

APE 2008,
Round Table “University Presses and Books in the HSS”

Göttingen University Press: Publishing services in an Open Access environment

Margo Bargheer* and Birgit Schmidt**

Göttingen State and University Library, 37070 Göttingen, Germany
E-mails: {bargheer, bschmidt}@sub.uni-goettingen.de

1. Background

Over the past decade, the landscape of scholarly publishing in Germany (and other parts of continental Europe) has seen a new wave¹ of not-for-profit university presses coming into the market: Kassel University Press in 1997, Hamburg University Press in 2002, followed by the Universitätsverlag Karlsruhe, and Universitätsverlag Göttingen in 2003, Potsdam 2004, Ilmenau 2006 and several others. And still now new presses are in the course of formation such as Bamberg or Heidelberg. A common trait of these presses is their close relationship to academic institutions, especially libraries, and a strong commitment to Open Access publishing.

It was in the mid-1990s, when academic libraries embraced the new distribution modes for electronic information while facing ever-tightening economic challenges such as rising journal subscription prices. These circumstances lead research institutions to think on alternative value chains for scientific information, namely production, publication and dissemination. Certain fields such as physics easily adopted

*Margo Bargheer is a trained media scientist and head of the electronic publishing department of the Göttingen State and University Library including the “Universitätsverlag Göttingen”. She coordinates several national Open Access projects and teaches on the subject of electronic publishing.

**Dr. Birgit Schmidt, MA LIS, has a background as mathematician and a training in library and information sciences. She has worked on long term archiving of digital objects, economic issues of internet-based publishing and currently works for EU-funded project DRIVER (Digital Repository infrastructure Vision for European Research) and a national Open Access project, both aiming to intensify the networking of digital repositories.

¹The first German university presses emerged from activities of privileged printers in the 17th and 18th century usually granted with exclusive rights to work for the local university. Many of these former university presses still exist as scholarly and independent commercial publishers f.e. Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, Herder or Ch. Beck. The “second wave” falls into the late mid-20th century and the expansion of the German academic system. The third wave came up with the emergence of electronic publishing and the internet.

digital repositories, and nowadays these repositories such as the arXiv² serve as central hubs in the dissemination of scholarly information. It is not long until we will see each research institution in Europe running a digital repository to collect and distribute the institution's intellectual output, either on an institutional or topic-oriented base.³ These repositories typically hold preliminary scholarly publications such as reports, white papers, preprints or working papers as well as already elsewhere published materials like post prints of articles and books.

The new generation of university presses aims at filling the gap between professional publisher activities, doubtlessly adding value to publications and digital repositories mainly providing infrastructure. These presses therefore take up the challenging double role of a publisher economically pursuing its interest for scientific content and at the same time acting in the name of scientists and universities willing to disseminate their publications as freely as possible. Therefore, it is often the university press offering independent consulting on publishing options for scholars, taking into account intellectual property rights questions, financial constraints or discipline-specific challenges.

In December 2005, with the support of the university press, the University of Göttingen released a resolution⁴ encouraging its scholars to use the full range of new opportunities in Open Access publishing: to distribute parallel versions of their publications via the institutional or thematic repositories and to make use of quality-controlled Open Access publishing channels such as journals or presses. Offering professional digital publishing in an Open Access mode, therefore, is a crucial driving force for the Göttingen University Press (Universitätsverlag Göttingen, GUP). This is combined with high-quality print-on-demand books to enable broad awareness and easy access as well as meeting traditional publishing and reading behaviour.

2. Description of Göttingen services

2.1. History

Since its founding in summer 2003, Göttingen University Press is run as a service of the Göttingen State and University Library. It was started as an additional service for the library-operated institutional repository of the university which started as early as 1995 to disseminate electronic theses online. The press is part of the Electronic Publishing department covering the fields of electronic theses online, the institutional repository for scholar's parallel publications, Open Access advocacy and in general offers a publication consulting service on behalf of the university. The institutional repository and its integration into the library catalogue serves as the electronic outlet of the press' publications, accompanied by its website for marketing and distribution.

2.2. Profile

The press offers its innovative publishing services primarily to scholars of the Georg-August-Universität Göttingen. Its publishing program therefore reflects the diversity of the university with

²<http://arxiv.org>.

³For an orientation in the landscape of digital repositories see the publications of the EU-funded project DRIVER (Digital Repositories Infrastructure Vision for European Research), <http://www.driver-support.eu/en/studies.html>. In fact, with regard to the upcoming repository networks like DRIVER it does no longer matter that much, where the actual deposit takes place: well-defined virtual collections can showcase specific disciplines and research topics.

⁴http://www.sub.uni-goettingen.de/ebene_2/pub/resolution.pdf.

