

Peer Review:

# Open Access for Monographs

## The quest for a sustainable model to save the endangered scholarly book



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### Abstract

This article questions the sustainability of the current print-based subscription model for publishing books in the Humanities and Social Sciences. The lack of availability and dissemination of the scholarly monograph (in print *and* digital), has led to a quest for new business models based on the Open Access publishing of books. The common characteristics of these new models are discussed and a new model for the funding and publishing of Open Access books is introduced. This model, developed within the OAPEN project, is based on an author-pays scheme and on the principle that research and the dissemination of research results should not be separated, as they both are essential elements in the scholarly communication process.

In his seminal article, "The New Age of Books," from 1999, Robert Darnton prophesizes that "the old-fashioned codex, printed on folded and gathered sheets of paper, is not about to disappear

into cyberspace.” Later on in his article, he claims that “the best case to be made for e-books concerns scholarly publishing, not in all fields, but in large stretches of the humanities and social sciences where conventional monographs – that is, learned treatises on particular subjects – have become prohibitively expensive to produce.”<sup>1</sup>

More than ten years later this prophecy remains fresh and insightful, and it is perhaps even clearer now that the discrepancy it plays with, the continued co-existence of the printed book alongside its electronic version, is not an incongruity at all. As recent research amongst scholars in the Humanities and Social Sciences (HSS) confirms, there is a need for both a printed and an online version of the scholarly monograph.<sup>2</sup> However, as we will argue in this article, both are lacking in availability at the moment, mainly due to the adverse dynamics within the current scholarly publishing system. This lack of availability has led to an accelerated search for new models based on the principle of Open Access, to improve the availability and reduce costs. We will discuss the common characteristics of these new models, zoom in on the issue of sustainability and in conclusion propose an alternative Open Access model for books, based on an author-pays scheme.

### **The prominence of the book in HSS**

The format of the scholarly book, as opposed to the journal article, remains important in many fields of HSS. Although the article’s popularity continues to increase,<sup>3</sup> the book’s reputation and perceived value remain stable. The need for the book format in these fields is explained mainly by the possibility it offers to develop a sustained argumentation or train of thought. This makes the monograph well suited for the strongly analytical, complex and discursive material that underlies many fields in HSS. One could also state that books and articles seem to fulfill different functions in HSS (analysis of primary texts or data versus critical dialogue).<sup>4</sup>

Furthermore, the prestige associated with writing and publishing a (printed) book remains uncontested. For young scholars, it is seen as the real threshold into academia and is often a requirement for tenure and promotion.<sup>5</sup>

In the digital age, this need for the printed monographic format has been translated into a complementary need for the digital variant of the book. But as research shows, the print and the online medium fulfill different functions for scholars. The printed book is mainly used for in-depth study, while the electronic version is more often used for consultation and reference purposes. Scholars increasingly rely on electronic resources for their information retrieval, including e-books, but they use these e-books to browse through large amounts of content, and their reading takes on much more of a scanning nature.<sup>6</sup> Many sources have stated that researchers, regardless of their field, would love to have more e-books, and they feel that the availability and accessibility of e-books in libraries are still very limited.<sup>7</sup> Libraries likewise state that they are unable to keep up with the demand.<sup>8</sup>

### **The crisis in scholarly communication**

Although there is a clear feeling of a lack of availability of e-books in libraries, the availability of printed monographs in libraries has also been dwindling. Already extensively described by Darn-ton in his 1999 article, the serials crisis and the subsequent disastrous consequences it has had for books persist in the first decade of the new century.<sup>9</sup> Libraries are buying fewer monographs mainly because of the rising costs of journals. In their acquisition decisions, libraries have to choose between continuing subscriptions and the big deals. Book publishers have been forced to lower their print runs. In the 1970s average print runs of 2000 books were quite common, whereas at the start of the new century, figures of around 400 copies have become more commonplace.<sup>10</sup>

These figures make one wonder about the effectiveness of the print-based communication system and whether we could still call this an adequate means of dissemination of scholarly research.

But for HSS scholars, it also means that their reputation and career are affected. As it becomes harder to get material published, younger scholars trying to get their thesis published, publications in languages other than English and minority fields are hit the hardest.

