ensuring that the acquisition of open

access content featured in the library's collection management and development plan or policy' and 'measuring the impact of open access monographs' (Stone, 2018). We need more reliable and wide-spread data on citation, download, and features on reading lists, just as a beginning. A report by Springer Nature found that OA books have seven times more downloads than traditionally sold ones, 50% more citations, and ten times more online mentions (Emery et al., 2017, p. 4). But that is a small-scale insight into their own publishing house. We need bigger and more comprehensive data to create persuasive arguments for library and institutional directors. But changes that convince academics to take risks must also come from funders. UKRI and related bodies should commit, in concrete terms, to recognising and rewarding experimental forms of OA publishing that do not yet have the cultural cachet of traditional major publishing houses. It is unfair and unrealistic for academics to bear all of this risk without reassurances – particularly those at an early stage of their career, who will presumably represent the future of academic publishing. Steven Hill of UKRI states:

Policy intervention [rather than persuasion or encouragement] is [...] important in this space as it can take us from a relatively stable state into another state. It can move the dial and change the way people think about things. It is really hard to bring about this change without having some catalyst where all stakeholders can line up behind (in Adema, 2019, p. 14).

Overall, policy intervention is progressive and welcome. But individual academics are least equipped to bear the risk of this destabilisation, particularly now, as the pandemic has resulted in widespread redundancies and termination of contracts. UKRI should publish guidance and information about how academics can be confident that experimental publishing routes are sustainable for their career security, and consider its own role in supporting early career academics to embrace non-traditional publishing. At this point, these reassurances have not been forthcoming in any concrete terms. Gerakopoulou et al. report these comments from UK librarians they surveyed:

"OA for REF [UK] has been a stick rather than a carrot approach and I feel it has done little to make researchers think about alternative venues for their publications" [...] Another librarian remarked that PhD researchers and ECRs (early career researchers) are convinced about 'the perceived importance to their academic career of getting their first monograph published with an established publisher and traditional print format' [...] (Gerakopoulou et al., 2021, p. 29).

In fact, publishing digital OA and paid hard-copy simultaneously would satisfy the terms of the UKRI policy and thus any future REF, and many OA publishers offer this. There seems to be a common misconception that digital OA means digital only. At the same workshop from which Hill is quoted Jean-Claude Kita insisted:

“Scholars need guidance here which is often lacking from funders [...] There is also the issue of adapting the current evaluation and promotion process to digital research outputs, where academic prestige/quality is mostly still linked to the physical output. Many scholars do not trust the digital book, thinking it compromises their development or their ability to get research grants. Funders need to put more incentives in place for digital works in evaluation assessments” (in Adema, 2019, p. 16).

Academics are not, however, passive players in the move towards OA. They do have choices, to an extent, about where they publish and how they invest their research time, and can also be working with librarian colleagues to evidence and promote the academic rigour, standards and value of OA. They can organise with fellow academics and scholar-publishers in the compilation and presentation of such data. They can challenge their own biases concerning the big commercial publishers, many of which have been instilled in us from an early stage in our studies. But undertaking the risk of change does need to come with reassurances, particularly for tenuous faculty. For new publishing formats to be sustainable, UKRI must address this in the next policy updates.

6. The Open Book Collective: A COPIM Proposal

There is a critical need, then, for the proper design and funding of sustainable systems for open access books, thinking beyond BPCs. The members of the COPIM project see consortial models as one of the best way to do this, both in terms of fulfilling the co-operative values of OA, and in terms of

- providing reliable funding systems that publishers can plan around.
- making it easier for librarians to access and utilise OA books.
- maximising the distribution of OA books.

