

Meeting Report

Summary Report APE 2024 - Keep the conversation going Academic Publishing in Europe, 9–10 January 2024, Berlin, Germany

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Abstract. This report summarizes APE 2024 (Academic Publishing in Europe, 9–10 January 2024, Berlin, Germany), the 19th edition of the yearly conference bringing together stakeholders within the realm of scholarly publishing. This year's conference, moderated by Brill's Chief Publishing Officer Jasmin Lange, was themed 'Keep the Conversation Going,' and highlighted topics such as publishers contributing to the SDGs, research integrity, the pros and cons of AI, and open science.

Keywords: APE 2024, scholarly communication, artificial intelligence, LLMs, research integrity, reviewer recognition, business models, transformative agreements, subscribe to open, sustainable development goals, open science, change management, dotcoms to watch, start-ups, peer review, academic freedom

1. Keep the conversation going

Academic publishers, librarians, researchers, technologists, and consultants to the industry gathered in chilly Berlin in January 2024 to discuss the latest topics on everyone's minds in the scholarly publishing ecosystem. This year's conference theme was 'Keep the Conversation Going', facilitating invigorating discussions on peer review, business models, Artificial Intelligence (AI), Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), and research integrity. As every year, new start-ups were given an opportunity to present themselves in the Dotcoms to Watch session.

APE 2024 was organized by the Berlin Institute for Scholarly Publishing (BISP), a not-for-profit dedicated to bringing publishers, researchers, and decision-makers together. The conference was held in a hybrid format, giving attendees the option to join remotely and in person. A train strike at the time of the conference caused disruption, forcing some delegates to cancel or change their travel plans.

As Marta Dossi, Managing Director of BISP, highlighted in her opening remarks on Day 1 of the conference: "APE has always strived to start the conversation in January, and to keep it going over the course of the whole year. At APE 2024, we want to give as much room as possible to the exchange of

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ideas and views". The program reflected this vision, as it consisted of panel discussions as well as keynote presentations, and there was ample room for the audience to join the conversation.

Prof. Jörg Rocholl, President of the European School of Management and Technology (ESMT), welcomed the delegates in the former supreme governing headquarters; he explained that the building where the business school is housed used to be the home of Sozialismus (socialism) in Berlin. In the context of APE, Prof. Rocholl said, "We need the critical thinking of research and rigor more than ever before".

Likki-Lee Pitzen, First Secretary, Cultural Affairs and Press, Embassy of the Federal Republic of Germany, Bangkok, Thailand, drew parallels between what it means to be a diplomat and how the publishing industry can influence and empower dialogue. She encouraged the audience to keep the conversation going through outreach and pleaded to "make people care about the science".

2. Can scholarly publishers change the world? "Probably not. But we can make a massive impact"

The United Nation's SDGs aim to eradicate poverty and inequality, protect the planet, and ensure health, justice, and prosperity for all, emphasizing inclusivity. Within the realm of scholarly publishing, the panel discussion Can scholarly publishers change the world? The role of the SDGs within the publishing industry focused on the following focal points:

- (1) To highlight the business advantages of aligning with SDGs to industry leaders and reshape the narrative beyond mere moral obligation.
- (2) To galvanize stakeholders to take action and promote engagement, offering a clear direction.

The panel discussion was moderated by Stephanie Dawson, CEO, ScienceOpen. She introduced the session by highlighting that we are at the halfway point towards achieving the SDGs, a blueprint for saving the world, by 2030. What role can publishers play to achieve these lofty goals? She noted that one concrete action taken by the industry is the SDG Publishers Compact. A survey by SDG Fellows in the Compact showed that stakeholders in the industry think the SDGs are relevant and that they are willing to commit to them.

Agata Morka, Regional Director, Publishing Development, PLOS, shared what PLOS has done in this context, beyond trying to look good on paper. "Is it just a big marketing ploy?" she asked. She went on to explain that committing to the SDGs ties in with PLOS' mission to increase equitable participation in science. Some examples include launching the journal PLOS Climate, introducing a policy on inclusion in global research to prevent "parachute research", experimenting with business models to remove financial barriers, and having a squad of 'PLOS planetees' to track the organization's efforts and engage staff. "Commitment goes far beyond what looks good on paper", she concluded.