### **The search for alternative models**

Darnton's suggestion for a possible way out of this crisis, by focusing on the development of electronic publishing, does not seem sufficient.<sup>11</sup> E-books alone do not change the system: dissemination is still restricted to the few libraries that actually buy them, and e-books aren't much cheaper and are often still bought together with printed books. A complementary strategy based on a restructuring of the economic system behind academic book publishing is necessary.

The diminishing sustainability of the traditional publishing model has prompted many experiments with the free distribution of e-books through the Internet. Recent research conducted for the OAPEN (Open Access Publishing in European Networks) project, involving some 30 case studies, shows that many publishers, scholars, libraries, academies, learned societies and other parties, in various combinations, are already involved in the Open Access publishing of books.<sup>12</sup> Almost all of these experiments are based on the so-called hybrid model, where the Open Access edition is available for free online and a printed copy can be bought. Furthermore, all experiments are dependent on some form of funding, be it institutional support, experimental grants or infrastructural support. Finally, most models are also busy developing services on top of the free content, targeted at libraries, publishers, scholars or other parties, to provide some additional revenue.<sup>13</sup>

Many of the publishing and business models within Open Access book publishing are based on collaborations between stakeholders (libraries, publishers, scholars, IT departments, etc.) and on the sharing of resources, infrastructures and skills. This "sharing mentality" in a cross-institutional setting creates cost-savings and greater efficiency in the production and curation process of both printed and digital books, and often includes the use of open source software (such as D-Space, DPubs, Connexions and Open Journals System/Open Monograph Press).

In contrast to more traditional publishing models from university presses or commercial publishers, Open Access book publishing is characterized by new collaborations and "flexible" functions. Library-press combinations are quite common

(such as Penn State Press and Purdue University Press), as are initiatives from scholars themselves (such as Open Humanities Press and Open Book Publishers). The collaboration between libraries and university presses often involves a scholarly communication or publishing office, such as the Scholarly Publishing Office of the University of Michigan Library of the University of Michigan Press, or the UCPubS of the University of California Press. More traditional university presses and commercial publishers, such as Bloomsbury Academic, are however also experimenting with Open Access book publishing.

Most initiatives make use of innovative business and publishing models, profiting from scale and platform advantages and cost reductions through digital techniques and sharing of resources and skills, and they often depend on a complex mix of subsidies, additional funding and cross-subsidizing, to construct a hybrid model with additional paid-for services on top of the free content. The question remains whether these models will continue to function in the future.<sup>14</sup>

### **Sustainability**

One of the main concerns amongst stakeholders within the current scholarly communication system is that Open Access business models for books in HSS will not prove sustainable. What is actually meant by sustainability is often unclear, however.

Sustainability very much depends on the specific context in which a model is considered viable. Is a model sustainable if it is profitable, or when it breaks even?<sup>15</sup> Or when its calculated losses are covered? Does sustainability mean self-sustainability or can it also be sustainable if it relies on some form of additional funding or subsidy (external or internal)? Different models might thus be sustainable (or unsustainable) in different contexts, depending on the goals (or the business plan) of a specific publisher. But as the large variety of publishing models in use already shows,<sup>16</sup> Open Access book publishers operate in a variety of contexts. Each initiative pursues its own specific goals, which makes it difficult to determine whether their business models are "sustainable" in a more general sense for other publishers and in other situations as well.

Carrying this argument of contextualization a

bit further, do we look at the sustainability of a single model within the current publishing system, or at the sustainability of the system as a whole? It can be very hard to establish what would be the possible cost savings of specific business models versus the perceived benefits of new models for society as a whole.<sup>17</sup> However, both on the level of the different print models as well as on the level of the current system as a whole, one could argue that the model of publishing books in HSS is no longer sustainable. Open Access could be a good alternative in this respect. As John Houghton's recent reports on the current publishing situation in the UK, Denmark and the Netherlands show, when we look at the system as a whole, Open Access publishing could be the cheaper and more efficient option.

There is also the issue of time. Systems that are sustainable now might not be sustainable in the long run. Most of the Open Access book publishing initiatives are still in an experimental phase.<sup>18</sup> Most are still dependent on funding and subsidy structures and it is difficult to gauge which one(s) will become viable. Their experiments with Open Access book publishing serve as methods to gather data on e-book usage and revenue models and eventually to develop sustainable business models. At the moment almost all experiments are based on a hybrid model, while in the future, with the advance of digital reading and digital reading devices, the need for (and thus the revenues from) the printed book might decline. There is much uncertainty about the development of the digital book market.