COPIM is therefore designing and building a new collective through which to address some of these issues, called The Open Book Collective. The OBC

is a COPIM project output, and will be established as an autonomous legal entity. Its aim is to develop ways of supporting smaller presses and supporting a diverse range of publishing models with the aim of enabling them to transition away from the use of BPCs or other forms of publishing charges. The collective will be comprised of key stakeholders in OA book publishing, including publishers and service providers, university librarians, and academic researchers. A key part of the work of the OBC will be a new digital platform that aims to act as an interface between OA book publishers and other book-focused OA initiatives and, in particular, academic libraries. It, and the collective as a whole, will be community-governed and will work to create more sustainable revenue streams for open book publishing. The project is funded by UKRI/Research England and the Arcadia Fund. It is initially focused on UK and US-based publishers and scholarly libraries, though the OBC's work is expected to expand more globally. As noted above, Plan-S signals international change in the importance of OA books.

More specifically, the platform will offer potential subscribers flexible subscription packages where librarians and institutions choose publishers, packages and collections to support financially. From the perspective of OA books-focused initiatives it will deliver new revenue streams, new opportunities to engage with libraries, as well as making outreach a collective rather than an individual endeavour. For librarians, their colleagues and other potential subscribers, it will make it easier to understand the values and offerings of different initiatives, including how initiatives align (or not) with local values and priorities, faster and easier to initiate and manage subscriptions, and will make it easier to integrate OA books into catalogues, given the platform requires more consistent forms of metadata from publishers. These components and governance principles are all being developed in direct response to feedback from library colleagues (see Gerakopolou et al., 2021).

This work is a form of what Jeff Pooley (2021) calls 'mission-aligned funding exchange (MAFE)'. The mission of the OBC is to build and maintain infrastructure to support the publication, discovery, dissemination, and preservation of OA books via a range of flexible revenue streams, and to make those books and their infrastructure better integrated with and more legible to library research systems. The platform will utilise Thoth, an open metadata management and dissemination system built for OA books, which creates readable, interoperable metadata for a searchable, reliable and sustainable

catalogue. It can ingest the catalogues of relevant publishers and produce comprehensive metadata that aims to be compatible with as many platforms as possible.

This platform thus aligns with the goals for sustainable change set out by recent reports from the Invest in Open Infrastructure initiative specifically:

- Aligning power and influence to enact change by recognising the power and opportunity for collectives to drive change — from accountability and vendor reciprocity to increased investment by consortia and existing funding programs through coordination.
- Rethinking funding mechanisms by exploring the tenets underlying collective investment models (Goudarzi et al., 2021a, p. 3)

Goudarzi et al. write that ‘As institutions rushed to respond to the needs of their scholarly communities and to their new economic reality, corporate publishing stood ready to offer short-term solutions’. The authors nonetheless maintain that ‘there’s an urgent need to invest now in a coordinated approach for the future of open’ (2021, p. 6). The UKRI mandate has wide-reaching consequences, which could either re-entrench academic hierarchies and inequality, or comprise a genuine transformative move towards a more equitable and diverse publishing field. On one hand, an approach that blindly promotes and re-entrenches high BPCs will merely ‘drop [...] barriers to readers only to erect them for authors’ (Pooley, 2021) consolidating the position of commercial publishing giants and damaging scholarly progress. On the other, if the funds UKRI has reserved to support OA are properly invested in developing communal, values-based, sustainable publishing models that support scholarly diversity, along with proper assurances to academics that their output will be valued on its merits, we have an opportunity now to transform scholarly publishing for good.

Disclosure: the author is a Research and Outreach Associate on Work Package 2 of the COPIM project, which as noted is jointly funded by the UKRI/ Research England and the Arcadia Fund. The launch of the OBC will meet one of the key aims of the COPIM project, which has been to design and launch a revenue management platform capable of delivering greater forms of financial sustainability to small and medium open access book publishers and infrastructure providers.

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Notes

¹ About Plan S: <https://www.coalition-s.org/>.

² REF stands for Research Excellence Framework. It is a UK-wide impact assessment for the research output of higher education institutions, and takes place every 6-7 years. Scoring highly on the REF increases the funding and reputation of an institution.

³ Links to supporting documentation can be found at <https://thoth.pub>.