

Open Access monographic publishing in the humanities *

Eelco Ferwerda, APE Berlin, January, 2010

Abstract. In recent years, it has become widely recognized that in the case of monographs, the traditional business model for books is losing its sustainability. Academic publishers have been forced to become more selective in the books they publish, and authors, in particular young researchers and first time authors, have found it harder to find a press willing to publish their work. In response to the economic restraints of printed monographs, many publishers and academic institutes, in particular research libraries, have started to experiment with digital and Open Access publication of monographs.

OAPEN is the first international project to develop an Open Access model for publishers and stakeholders in scholarly communication. OAPEN stands for Open Access Publishing in European Networks.¹ It is a 30 month project co-funded by the European Union,² to develop and implement an Open Access (OA) publication model for peer reviewed academic books in the Humanities and Social Sciences (HSS).

1. Traditional monograph publishing

Over a period of 30 years or so, average sales of monographs have dropped as libraries have had to cut down on book acquisitions. According to Greco and Wharton, in the 1970s, it would be normal to sell around 1500 copies to the library market, now the average has dropped to between 2 and 300 copies [2]. Consequently, print runs and overall sales have dropped as well. Thompson mentions average print runs between 2 and 3000 in the 1970s, and sales below 500 for over half of all academic books a few years ago. Only a minority will sell more than 750 copies [5].

Figure 1 is a graph from the American Association of Research Libraries and it shows the expenditures of the libraries on journals and monographs over almost 20 years, from 1986 to 2005. The yearly changes in expenditures, unit costs, and purchases are represented in percentages and compared to the inflation rate.

The top line represents the total expenditures on journals. For this period of almost two decades, there has been a steep and steady increase in total expenditures on journals, at a rate of almost 4 times the rate of inflation.

Looking at this graph from a librarian's perspective, it is clear how libraries have struggled to keep up with price increases. From about 1990 onwards, the number of journals purchased began to slowly decline. Then around the turn of the century the big deals emerge and the unit costs of journals suddenly drop. This leads to a recovery and further growth of journals purchased. But although the big deals

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¹For more information, see www.oapen.org.

²Actions undertaken under the eContentplus Programme (2005–2008) to make digital content in Europe more accessible, usable and exploitable. See http://ec.europa.eu/information_society/activities/econtentplus/projects/dili/oapen/index_en.htm.