Another problem concerning the sustainability of HSS publishing has to do with the audience for these kinds of works. In many cases, the audience for HSS monographs is so small that this kind of publishing can never be profitable.<sup>19</sup> One could also argue that HSS publishing has not been sustainable for a long time and has always relied at least on some form of subsidies and institutional and governmental funding.<sup>20</sup> The pluralistic strategy that characterizes Open Access book publishing in HSS, which is based on subsidies and institutional and public funding and revenues from print sales and additional services, is not that different from the current printed book model. Since outside funding has always been part of HSS book

publishing in the print, demand-side system, it will probably remain a necessary part of Open Access business models.

A different approach considers publishing to be an integral part of the research process itself, and argues that it should thus also be part of the funding of research. In the current demand-side model, most of the publishing costs are already being paid indirectly via library budgets, which fall under the state/university institution budgets and are thus publicly funded. As Matthew Cockerill states, this is the choice currently being made by the community, where it may just as easily decide to use their budgets to fund Open Access publishing in a direct way.<sup>21</sup> The choice for the funding of Open Access publications is a societal or political choice, and it may be necessary to make Open Access book publishing in HSS sustainable.<sup>22</sup>

### **OAPEN model**

OAPEN (Open Access Publishing in European Networks) is a consortium and network of European publishers, publishing initiatives and universities. In a 30-month project co-funded by the European Union, OAPEN wants to develop and implement an Open Access publication model for peer-reviewed academic books in the Humanities and Social Sciences.<sup>23</sup>

The overall objective of OAPEN is to improve the accessibility, usage and impact of European research in HSS, by promoting Open Access for books and by developing a "golden road" to Open Access books in HSS,<sup>24</sup> based on common funding models and standards. Publications will be aggregated within a freely accessible Online Library. This Open Access Library aims to increase the visibility and usage of Open Access monographs and promotes the use of common standards. Furthermore, a production centre or publishing platform will be developed, primarily dedicated to monograph content in HSS.

OAPEN's model is based on a few straightforward principles. First of all, research and the dissemination of research results should not be separate, as they are both essential elements in the scholarly communication process. OAPEN thus recommends that research funding should include the costs of dissemination. Secondly, both green

and gold Open Access should be promoted.<sup>25</sup> Academic institutes that promote Open Access by, for instance, mandating Open Access archiving should extend their policies to include Open Access publishing. These funds for Open Access publications should then be available for both articles and books. Finally, OAPEN believes academic publishers should develop Open Access book publishing as a service to the scholarly community. This can be compared to the way many journal publishers provide authors with the option to publish their articles in Open Access within existing subscription-based journals.

OAPEN's publication model was developed to achieve a common approach to Open Access books. The model aims to improve access to monographs, but also to reduce the economic barriers facing traditional monograph publishing. OAPEN's basic approach is a combination of Open Access and traditional (or Print on Demand) publishing. Publishers produce the Open Access edition as a service for which they can charge a publication fee. To determine what a "fair" fee should be, based on the value added by the service(s) the publisher provides, the model consists of an approach to calculate the costs of Open Access publications and proposes mechanisms to fund these publications. The model also incorporates a system for quality assurance and a legal framework.

To calculate the costs of Open Access books, all the costs directly related to the production of the electronic version (such as organizing peer review, editing, typesetting and some basic marketing) are kept separate from the costs to produce, distribute and sell other editions (such as cover design, printing, distribution, marketing and sales). Overhead costs are then added as a fixed percentage of the direct costs of each edition.

Publication funds can then cover all or part of the costs for Open Access editions. Multiple mechanisms may apply here, and fees can be based on, for instance, a percentage of actual publication costs or on full costs in combination with a system for revenue sharing (as a percentage of net profits from sold copies). The publication fee can be provided by publication funds, which can originate from a variety of sources, such as research funders, universities and research institutes, and research

libraries or their consortia. By funding the Open Access edition, research funders meet their objectives by ensuring both the publication of and access to peer-reviewed research results.

In this proposed system, both publishers and funders remain independent and free to choose their preferred system. The model should also work within the existing competitive market environment.

