

Webinar - Working collectively to open up access to books: Wayfinders #5 – Q&A and links to resources

Panelists: Lucy Barnes, Frances Pinter, Emily Farrell, Charles Watkinson

Links to the models discussed by panellists are in the 'resources' section of this document

OASPA's Wayfinders #5 was chaired by Malavika Legge

Q. Following this research - <https://zenodo.org/records/14679068>, please can I ask two questions:

1. How are open and sold versions of books differentiated, if at all?

2. When a book is available in both open and sold versions, are the purchasers making an informed choice in full knowledge that an open version is also available?

FP: We sell OA books in print but not in digital formats. Print and digital have separate ISBNs. We make the open digital discoverable through the regular channels.

EF: We still sell a print copy for OA books. We do what we can to make it clear there is an open copy and make it discoverable as possible. It's not really possible to know whether someone is buying in print because that is their preferred format, or because they were unaware of the open ebook.

LB: They aren't differentiated -- they are the same book, generated from the same file, just some formats are freely available and some have a price attached. On our website we make it very clear that both free and paid formats are available, and on the book jacket we clearly state that the book is open access, both in words and with the open access symbol. We also flag this in metadata wherever this is possible. But in general, it should be easier to flag when a book is available OA -- sales platforms don't always do it and e.g. book reviews should do it as standard, but sadly they don't always.

Q. Relatively few university leaderships on either side of the Atlantic have really prioritised Open Access hitherto, still less so for Arts Humanities and Social Sciences (AHSS) subjects. Given the current resource crises for higher education institutions, does the panel have much/any/some confidence that the situation, not least for long-form Open Access, will favour collective funding solutions or is there in reality a danger of general retreat, as any perceived 'soft' or 'conditional' funding is withdrawn?

FP: The danger is very real. Not only might funding reduce but given the hostility to HSS subjects it may just be easier to not take up this battle. We need to work more closely with librarians and university administrators to make clear what is at stake.

LB: There is of course a danger that this money will be withdrawn -- in the current environment, certainly in the UK (and elsewhere, e.g. Netherlands) potentially anything is up for cuts (including the apparently 'sustainable' big deals). And there are certainly some voices arguing that libraries should cultivate their own 'walled gardens' rather than support collective OA models. However, at OBP, we have noted that we're getting fewer cancellations this year than last.

On the minus side, our membership isn't growing as rapidly this year, but the numbers are holding steady during a turbulent time. From conversations I am having with librarians, I am also hearing an

increased sense that the current reality of big deals dominating, decisions such as Clarivate's new 'own nothing, pay forever' model (my characterisation, of course), and budget cuts biting mean that, to quote a librarian I spoke to recently (whom I think I quoted in the webinar) 'things are not stable in the way that we believed they were' and in that environment, change looks like less of a risk. Some UK institutions are also mindful of the proposed OA book mandate for the REF after 2029 (although this is in danger of turning into a 'boy who cried wolf' situation and plenty of institutions are not thinking about it at all right now).

I think I mentioned at the end of the webinar that people always want confident forecasts and tolerance for experimentation is low, but I certainly don't feel that the money is all going to evaporate for collective OA models, and I also think that there might be more of a hearing for our arguments at the present time. The challenge is to translate all of that into language that university leadership will find persuasive -- but that's a challenge we're working on.

Q. In my view, book publishing tends to be more multilingual than scholarly journal publishing, at least when it comes to Humanities in general and History in particular.

Do you think that this fact may be related to the limited participation of continental libraries (I am speaking of Europe)? In other words, how do you tackle multilingualism?

FP: The function of the monograph is different to the function of the journal in many ways. Research on specifics of countries found in books often have a greater local readership rather than using English to reach a broad even if small readership of a journal article

LB: At OBP we do publish some books in languages other than English, and multilingualism and bibliodiversity are important to us, but for us this again comes back to the 'scaling small' argument. We don't need everyone to join our Library Membership Programme (although of course we'd be delighted if they did!) and we don't aim to publish all of the books for all of the world. The context for OA books is different in different countries and the solutions will be different. So to us, the answer is to collaborate with European colleagues, as we do e.g. via PALOMERA, OPERAS, the Open Access Books Network, to support the growth of equitable OA models in other contexts. You see different approaches e.g. in Croatia compared to Poland compared to France, but OA book publishing in local languages is happening more and more. Of course there are countries where not so much is happening, but projects like PALOMERA and the European Diamond Capacity Hub (currently focused on journals but will include books) are trying to raise the levels of OA book/diamond OA book publishing across Europe.

ML: Although pertaining to journals rather than books, Jessica Dallaire-Clark from Erudit covered the issue of multilingualism really comprehensively during a presentation in an OASPA webinar earlier in 2025 - you can find her presentation in this video recording:

<https://www.oaspa.org/events/what-do-we-mean-by-quality-in-open-access-publishing/>

Q. It would be interesting and very useful for open access to encourage or raise awareness of partners to use their own bibliographic identifiers such as ARK identifiers. It would be good to implement it in the OA book publishing process, i.e. as an offer from the partners. The DOI is important for metadata, however, I believe that URNs, among others, can be useful and decentralise the use of DOIs.

FP: Yes, see some of the initiatives under Knowledge Unlatched. But more could be done. That said, the number of monographs published in English is estimated to be about as large as all the other main languages put together. And you do need a critical mass to make the collectives work.

LB: My knowledge about metadata is relatively limited unfortunately, but it might be worth getting in touch with Thoth (thoth.pub) -- I know they work with DOIs but they may also be interested in ARK. (Full disclosure: OBP helped to develop Thoth and one of our directors is one of Thoth's directors too!)