Ritu Dhand, Chief Scientific Officer, Springer Nature, answered the question "Can scholarly publishers change the world?" by stating, "Probably not, but we can make a massive impact". Springer Nature has published 800,000 articles and more than 3,800 books related to SDGs. She emphasized that it is not easy to collate this information. They have launched new journals and SDG hubs, engaged experts to drive thought leadership, and have waived 20 million euros for APCs for authors in the global south publishing in fully OA journals. "Walk the talk", she said. It is important to prioritize more time from their people instead of adding to their workloads.

Nikesh Gosalia, President Global Academic and Publisher Relations, Cactus, asked, "How can publishers create real-world impact?" "So far, we haven't fared well", was his sobering conclusion. He said

acceleration is needed; stagnation and regression currently dominate. “If this were a teammate of ours, we’d be putting them on a performance improvement program.” He reviewed the ten commitments of the SDG Publishers Compact and explained what Cactus has done, including mapping published research to the SDGs, launching resource portals and sustainability reporting. He proposed to repurpose research articles, and enhance them with infographics, audio summaries, plain language summaries, and podcasts. He advised to focus on a holistic approach, recognizing and rewarding those working towards furthering the SDGs, and engaging with core audiences (i.e. ECRs/younger researchers).

Kudos’ slogan is Science needs Stories. Charlie Rapple, Chief Customer Officer and Co-founder, Kudos, fears our industry is missing the details amidst the superficiality of pretty branding. “That’s not going to help the world, we need to focus on the specific indicators”, she said. “We have the building blocks.” She suggested leveraging the benefits of AI for SDG mapping. At Kudos, they started analyzing in greater detail who reads their summaries. “We are publishing the answers to change the world. We are the gatekeeper; it takes meaningful effort and purpose to do so”.

A question after the session is about data. As Ritu Dhand said, it is not easy to curate and map the data assigned to SDGs. Nikesh Gosalia said there are tools for text classification, topic modeling, content recommendation engines, and large language models (LLMs). Charlie Rapple added, “We need curation in addition to tech solutions”. While it would be good to empower authors and editors, the panel doesn’t think it will be beneficial to ask them for additional input in this context, because of the risk of ending up with a ‘box-checking syndrome’.

3. Change is your journey from where you are now to where you need to be

“The only constant is change”, said Greek Philosopher Heraclitus some 2500 years ago. Scholarly publishing is a rapidly evolving environment, with ongoing changes to workflows, business models, compliance requirements, and necessary skill sets.

The session The five principles of Lean Change: A modern approach to delivering sustainable business change in publishing dove into the elements of lean change, a practical and people-centered approach to change. Charlotte Talmage, Change Management and Communications Specialist, Uuna, and Julian Sharples, Change, Communications and Diagnostics Specialist, Uuna, presented their Change Together program, which contains five principles:

- (1) Define and align: Working with the Strategic Change Canvas (based on the Business Model Canvas).
- (2) Bridging perspectives: Looking at what’s right for the organization, not its individuals, finding shared interests and common ground, and listening without judgment.
- (3) Create together: Getting everyone involved to solve problems together and map who is the decision-maker.
- (4) Lead the change: Translating the context around the ‘why’ and the ‘what’ and empowering employees to work out the ‘how’.
- (5) Test, measure and learn: “Failing is great, as long as you learn from it”.

Leadership coach David Roche said change is accelerating exponentially, but many company leaders don’t involve the organization in change processes. The transition to becoming a CEO is not easy, but it doesn’t have to be lonely at the top. He recommended getting independent professional help; a mentor/coach is very important. Also, “empower staff to make your business”.

4. The outsider perspective in business can be the catalyst for innovation

Jasmin Lange introduced Harsh Jegadeesan, Chief Publishing Officer, Springer Nature, who worked in the tech industry before joining Springer Nature, by saying, “The outsider perspective in business can be the catalyst for innovation, challenging the status-quo, injecting fresh ideas into the organizational DNA”. In his keynote Building a more open and inclusive publishing system: What can we learn from tech companies/industry?, he outlined his ‘OCEAN of Opportunities’ strategy:

O - Open and inclusive research: making open science the default and learning from the open-source movement.

C - Communities, collaboration, and coordination: providing a platform for research communities to collaborate and coordinate research and innovation.

E - Experience: significantly improving researcher-centric experiences.

A - AI: using AI to increase the speed of science and innovation.

N - Network and network effects: being the bridge between research and innovation ecosystems.

5. Opportunities and risks of implementing AI in publishing workflows

The second half of Day 1 of APE 2024 revolved around AI. Max Vögler, Vice President Global Strategic Networks, DACH, Elsevier, introduced the two panel sessions on how we think about AI and LLMs and the integration of these technologies: the first panel from the perspective of publishers, and the second from the perspective of scientists looking at the publishing community.