13 faculties and several scientific centers covering sciences, life sciences, humanities, arts and social sciences. The press' publications originate from all scientific disciplines (except engineering) with a slight majority in Humanities and Social Sciences. The broad publishing scope requires different needs and challenges for the respective communities to be taken into account, be it discipline-specific layout styles, reading patterns or distribution channels. This diversity also influences the necessary quality control. If the press could only draw on their own personnel, quality control would have been either neglected or confined to those disciplines brought into the press by the staff's own scientific background. To guarantee a high-quality publication profile the Georg-August-Universität has send high-ranking delegates (usually active professors) from each faculty into the editorial board of the university press. The editorial board acts as a steering committee, additionally its members undertake discipline-specific peer review and recommend publications and serial or journal concepts to the board, which decides on the majority principle. However, an objection from a board's member is not simply overruled but thoroughly analysed and leads to editorial recommendations and advices for authors and editors.

Not every publication needs to pass this peer review process which indeed poses an extra workload on each member of the editorial board. The press publishes within two categories: the concept "Universitätsdrucke" is based on the assumption that the Georg-August-Universität Göttingen is a high-ranking scientific institution and therefore reaches a fair amount of quality, as a basis to be published without further qualitative review of the content. However the staff of the press thoroughly controls for formal quality such as typesetting, make-up, layout and image quality. Cover and preliminary matter are designed by the press' staff taking into account aesthetic and economic aspects as well as bibliographic necessities. The category "Universitätsverlag" is exclusively reserved for publications of high quality. The formal quality control lies within the press, the review process either rests with serial editors or is exerted by the faculties representatives. Cover design for "Universitätsverlag" publications receives extra attention by the press' staff. All other publication aspects remain similar, in particular author fees and retail prices of both categories are strictly based on production costs.

The press publishes monographs, anthologies, proceedings, scientific exhibition catalogues as well as serials and journals. Dissertation theses constitute less than a third of the publishing output. Although each publication project is developed individually on the author's or editor's needs, their budget and the publishing expectations of their target group, we observe a strong trend for the "hybrid" publication model that combines Open Access publishing with high-quality print-on-demand and initial print runs between 50–100 copies. The "long tail" of book sales is served by re-orders paid through print sales. The combination of a free online version and its reverberation in the "print" world (high-quality appearance, ISBN, distribution via book retail) brings together the best of both worlds and meets the present needs of scholars relying on books as a publication and reading asset. Some disciplines or research "generations" seem to pick up the opportunities offered by Open Access publishing more easily than others. Young academics at the dawn of their career are in general eager to have their results out and citable and are willing to finance the upfront costs of the publication without worrying about book sales. Established scholars are socialised with traditional offset prints and its large and therefore costly print runs. They are on the one hand used to raise funds for publishing but at the same time expect to finance the publishing project with book sales. There is a slight tendency that members of the "book sciences" such as history or archaeology are convinced of cannibalistic effects of the free online version on book sales. Sometimes these economical worries are underlined by a certain reluctance to expose the scientific results to a broad and therefore anonymous audience. Members of disciplines as mathematics or theoretical physics are more familiar with the preprint culture and communicate preliminary results as part of the scientific process. Therefore, scientists from these fields tend to presume positive marketing effects of the "full

range teaser”, the freely available book on the internet. Our data collection is not deep enough yet to robustly support one of these hypotheses. However, there is some evidence that a free online version combined with carefully designed books at moderate retail prices does result in negative effects on book sales.⁵

The legal sciences program of Göttingen University Press deserves special attention. Germany has a long tradition of independent, commercial scholarly publishers. Many of them only reluctantly pick up electronic, let alone Open Access publishing. So far only a handful of German-based publishers have enrolled themselves on the SHERPA/RoMEO database that displays publisher copyright and self-archiving policies. None of the German law-specialised publisher discloses that he allows self-archiving in any form. Law scientists are used to pay for the publishing of their dissertations but usually do not need to worry about the costs of any following publication. However, the Göttingen law faculty has already established three series with the press that are all available Open Access and nevertheless achieve reasonable book sales.

Authors or editors are getting more and more convinced that the immediate world wide and long-term availability of the electronic version promotes their scientific careers and will even outlast the print version. Nowadays, the majority of all GUP publications are available Open Access. In the run of four years the share of full Open Access books has grown from 50% to more than 80% by convincing former reluctant authors and editors to publish their books now Open Access as well and by setting up a stricter publishing policy.⁶ To make this policy more visible, Göttingen University Press managed to be listed as a “green publisher” in the SHERPA/RoMEO database.⁷

2.3. Author's rights

As the press is run by the university it works under the policy that it only asks for those rights needed for its purposes and leaves authors and editors as many rights as possible, on the contrary to the buy-out principles of commercial publishers. For the electronic publishing in the internet the press only requires a non-exclusive license which leaves authors and editors the right to publish elsewhere. In most cases the GUP publications are licensed with a Creative Commons Licence 2.0. Users are allowed to download, distribute and print in small numbers given that they mention the author and distribute the work unchanged. The license does not cover commercial use of the free online version and allows authors and editors to use the publisher's version wherever they need it. For the sake of the unambiguous existence of the printed book and as a protection of the press' (and therefore the university's) investment, the press requires an exclusive license for the print version but handles reprint requests as generously as possible.