### **Conclusion: Transitional Period**

In general, although there are many experiments going on, it is still too early to say which publishing and business models will emerge in the Open Access book publishing world as the most viable options. However, as we have argued, in the transition to Open Access books, some form of funding of Open Access editions will most likely be required. The need for a funding mechanism for Open Access articles is already increasingly being recognized, as exemplified for instance in a report published last year, "Paying for Open Access Publication Charges,"<sup>26</sup> and by the Sherpa/Juliet inventory of research funders' Open Access policies.<sup>27</sup> An important challenge in this transitional period is to ensure that books are not left behind. At the moment, only the Austrian Science Fund (FWF) provides funds for Open Access books.<sup>28</sup>

The impact of OAPEN's model for academic books will depend on its uptake among publishers and stakeholders. The acceptance of the model among academic publishers and other publishing initiatives will depend largely on the willingness of funders to pay for publication fees for Open Access books. OAPEN aims to introduce a pilot for publishers and stakeholders, setting up publication funds in various European countries, as a first step in the transition to Open Access publishing.

OAPEN's model will likely be only one of the various possible models that can be used for Open Access publishing, as many options are being explored and experimented with in this transitional phase. Perhaps a combination of funding and subsidies, resource sharing, efficiencies through economies of scale and collaboration, print sales and services along with free content will prove to be the most successful strategy. In this respect, publishers may eventually become "producers," com-

binning different sources of revenue and funding into a break-even model. But, just as monograph publishing has generally become unsustainable in a print world without some form of subsidies, it seems likely that Open Access monographs will also require additional funding. As John Willinsky has pointed out:

The development of something approaching an “economic model” for open monograph publishing will inevitably entail a combination of approaches that build on how work has always been supported

in the humanities, involving small grants, the cooperation of libraries and archives, and the active collaboration of scholars and graduate students. The key to this approach is to be able to offer scholars and authors a series of economic-model options which they can pursue from the outset (based on relatively accurate projected costs).<sup>29</sup>

What is clear, is that the different options and possibilities of Open Access book publishing need to be experimented with, and procedures and costs need to be made more transparent. □

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## Notes

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- 2 Janneke Adema and Paul Rutten, *Digital Monographs in the Humanities and Social Sciences: Report on User Needs* (OAPEN, 2010), 50-55. A UCL/CIBER study for JISC also showed that users found different and supplementary applications for e-books and hard copy and wanted to benefit from both; *Textual analysis of open-ended questions in e-book national observatory survey* (UCL: CIBER, May 20, 2008), 17.
- 3 Adema and Rutten, *Digital Monographs in the Humanities and Social Sciences: Report on User Needs*, 52-53.
- 4 Jennifer Wolfe Thompson, "The Death of the Scholarly Monograph in the Humanities?," *Libri* 52 (2002), 121-136.
- 5 C Judson King, *Scholarly Communication: Academic Values and Sustainable Models* (Center for Studies in Higher Education. University of California Berkeley, July 27, 2006), 6; Blaise Cronin and Kathryn La Barre, "Mickey Mouse and Milton: book publishing in the humanities," *Learned Publishing* 17 (April 1, 2004): 85.
- 6 See for instance research done by Ian Rowlands and Maggie Fieldhouse, *Information behavior of the researcher of the future. Trends in scholarly information behavior* (A British Library / JISC Study, September 7, 2007), 15; *Textual analysis of open-ended questions in e-book national observatory survey*, 19-20; Hazel Woodward et al., "Understanding how Students and Faculty REALLY use E-Books: The UK National E-Books Observatory," ELPUB Conference 2009, 2009, 5.
- 7 *Textual analysis of open-ended questions in e-book national observatory survey*, 7-11.
- 8 Caren Milloy, *JISC national e-books observatory project e-books project first user survey a4 final version* (JISC, n.d.), 3; See also: Alma Swan, *Key concerns within the scholarly communications process. Report to the JISC Scholarly Communications Group* (Key Perspectives, March 2008), 41, <http://www.jisc.ac.uk/whatwedo/topics/opentechnologies/openaccess/reports/keyconcerns.aspx>.
- 9 See for instance the figures concerning Monograph and Serial Expenditures in ARL Libraries, 1986-2006: <http://www.arl.org/bm~doc/monser06.pdf>.
- 10 Robert Darnton talks about print runs of 800 in the 1970s and around 400 now. Greco and Wharton state that average library monograph purchases have dropped from 1500 in the 1970s to 200-300 currently. Thompson estimates that print runs and sales have declined from 2000-3000 (print runs and sales) in the 1970s to print runs of between 600-1000 and sales of in between 400-500 nowadays. Albert N. Greco and Robert Michael Wharton, "Should university presses adopt an open access [electronic publishing] business model for all of their scholarly books?," in ELPUB. *Open Scholarship: Authority, Community, and Sustainability in the Age of Web 2.0 – Proceedings of the 12th International Conference on Electronic Publishing held in Toronto, Canada 25-27 June 2008 / Edited by: Leslie Chan and Susanna Mornati*, 2008, 154; John B Thompson, *Books in the Digital Age: The Transformation of Academic and Higher Education Publishing in Britain and the United States* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2005), 93-94; For other figures of declining monograph sales, see Colin Steele, "Phoenix rising: new models for the research monograph?," *Learned Publishing* 16 (April 1, 2003): 111-112.
- 11 Darnton, "The New Age of the Book."
- 12 Janneke Adema, *Overview of Open Access models for e-books in the Humanities and Social Sciences* (OAPEN, 2010).
- 13 For an overview of services in use, see Adema, *Overview of Open Access models for e-books in the Humanities and Social Sciences* (OAPEN 2010), 57-58.
- 14 With the advance of digital readers and the rise of online reading, sales from printed copies within the hybrid model might for instance diminish in the future.
- 15 This is also an ethical question we need to ask our selves when it comes to publishing in the humanities: what is the added value of publishing activities in this respect and what is a fair price for these services?