LLMs and other types of AI perform more effectively when they can rely on a trustworthy corpus. Which training data was used is often unknown. Rachel Burley, CEO, American Physical Society, chaired the panel The Trusted Corpus and AI, on how academic publishers are thinking about the use of AI in workflows and in products.

The first speaker in this panel session was Dr. George Tsatsaronis, Vice President Data Science, Research Content Operations, Elsevier, who dove into the opportunities as well as the risks and threats of using AI. He asked: “Why should we think about GenAI [Generative AI, AEV] in the context of scientific writing and publishing?” He went on to explain that many researchers use AI to assist them in writing their papers. However, one of the concerns is the so-called ‘hallucination’ risk, which relates to (1) truthfulness to the sources that the model has seen during training, and (2) its factuality; how correct the answer that a model provides is. If a model doesn’t respond in a truthful fashion, or if the answer is factually wrong, it is hallucinating. Other concerns are bias, questions around how up to date a data set is, homogenization of content, and the chance that the model is not trained with scientific data. Potential benefits of using GenAI in scientific writing and publishing are saving time and effort, improving language, translating text, and identifying novel research topics. Elsevier follows its ‘Responsible AI Principles’. Dr. Tsatsaronis touched upon how Elsevier is using AI to support the editorial process. He further showed the Generative LLM lifecycle, illustrating how LLMs have evolved. ChatGPT didn’t happen overnight; it’s the result of over sixty years of research. He concluded his presentation by demonstrating the ScopusAI beta version.

Dr. Thomas Lemberger, Deputy Head of Scientific Publications, EMBO, started off by impressing on the audience how humans talking to non-humans has had a tremendous psychological impact on us. At EMBO, they go beyond natural language. “It is important to remember that Generative AI can generate synthetic realistic data across many different modalities.” Focusing on life sciences research at EMBO, GenAI is also used to develop new molecules and proteins to interpret or generate new genetic elements. He gave a few examples of how EMBO leverages AI. One of their applications is based on manually

curated data in combination with tech. Another automates summarization of referee reports. They tested whether editors could notice if a summary was written by a human or an AI. Further experiments looked at the tone and manner of referee reports, giving suggestions to be emotionally neutral. The final example was scope2vec, which maps the research landscape. Dr. Lemberger sees publishing as a 'chain of trust'.

6. “Generative AI is just a reflection of science”

Due to some last-minute changes, the panel Good Science and AI, chaired by Manuel Hartung, CEO, ZEIT STIFTUNG (foundation) BUCERIUS, consisted of Prof. Dr. Jeanette Hofmann, Research and Founding Director, Alexander von Humboldt Institute for Internet and Society, Prof. Gerd Gigerenzer, Director-Emeritus, Max Planck Institute for Human Development and Director, Harding Center for Risk Literacy, and Dr. Ohad Parnes, Senior Research Fellow and Research Coordinator, Max Planck Institute for the History of Science.

“It’s not just about what AI does to science, it’s about what science becomes with AI”, is the headline of the panel, Manuel Hartung said in his introduction. In her opening remarks, Dr. Hofmann hypothesized whether we might go back to a scenario in which the individual contribution to academic knowledge will be de-emphasized in favor of producing valuable knowledge by using calculative devices in combination with the human brain. Dr. Parnes spoke about the changing nature of the definition of plagiarism and how GenAI is being tweaked to look for different things. “Generative AI is just a reflection of science”, he said. Prof. Gigerenzer addressed two questions: (1) whether AI endangers democracy, and (2) if AI can support science. His answer to the first question was “No, but politicians and leaders of tech companies can”. His answer to the second question was “Yes, of course. However, researchers need to understand the limits”. He emphasized the need for digital risk literacy. He also made a plea for academia to retake control of publishing and said this can be done with the support of AI.

7. “Innovation involves failure”

Day 1 ended with Daniel Hook, CEO, Digital Science, handing out the APE Award for Innovation in Scholarly Communication to Laura Feetham-Walker, Reviewer Engagement Manager, IOP Publishing (IOPP), for her contribution to improving the peer review process, which includes IOPP’s peer review excellence and training program that has certified 13,000 researchers till date. Daniel Hook said, “Innovation involves failure. Be brave. Sometimes being unsuccessful shows us how to be successful later on”. Hong Zhou, Director of Intelligent Services & Head AI R&D, Wiley, received an honorable mention for his work on Atypon’s auto-tagging technologies.