2.4. Business model

The press' business model is based on a cost-recovery approach. Costs include prepress, production, distribution and marketing as well as a part of the net personnel costs. General overhead costs are ac-

⁵It has to be taken into account that the respective target groups for university presses of the “third wave” are rather small and confined to specialised scientific communities. We do not expect the described positive effect to happen for textbooks with a general approach and a large audience. The upfront investment for putting the material together and updating it on a regular base so far seems to require large amounts of sales at maximum prices combined with restrictive copyright arrangements.

⁶For more detail see the “Leitlinien des Publizierens”, http://www.univerlag.uni-goettingen.de/pub/policy_uv_goettingen.pdf.

⁷<http://www.sherpa.ac.uk/romeo.php?type=publisher&search=G%F6ttingen>.

counted for but not calculated into retail prices and author's and editor's publication fees as the press almost mainly serves members of the university. To minimise capital lockup authors and editors contribute to the production process: with the assistance of the press they produce a PDF file ready for publication while the press takes care of cover design, preliminary matter, quality control (where applicable including peer review) and organises production, distribution and marketing. Authors and editors in exchange pay a share of the printing and the press' processing cost. This share is supplemented by an institutional contribution. Göttingen University and its library support the press by infrastructure and staff for organising the review and production process, as well as the dissemination and archiving of publications. To achieve a modest price setting the retail price of books is calculated on the basis of short print runs for re-orders on the basis of external print-on-demand facilities.

3. Larger context

3.1. Integration into the library

As the last wave of university press foundings has largely been initiated by the respective research libraries these presses draw on library-specific dissemination facilities. Catalogue entries of the Göttingen University Press titles for instance can be combined with cover image and order facilities. All titles receive special care and handling during the indexing and integration process into the library's collection. Our subject specialists provide their contact lists or advise the press on how to win subject specialist's attention. At the same time the press places extra copies at the disposal of the dissertation and exchange department and seeks to provide additional copies for titles with textbook potential. For many of the institutions running a university press with a strong focus on Open Access the publishing activities are usually one facet among others in their portfolio of services. In Göttingen operating a professional publishing service led to a far more differentiated and user-oriented concept for the university's repository. It is the press and the superordinate electronic publishing department that handles ISBN, ISSN or DOI issuance for the university. Moreover, the press offers independent advice on legal and economic aspects of publishing. Consultancy does not necessarily lead to a contract with the press but rather in a publishing solution best for the author's needs. The experience gathered in the day-to-day work as a professional publisher serving different scientific communities steers the Open Access activities for the university at large. They include information and advocacy actions for the university members and the development of larger e-publishing networks to enhance the visibility of Göttingen' research output in the electronic publishing world.

3.2. Integration into information and repository networks

These networks in general expand on two levels. They facilitate the development of common strategic visions and the sharing of technical infrastructures. Awareness building and a greater level of common understanding lies at the base of an advanced and standardised international electronic publishing infrastructure. The information platform open-access.net supports scientists and research institutions to implement Open Access in practise and offers information on publishing strategies, costs and legal aspects. Harmonised metadata and a common level of technical quality on the other hand enhances technical performance and allows the integration of separated data-sets into virtual collections. The EU-funded project DRIVER (Digital Repository Infrastructure Vision for European Research)⁸ develops

⁸<http://www.driver-community.eu>.

the infrastructure for a pan-European repository network. A main organisational aim of DRIVER is the confederation building of all relevant stakeholders in the area of digital repositories. On a national level this is complemented by the development of an “Open Access Network of DINI-certified Open Access Repositories”.⁹ The “Deutsche Initiative für Netzwerkinformation” DINI (German Initiative for Networked Information) developed a certification process to improve the quality of publication services on the basis of Open Access repositories by referring to international standards and quality criteria. The certification process also provides the basis for the integration of these repositories into the DRIVER network. The above described networks up to now focus on already published content in order to provide the scientific communities with parallel Open Access versions of copyrighted and fee-based materials. Primary publishing however raises different questions and requires its own networking activities even if the same infrastructure for displaying the material comes into use.