Monograph and Serial Expenditures in ARL Libraries, 1986-2005*

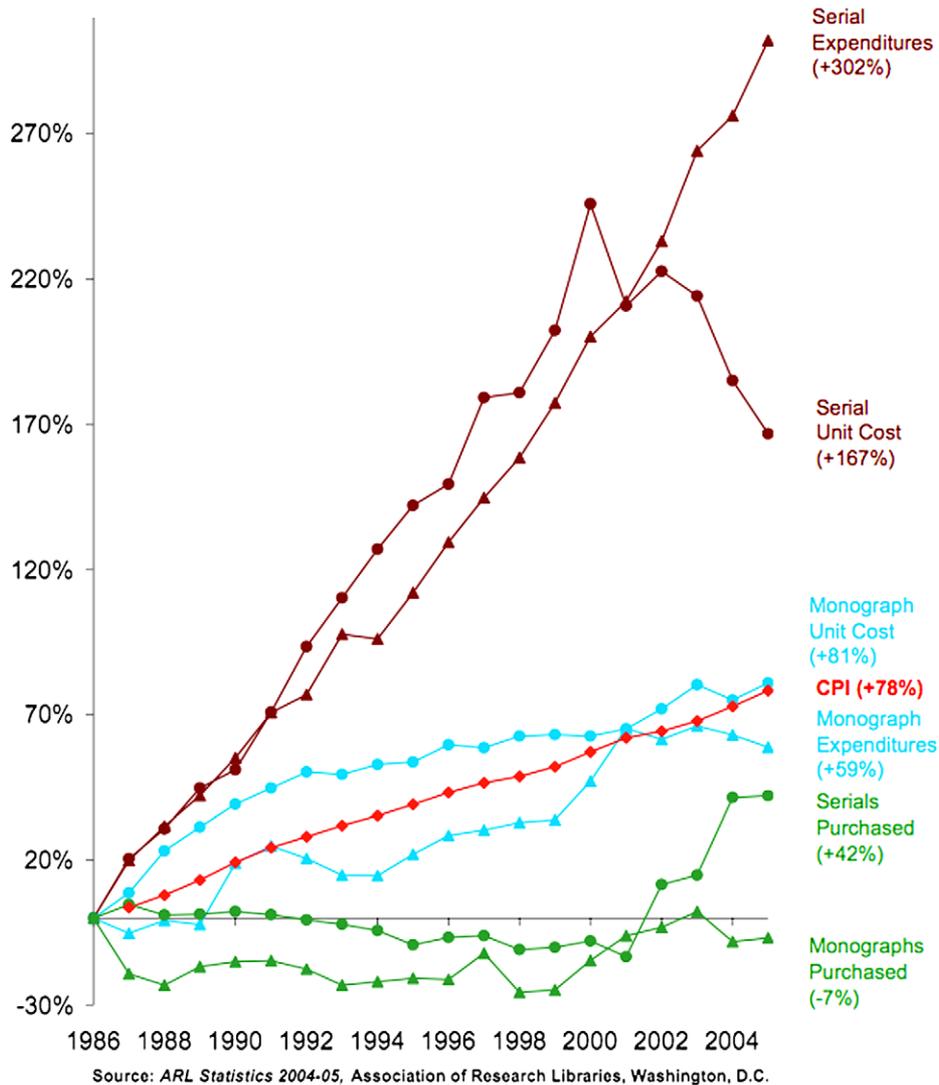


Fig. 1. Monograph and serial expenditures in ARL libraries 1986–2005.

brought down the unit costs of journals, overall spending continued to increase at the same pace. Library budgets did not grow enough to accommodate price increases, and the result can be seen at the bottom end of the graph.

In sharp contrast with journals, monographs have been in decline. Libraries have been forced to reduce their acquisitions of books, which has resulted in a considerable decline of book sales, which in turn has made it increasingly difficult for publishers continue publishing books in a sustainable manner. Academic book publishers have responded by becoming more selective in the books they chose to publish,

in some cases even moving out of monograph publishing altogether, by moving into other areas such as trade books and text books, and, perhaps paradoxically, by publishing more titles to retain total turn over. In the last few years, it is widely recognized by all stakeholders – librarians, publishers and scholars – that the traditional publishing model for books is being threatened, and there are many articles about the so-called ‘monograph crisis’ [4].

The figures mentioned above are reflected by our experience at Amsterdam University Press. Over the past 5 years, our average print run for monographs was around 600, and we have seen a steady increase in books published digitally, as Print-on-Demand or in combination with a short print run. Print-on-Demand has many advantages, it reduces costs for distribution and makes it easier to sell books world wide, it also reduces up front and overall costs. However, from a financial perspective Print-on-Demand only makes sense when sales expectations are below 2 or 300 copies. There are two points to this: One is that when publishers expect book sales of no more than 2 or 300 copies, they will require some form of additional funding to break even. This is becoming a quite common practice in many markets and for many subject areas.

The other point is that with sales figures that are this low, one can wonder about the effectiveness of book publishing in terms of being able to reach intended audiences.

2. Open Access publishing

Open Access publishing should be distinguished from Open Access archiving. In both cases, publications are made freely available through the internet. But Open Access archiving is about preserving and providing unrestricted access to already published material. Publishing on the other hand is about validation and certification of research results, and it includes the whole process of reviewing, editing, design, production, marketing and distribution. The distinction between archiving and publishing is precisely the distinction between the so called green and golden roads to Open Access.

From an economic perspective we should observe that OA archiving or green Open Access does not change the business model behind publishing, and therefore does not change the current economic conditions – although publishers are understandably concerned about losing revenue when everything they publish is eventually made freely available.

Open Access publishing does involve a different business model, although there are actually many models and experiments taking place. Open Access publications are free for end users, but require some form of funding on the production side. This can be a publication charge for the author, or some form of financial support from an academic institute, such as a Learned Society, a University or Library, or a research institute. In the case of a publication fee, the model is usually called ‘author pays’, although it is not actually the author who pays, but his or her employer, or the funder of the original research.