8. “Don’t worry about your career; worry about your job”

Day 2 of APE 2024 kicked off with Martin Wilson, Head of Content, Researcher Services, Taylor & Francis, interviewing Richard Charkin about his biography *My Back Pages*. The book is an “undeniably personal account” of Charkin’s career, spanning half a century. He talked about his mentors who taught him to take risks and how the world has changed since 1972. His advice for newcomers in the industry: “Don’t worry about your career; worry about your job”. Then your career will take care of itself. Also, “When someone asks you to do something, always say yes”.

9. “There is not one model that is the silver bullet. We operate in a diverse landscape”

Since the shift from subscription journals to Open Access, publishers have been deploying different types of business models, such as Green, Gold, and Diamond OA, each with different payment arrangements for article publication costs. Via transformative agreements, libraries pay a fee to publishers to facilitate the open access publishing (and reading) of articles for those affiliated with their institution, with the ultimate goal of flipping subscription journals to fully OA.

In the session Transformation beyond Transformative Agreements? chair Niamh O’Connor, PhD, Chief Publishing Officer, PLOS, asked, “Has the OA movement been successful?” The answer has to be ‘no’, she stated. Three speakers gave a short presentation of the business models deployed at their organizations.

CERN’s Kamran Naim, PhD, Head of Open Science, outlined that the discipline of particle physics is highly complex; this research environment necessitated an open science workflow, he said. SCOAP3, the Sponsoring Consortium for Open Access Publishing in Particle Physics, has been operating successfully for a decade now. CERN sees OA as a global public good. “We believe that these kinds of diamond approaches are possible”. In relation to APC-waiver programs, he said, “They don’t acknowledge the dignity that researchers globally deserve”.

Annual Reviews’ mission is ‘to benefit society’, said Richard Gallagher, PhD, President and Editor-in-Chief, therefore, they flipped all their content to OA. The existing models didn’t work for their product. Annual Reviews launched a Subscribe to Open (S2O) pilot in 2020. When they first started talking about the idea in 2018, stakeholders’ reactions were lukewarm, he said. However, they persisted, and are pleased with the results so far (no lost subscribers, increased usage) and the equitability of the model. A weakness is the conditional nature of the open-close decision, and the model is vulnerable to non-participation. They haven’t figured out how to balance the relationship with funders, he admitted.

Ben Ashcroft, Vice President Commercial, De Gruyter, explained they have a long history with OA due to De Gruyter’s acquisition of Versita. ‘Make knowledge and research widely accessible’ is their mission, and OA ties in with that. They considered the pros and cons of other models before deciding on S2O. They now have a modular approach (a little bit of this, a little bit of that).

A lively discussion ensued. “What’s the recipe for success?”, an audience member asked. Richard Gallagher: “The sales team is key in this process, plus librarian advocates”. Ben Ashcroft: “Consider the self-interest for an institution: do you want to pay a subscription of US\$350, or US\$2000 if one of your authors wants to publish in the journal?” Kamran Naim concluded: “There is not one model that is the silver bullet. We operate in a diverse landscape”.

10. “The more you look, the more you’ll find”

Amid increasing concerns about research integrity, the academic community is confronting the magnitude and breadth of this issue. In The Research Integrity Debate: Should science slow down or speed up? panelists talked about “one of the most discussed topics of the last year”, according to chair Sven Fund, Managing Director, Reviewer Credits.

Why is research integrity such a hot topic? “It’s in the public eye now”, said Kim Eggleton, Head of Peer Review & Research Integrity, IOP Publishing. “The more you look, the more you’ll find. It is one of the biggest challenges since OA to hit our industry.” She explained that we’re using systems that are 20–30 years old, and are no longer fit for purpose. We need to build from the ground up, with integrity

at the heart of development. “The issue is systemic, because of the perverse incentives in academia”, she added. “The pressure is very high. Of course they [the researchers, AEV] are going to take short-cuts”.

Hylke Koers, Chief Information Officer, STM Solutions, urged stakeholders in the industry to set aside their competitive nature. “Publishing is a centuries-old trust-based industry”, he said, and concluded that more and more people in publishing are in research integrity roles.

Julian Moore, Managing Director Technology Corporate Finance, Lincoln International, talked about the difference between scholarly publishing and banking: banks know who their clients are. To disrupt current systems, “It has got to be innovative, not stuck in a committee. You need third parties to come in”.