3.3. Working group of university presses

To strengthen the press’ position in the German-speaking publishing landscape several of the small-scale university presses have allied in the working group of university presses. It consists of 10 German, two Austrian and one North-Italian presses.¹⁰ These presses already offer Open Access publishing options to their authors – with different uptakes of the model depending on the respective faculty policies and actual publication behaviour. Members of the working group cooperate in practical issues such as information exchange on production, dissemination or the legal and economic framework. They meet on an annual base and run a common exhibition at the Frankfurt Book Fair and the “Deutsche Bibliothekartag” (Congress of German Library Associations). Cooperation might also mean practical common projects. The Göttingen and Bozen university presses have just recently agreed to jointly publish an anthology that takes South Tyrol as a geological, geographical and cultural region into focus.

3.4. OAPEN

With the project “Open Access Publishing in European Networks” (OAPEN),¹¹ presented at the round table “University Presses and Books in the Humanities and Social Sciences in a digital future” at the APE 2008, Göttingen University Press seeks to intensify its collaboration with presses, scholars and service providers in the development of Open Access publishing models for high-quality content. OAPEN offers new opportunities of sharing visions and infrastructure with other European presses.¹² All involved presses are open-minded with regard to Open Access and aim to analyse publication and business models for Open Access e-books. For example, there are some practical experiences in OA book publishing, but no systematic analysis of print sales or usage statistics.

On a technical level the project OAPEN aims to develop a publication platform and a digital library on the basis of a distributed network of digital repositories. OAPEN’s vision is to use a subset of the DRIVER information space – a set of aggregated and cleaned metadata about publications in European digital repositories – as a basis for its publication and end user services. In the building of its publication

⁹<http://www.dini.de/oa-netzwerk>.

¹⁰<http://www.ag-univerlage.de>.

¹¹<http://www.oapen.com>.

¹²For a recent assessment and vision of the role of universities and their presses in scholarly publishing see also the “Ithaka Report”: Laura Brown, Rebecca Griffiths and Matthew Rascoff, University Publishing in a Digital Age, Ithaka, July 2007; <http://www.ithaka.org/strategic-services/university-publishing>.

and data model OAPEN seeks to cooperate with other initiatives like the European Digital Library project EDLnet.

4. Conclusion

If universities in the German-speaking¹³ countries run and let alone launch their own presses in a highly competitive market for scientific publishing they might seem to trifle with public money. Unlike the Anglo-American university presses most of them operate as small-scale enterprises and rely on direct or indirect subsidies of their mother institution. Staff often is recruited in-house and therefore has to acquire professionalism in a learning-by-doing process. To establish scientific journals that can compete with products of the large commercial publishers seems to be out of reach for most of these presses. Therefore, their main outputs are books and often those ones that could not be realised with profit-oriented publishers as they do not promise a significant return of investment.

At the same time having a dark figure of how many work hours of scientists and their staff, how much third-party funding moves into the book production via the commercial publishing system might prove risky as well in the long run. This goes especially for the situation that universities see their research results disappear behind the walls of subscription fees, high retail prices and a strict copyright regime.

The described university presses have settled at the intersection of professional publishing, ruled by economic interests and an institution-owned infrastructure set up to serve scientist's needs. Their dedication to high-quality Open Access publishing at science friendly conditions is an outcome of this double role. A recent study on the role of university presses in scholarly communications¹⁴ points out that university presses should on the one hand be managed professionally in the economic sense and on the other hand play an important role as part of the service portfolio offered by any university. The author states that it is the university press that should be involved when creating new research programs in order to develop matching publishing strategies. The "e-humanities" in Germany for instance, a program developed in the grid computing context, will require new publishing concepts. Those concepts need to be developed in "think tanks" for the time being without economic pressure but nevertheless based on solid publishing experience. We see this role perfectly taken up by the new university presses. Their small size and flexibility allows them to oscillate between a scholarly publisher and a university owned service thus bringing together the best of both environments. This also includes cooperation with presses that would otherwise be considered as competitors.

New concepts of cooperation like OAPEN will provide practical strategies for innovative services and economic expansion as well as arrangements with commercial service providers. As the core group of OAPEN consists of not-for-profit publishers their multi-facet cultural mission combined with careful consideration of economic aspects will assure a balanced view on Open Access in the book sciences and beyond. In this sense not-for-profit presses have a strong potential to improve the state of scholarly publishing while offering alternative community adapted venues of publishing.

¹³This probably applies to other continental European countries as well although there is little empirical data to support these hypotheses. OAPEN seeks to integrate other European partners during the course of the project, especially from the newer members of the European Union.

¹⁴J.J. Esposito, The wisdom of Oz: The role of the university press in scholarly communications, *Journal of Electronic Publishing* 10(1) (2007), <http://hdl.handle.net/2027/spo.3336451.0010.103>.