The idea of Open Access to articles was reinforced by the serials crisis and it is spreading quite rapidly. The Directory of Open Access Journals (DOAJ), lists over 5000 Open Access journals, and it is by now quite common for publishers to offer authors the choice of publishing their articles in Open Access in journals that are subscription based.

Open Access books are still a very new phenomenon, although the first examples date back to the 1990s. But only in the last few years are people beginning to understand that many of the benefits that apply for Open Access journals, also apply for Open Access books. For authors, it extends the reach of their work, by ensuring worldwide access and retrievability. Researchers benefit through direct access to publications, improved search mechanisms across collections and ease of use. Research funders

can guarantee the publication of peer reviewed research results and ensure free and unrestricted access, thereby improving the return on their investment in research. Libraries can improve their service to researchers and students. And for academic publishers Open Access publishing could offer a more effective and sustainable approach to the dissemination of Scholarly knowledge.

3. Examples of Open Access book publishing

Given these advantages and the economic pressures facing book publishers it is not surprising that there are by now many experiments taking place with Open Access monographs. Some examples are from so-called ‘scholar led’ presses, such as Open Humanities Press and Open Book Publishers. In both these cases, scholars started their own press out of dissatisfaction with the traditional publishing system. Some are from commercial presses, such as Bloomsbury Academic, an imprint of Bloomsbury, introducing a new business model based on a Creative Commons non-commercial license. Some, such as Athabasca University Press and Rice University Press, are set up as a digital press, but offer printed copies through a print on demand service. The oldest example is National Academies Press. NAP started to offer free online access to their publications more than ten years ago, and has managed to sustain the press on sales of PDF versions and printed copies. Quite a few examples are from ‘remote’ areas, where presses adopted Open Access publishing as a way to overcome limited reach and distribution of their publications. Examples are ANU E press of the Australian National University and ASSAf, the Academy of Science of South Africa.

In a study conducted for the OAPEN project [1] of over 30 different cases of Open Access book publishing, it became clear that almost all these examples 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 depend on some form of funding, be it institutional support, experimental grants or infrastructural support. Finally, most models include developing services on top of the free content, targeted at libraries, publishers, scholars or other parties, to provide some additional revenue.³

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 foremost creates cost-efficiencies but also efficiencies in the production and curation process of both the printed and digital book. To streamline the collaboration between libraries and university presses, a third party is often introduced, 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.

Although most models make use of innovative business and publishing models, based on scale and platform advantages, cost reductions through digital techniques and sharing of resources and skills, the development a complex mix of subsidies and additional funding and cross-subsidizing, based on a hybrid model with additional paid-for services on top of the free content, the question remains whether these models will still work in the (near) future.

³For an overview of services in use, see [1], pp. 57–58.

4. OAPEN

OAPEN (Open Access Publishing in European Networks) is a 30 month project co-funded by the European Union, to develop and implement an Open Access publication model for peer reviewed academic books in the Humanities and Social Sciences.

The overall objective of OAPEN is to improve the accessibility, usage and impact of European research in HSS, through the promotion of OA for academic books, the creation and promotion of digital formats for the dissemination of HSS scholarship and the creation and aggregation of freely available HSS publications within an Online Library.

The qualitative goal is to create a 'golden road' to Open Access books. This requires stakeholders in scholarly research to be engaged in the publication process, developing common funding models.

The quantitative goal is to aggregate peer reviewed HSS publications from across borders and to make them freely available in an online library. By creating common model for OA books, on top of standards developed in other projects such as DRIVER and Europeana, retrievability and visibility of HSS publications can be improved. OAPEN aims to achieve critical mass by introducing a network for academic publishers to create a virtual collection of HSS publications.

OAPEN aims to achieve three main results:

- OA publication model: The publication model promotes a common approach to OA books. It consists of guidelines and recommendations, such as an approach to calculate the costs of OA publications, mechanisms to fund these publications, a system for quality assurance and a legal framework.
- Production centre: A publishing platform primarily dedicated to monograph content in HSS. The centre is aimed at academic publishers throughout Europe and will include various services, such as Print-on-Demand services and services for the production and marketing of OA books.
- OA library: The library aims to increase visibility and usage of OA monographs and promotes the use of common standards. It consists of a freely available multilingual collection of current content in various fields of HSS. The online library is based on existing repository and harvesting infrastructures, conforming to international standards and connected to existing European projects and initiatives.