- 16 See Adema, *Overview of Open Access models for e-books in the Humanities and Social Sciences* (OAPEN 2010).
- 17 As John Houghton et. al. explain: "The literature relating to the costs of scholarly publishing reveals two distinct approaches. The majority of writers focus narrowly on the publishing process and discuss the functions and costs involved. Others explore a broader context, seeing publishing as a part of a wider system of knowledge creation and dissemination. However detailed, analyses that focus on publishing activities alone are unlikely to reflect the system-wide costs or benefits involved, and risk mistaking cost shifting for cost saving." John Houghton et al., *Economic Implications of Alternative Scholarly Publishing Models: Exploring the costs and benefits* (A report to the Joint Information Systems Committee (JISC), January 2009, 2).
- 18 Exceptions being for instance National Academies Press.
- 19 John M. Unsworth, "The Crisis in Scholarly Publishing in the Humanities," *ARL Bimonthly report* 228 (June 2003).
- 20 Greco and Wharton give figures that show substantial subsidies to American university presses in the period 2001-2006: Greco and Wharton, "Should university presses adopt an open access [electronic publishing] business model for all of their scholarly books?" 150.
- 21 Matthew Cockerill, "Business models in open access publishing," in *Open Access: key strategic, technical and economic aspects*, Jacobs, N., (ed.) (Oxford, 2006), 91.
- 22 Michael Jensen, "Scholarly Publishing in the New Era of Scarcity" (Plenary presentation presented at the The Association of American University Presses Annual Meeting, Philadelphia, 2009).
- 23 Note that the emphasis here is on *peer-reviewed*. Open Access publications within the OAPEN model will adhere to the same quality standards as subscription based publications.
- 24 Based on Open Access publishing (Gold Open Access) instead of on Open Access archiving (Green Open Access).
- 25 Based on the idea set out for journal articles by amongst others Jean-Claude Guédon where the green and gold road are not seen as being in competition with each other, but are seen as complementary strategies. Jean-Claude Guédon, "The 'Green' and 'Gold' Roads to Open Access: The Case for Mixing and Matching," *Serials Review* 30, no. 4 (2004): 315-328.
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- 27 About half of all the funders promoting Open Access also have policies for Open Access publications: see <http://www.sherpa.ac.uk/juliet/>
- 28 [http://www.fwf.ac.at/en/projects/peer-reviewed\\_publications.html](http://www.fwf.ac.at/en/projects/peer-reviewed_publications.html)
- 29 John Willinsky, "Monograph Funding" n.p.: 2008.