Q. If there is less interest from non-English speaking countries, is there an avenue in collaborating with publishers in those countries to develop their own OA book initiatives or collaborative infrastructures?

LB: Yes absolutely! This is the way forward in our view (see my answer to Q8), rather than a small number of megapublishers who try to do everything for everyone. At OBP we collaborate in different ways, via networks of people and organisations (Open Access Books Network, OPERAS, ScholarLed, Open Institutional Publishers Association, Association of African Universities) and via infrastructural collaborations with Copim (copim.ac.uk). Please get in touch with me (lucy@openbookpublishers.com) or with these organisations directly if you'd like to know more about this or have a specific collaboration in mind.

ML: Agree with this question. OA publishing, and OA book publishing in particular, is extremely context-specific. The conversation and availability of funding looks totally different in different settings and regions. Conversing and understanding these contexts and how things work in different countries is extremely important. Collaboration stems from conversation and connection. Participation is important - collaboration is not about who/what is "on the agenda" - it is about who is "at the table".

Q. As a small scholar-led press we were recently recommended to check out Knowledge Unlatched but I remember it had a bad reputation in the OA community a while ago. Is this still the case?

FP: Knowledge Unlatched was initially a simple platform to raise money collectively to pay for BPCs for librarian selected titles from publisher offerings. It became a platform where a number of different collective models have been offered for both books and journals. Some people don't like the fact that it is run as a commercial enterprise. However, KU's business model is still the same. Publishers set the prices and KU charges a service fee. Over 100 publishers and 670 libraries participate in KU. (disclosure, I am the founder of KU, and left in 2016)

LB: Knowledge Unlatched has had a long history since it was first pioneered by Frances. It has opened up a lot of books, but at OBP we have occasionally had issues with KU (after Frances' involvement with KU had come to an end). We wrote about those issues here (<https://blogs.openbookpublishers.com/why-obp-is-not-participating-in-ku-open-funding-and-why-libraries-should-understand-the-reasons/>) and here (<https://blogs.openbookpublishers.com/open-book-publishers-statement-on-knowledge-unlatched-and-the-open-research-library/>) if you'd like to know more. You'll note that these posts are both from a few years ago now, and we haven't butted heads with KU like this since! KU was bought by Wiley a few years ago and I'm not sure what the future plans for the company are.

Q. To what degree are you able to share digital usage of your OA titles with authors and/or their institutional funders?

EF: We can provide COUNTER stats for authors and institutions. As Charles noted, these may not cover all platforms, but we can certainly give stats on what we see on our site. At the same time these should be viewed more broadly alongside other impact measures.

LB: I think I said on the day that we share usage details for all of our books on the book's webpage on our site, using the OPERAS Metrics widget which we helped to develop. We also provide COUNTER-compliant metrics to member libraries. But a lot of education needs to happen about the differences between OA metrics and closed-access metrics (OA metrics never cover complete usage -- they're the tip of the iceberg) and we don't want to end up in a blunt 'big number means good book' situation.

Q. When we scrutinise the sustainability of collective funding so critically, are we holding it to a higher standard than more traditional (buying) revenue models?

After all, if one of the collective models were to fold (and in reality they are thriving and proliferating), it would probably spark wider debate about the viability of these sorts of models. But when countless traditional publishers shut down or are bought up [by larger/other publishers], we don't question whether their revenue model inherently works. Or is there a meaningful difference between these situations?

[OASPA note - this question was dealt with in conversation in the closing minutes of the recording. The below is additional to that conversation and comments in chat debating the role of publisher-acquisitions.]

FP: I think we have to consider the incentive structures for publishing and the publisher role as proxy for quality assurance, and then ask whether all the books we publish really have a sufficient audience to warrant the investment costs.

Resources shared during [OASPA's Wayfinders #5](#) on 25 March, 2025

- Outputs from an interactive, online session on Open Books in East Africa, Oct 2024 - co-organised by OASPA, OAPEN and other key partners:
<https://www.oaspa.org/news/equitable-and-sustainable-open-access-for-scholarly-books-in-east-africa-report-from-an-online-session/>
- Open Book Publishers model -
<https://www.openbookpublishers.com/about/our-business-model>
- The University of Michigan Press 'Fund to Mission' model overview -
<https://ebc.press.umich.edu/invest>
- CEU Press' 'Opening the Future' model overview -
<https://ceup.openingthefuture.net/about/>

- If libraries retreat from collective initiatives smaller publishers and biblio diversity will suffer. We will see consolidation and “another oligopoly situation” as seen in journals, covered by this 2023 article in *Quantitative Science Studies* :
<https://direct.mit.edu/qss/article/4/4/778/118070/The-oligopoly-s-shift-to-open-access-How-the-big>
- T&F pilot ‘Pledge to Open’ model overview -
https://librarianresources.taylorandfrancis.com/open-research/choose-open-access/open-access-choices-for-researchers/open-access-books/pledge-to-open-pilot/?_ga=2.237083076.599568274.1737997533-613089042.1737997533&_gl=1axex0k_gaNjEzMDg5MDQyLjE3Mzc5OTc1MzM. _ga_0HYE8YG0M6MTczNzk5NzUzMy4xLjAuMTczNzk5NzUzNC42MC4wLjA. _gcl_au*M TQOMzE1MDcwOS4xNzM3OTk3NTMO
- Reflecting on the requirements of OA in low-resource environments, this 2021 article in *Development and Change* calls for more equitable forms of openness and access, with a view to decolonizing as well as advancing OA: Meagher, K. ‘Introduction: The Politics of Open Access – Decolonizing Research or Corporate Capture?’:
https://hcommons.org/?get_group_doc=1003678/1613037262-dech.12630.pdf
- More on the Subscribe to Open community of practice -
<https://subscribetoopencommunity.org/>

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