5. OAPEN publication model

The publication model aims to improve access to monographs, but also to reduce the economic barriers facing traditional monograph publishing. OAPEN's basic approach to the model is a combination of Open Access and traditional (or Print-on-Demand) publishing. Publishers produce the OA edition as a service for which they can charge a publication fee. The model therefore consists of an approach to calculate the costs of OA publications and mechanisms to fund these publications. The model also incorporates a system for quality assurance and a legal framework.

Publication funds can be provided by a variety of sources, such as research funders, universities and research institutes, and research libraries or their consortia. The objective for funding of the OA edition is to ensure both the publication of and access to peer reviewed research results. Therefore, research funders may promote or require OA publication of funded research.

The approach to calculate the costs of OA books is to separate all the costs directly relating to the production of the electronic version (such as organizing peer review, editing, typesetting and some basic marketing) from the costs that are made to produce, distribute and sell other editions (such as cover

design, printing, distributing, marketing and sales), and then to add overhead costs as a fixed percentage of the direct costs of each edition.

Publication funds can cover all or part of the costs for OA editions. Fees can be based on different mechanisms, for instance based on a percentage of actual publication costs, or based on full costs in combination with a system for revenue sharing (as a percentage of net profits from sold editions). Both publishers and funders remain independent and free to choose their preferred system, and the model should work within the existing competitive market environment. Publishers can decide to make publications available in Open Access regardless of funding, as part of their strategy to improve the dissemination of publications.

OAPEN's model is based on a few straightforward principles. The first principle is that research and the dissemination of research results should not be separated. They should both be treated as essential elements in the scholarly communication process. OAPEN recommends that research funding should include the costs of dissemination.

The second principle is that academic institutes that promote Open Access should extend their policies to include OA publishing. In other words, they should promote both green and gold Open Access. In addition, funds for Open Access publications should be open for both articles and books.

The final principle is that 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 are providing authors the option to publish their articles in Open Access within existing subscription based journals.

6. The transition to Open Access publishing

OAPEN maintains that the transition to Open Access books will require some form of funding of Open Access editions, even though there are few examples of funding opportunities at present. But the need for a funding mechanism for Open Access articles is being recognized. A good example is a report published last year "Paying for Open Access publication charges", containing guidelines for all stakeholders in scholarly communication [3]. To give an idea of some of the main recommendations:

Higher Education Institutes should establish dedicated budgets to which researchers can apply for funds to meet the costs of publication fees.

Funders should clarify how they will provide support for researchers in meeting their Open Access policies in general, and the payment of publication fees in particular.

For Open Access articles funding opportunities seem to be steadily increasing. Evidence of this trend can be found on the Sherpa/Juliet inventory of Research funders' Open Access policies, where about half of all the funders promoting Open Access also have policies for Open Access publications.⁴ Again, these policies are directed towards articles, not books, and one could argue that the main challenge in the transition towards Open Access publishing is to make sure that monographs are not left behind. So far, there is one example of a national research council providing funds for Open Access books: The Austrian Science Fund (FWF).⁵

⁴<http://www.sherpa.ac.uk/juliet/>.

⁵http://www.fwf.ac.at/en/projects/peer-reviewed_publications.html.

7. Conclusion

It is too early to assess OAPEN's impact on the academic book publishing market. Clearly, the traditional book publishing model is not effective any more. Publishers have become more selective in their choice of new publications, turning down more manuscripts for economic reasons, regardless of the outcome of peer review. Many publishers seek or require additional funds before publication. In addition, published monographs do not find their way to their intended audience, as library purchases of monographs have declined.

Many academic publishers and other stakeholders recognize the need for a new approach to monograph publishing. Any solution will most certainly involve e-books. Stakeholders are also aware of the need to improve conditions in HSS. The interest in OAPEN and the steady growth of its Partner network is proof of that.

The impact of OAPEN's model for academic books will depend on the uptake of the model among publishers and stakeholders. The acceptance of the model among academic publishers will depend largely on the willingness of funders to pay for publication fees for Open Access books. This is why OAPEN aims to introduce a pilot for publishers and stakeholders, setting up publication funds in various European countries. At the same time, OAPEN will start aggregating HSS publications in its OA library, to establish the effectiveness of the model.

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