Othman Altalib, Chief Growth Officer, Morressier, said “We have to learn from other industries. Reputation damage etcetera happens everywhere. “He added that as a start-up, “We are crazy enough to think there is a better world out there”.

11. “We build on OpenAlex”

A recurring highlight of APE is the STM’s New Dotcoms to Watch, which features start-ups that focus on addressing a particular challenge within the academic publishing industry. In this year’s session, moderated by Martijn Roelandse, PhD, STM, Park 56, the following seven start-ups were featured:

- Clear Skies (presented by Adam Day) detects organized research fraud through analytical pipelines. Subscribers get automated alerts on potential fraud through a papermill alarm.
- Consensus (presented by Eric Olsen) is an AI search engine tailored for research, utilizing language models to extract insights from peer-reviewed literature, designed for those seeking unbiased, expert information.
- Global Campus (presented by Tijmen Altena) is transforming the search for academic expertise. Their semantic search technology connects organizations with the most relevant academic professionals for review, recruitment, or research.
- Knowledge Gate Group (presented by Viktoriya Vasilenko) provides an AI platform that identifies and connects with scientific opinion leaders, aiming to speed up research by streamlining the process of finding global experts for organizations.
- Ludenso (presented by Harald Manheim) is creating an augmented reality tool specifically for publishers, allowing them to add interactive 3D models, videos, and audio to textbooks, with benefits to students with additional needs.
- Signals (presented by Elliot Lumb) provides tools for researchers, journal editors, and research integrity professionals to assess the legitimacy of research articles and prevent publication fraud, by analyzing and surfacing insights from author metadata.
- Visual Abstract (presented by Benito Campos) is dedicated to making complex research accessible and understandable for all, helping people to search, find and read scientific publications.

OpenAlex gets a shout out from a few of these start-ups, as the openly available dataset is a valuable resource to build upon.

To conclude the session, the audience got to vote on the following questions:

- Which of these start-ups has the best idea? Signals and Clear Skies took the lead.
- Which of these start-ups delivered the best pitch? Visual Abstract was the clear winner.
- With which of these start-ups would you like to collaborate? Signals received the most votes.

12. Reputation, rewards and reviews

Peer review plays a vital role in scientific evaluation and the human factor remains crucial, despite the availability of tools to aid in peer review and identify fraud. The final panel *Rewarding for Reviewing? Changing paradigms in research integrity*, chaired by Kathryn Sharples, Wiley, Group VP, Publishing Strategy & Policy, explored the subject from various viewpoints. Altruistic motives remain top motivators for conducting peer review, she said, and added, “It’s more important than ever to understand what motivates peer reviewers”.

According to Gianluca Carnabuci, Director of Research, Professor of Organizational Behavior, ESMT Berlin, in science, most players play a rather negligible role, with only a few high rollers. Peer review was conceived on the basis of a very reputational mechanism. He claimed it only works in very elite academic environments. “Does it work in a system that is not elite?” he asked. “I have a strong suspicion that it doesn’t”. The incentives for putting in the work are too low.

Sven Fund, Managing Director, Reviewer Credits, shared the results of a reviewer rewards survey, which concluded that reviewers would like to get paid or receive a discount on APCs for their work. 77% Said they have not been rewarded at all; 44% said that rewards influence their willingness to review.

Dr. Anke Beck, Head of External Affairs, Europe, Frontiers, talked about their reviewer recognition program. In a pilot, 600 researchers get points for editing or reviewing, which they can use to pay an APC, donate to a community fund for LICs/LMICs, or share with others, such as ECRs. So far, Frontiers has seen positive results.

13. The scientist’s, the scientists’ or the sciences’?

The conference concluded with a keynote *Academic Freedom in Times of Online Publishing* by Prof. Dr. Antonio Loprieno, President, All European Academies (ALLEA). Frontiers’ Anke Beck introduced the keynote. Academic freedom is an evolving concept, said Professor Loprieno. It can be interpreted in various ways. Freedom used to be a privilege of the elite shaping academia. In the enlightenment, people were free to think, teach and learn, and free of religion. It was different than our current understanding of ‘academic freedom’, a concept Prof. Loprieno unpacked semantically in his keynote. “Whose academic freedom are we talking about? The scientist’s, the scientists’ or the sciences’?” Profound technological and sociopolitical transformations are inherent to our understanding of academic freedom.