

First European Symposium of Social Science & Humanities

Journals

Brussels 22 & 23 November 2021

Online Mondays 4-6.30pm from 21 Feb. to 21 March 2022

<https://eu-ssh-journals.sciencesconf.org>



Sustaining a more equitable journal publishing system; community action is vital

Vanessa Proudman, 22 November 2021

Thank you so much, I'm so sorry that I couldn't be with you today. [technical issues]

Thank you for being flexible.

So today I'm going to be talking about Open Access Diamond, free to the author and the reader, so unlike the previous presenters I'm not going to focus so much on subscription journals but really on a lot of institutions that are publishing in Diamond. So I think many of the viewers will be publishers and making a significant contribution [inaudible due to technical issues]. Most universities agree [inaudible due to technical issues].

[technical discussion omitted]

So there is a real widening gap of inequity in open-access publishing, so if we think about the dominance of the APC model, and I think I was saying, so many universities and libraries are really aware how costly it's becoming to share our research more openly, but that's where OA Diamond is so vital and so important to thrive going forward.

And just as climate change is actually showing us that if we continue the status quo this system is unsustainable. So now is really the time to take action together so, publishers together, many of you have been working in this sector for many years and I'd now like to invite you to join forces to create a force to be reckoned with. Something where we are stronger in numbers and where a diverse, and a biblio-diverse, ecosystem is also a stronger publishing system. So what I hope that we can achieve in years to come is that we create a thriving, equitable and more connected, innovative and scholar-led publishing ecosystem.

And let me tell you how we'll get there. So first we need to understand the current landscape. We have Pierre Mounier in the audience. He led this pioneering research project to understand the OA Diamond landscape. It was funded by Science Europe for Coalition S and I think many of you have seen the results which were published earlier on this year. And to support my vision for going forward I will also highlight some of those

key results. Some of the research that we have looked at comes from survey responses and I'll refer to those, and more than 1,600 journals responded, and I'd like to thank some of my colleagues for some of the slides today. So SPARC Europe was one of those partners and a more equitable open access publishing system is really key.

So, as I said I think you have probably seen the findings. Many of you haven't looked at the recommendations. I still would like to promote those and I will mention some of those to you today. So let me just tell you, give you some of the highlights of that research. So in summary we have a really wide archipelago of many islands of relatively small journals publishing in numerous languages in many different countries across the world in many different disciplines. And we estimate it being about 29,000 journals worldwide. Now I'm not going to question the relevance, or whether there are too many or too few at this point, I'm reporting on the status quo, and I'd also like to report that in recent years there have been many new OA Diamond journals, and they're not based on feeding into rankings, there are many social science and humanities journals included in that new set. So it's a need by the researcher and the research communities to publish and share their research in OA Diamond journals.

When we looked at the journals we also found that the majority of the journals were also, had readership outside of the country of origin of those journals, so seeing how important journals often funded by the institution, or even a national research funder or government, but you see the impact goes beyond that country or that institution, so showing the relevance of OA Diamond. And also it's a myth to think that OA Diamond is a very small publishing sector. If we looked at the average number of articles we had about 350,000 articles in one year as compared to 453,000 APC-based ones. And if you think of the very low resources, the very low cost of OA Diamond, I think you'll think that that's rather impressive, and showing the significance of this sector. And we also found that a significant amount of OA Diamond journals were also publishing in more than one language, so how important it is for languages outside of the Anglosphere. So here you see this nice donut shows the large purple part is the social sciences and the humanities. I am going to talk about the whole sector today but you will see that social sciences and humanities are really very well served by the OA Diamond sector and it's really important, and you don't need me to tell you that, I think, today.

So who owns the journal? We find that the large majority universities are the ones who are investing in these journals and sharing the research for free for both authors and the readers so we're really grateful to the institutional publishing of years gone by.

Now before I get to some of the operational challenges, though, so if you just imagine these thousands of journals worldwide, many of them working in islands themselves, what happens if you're on your boat, you have your lifejackets on as you can see there, you know how to row, some of you have a dinghy like this one but there are some which are much larger like oil tankers and they move more slowly, but what happens when around the corner you have something like Plan S or the European Open Science Cloud? This could mean some waves to your boat, can you manoeuvre, how do you manage going forward? If you're very small and you have very few resources that's a difficult operational challenge for you. So one of my points today is by teaming up together and collaborating we can manage some of those bigger challenges and also we can work more effectively but still remain independent and true to the researchers that we serve.

So let me tell you about some of those challenges with operations. So the journals told us that indexation in those big search engines is one of the biggest challenges. We also found that looking at some of the Plan S criteria relating to opening licencing, DOIs, and other criteria, that only 37% comply with over half. So again, the resources are much lower, and the technical capacity often is also reduced in that case. There is also a lack of archiving and preservation facilities, I think we also heard that from our former speaker, so that's really a concern for libraries and for researchers of course. We also see that journals – and I'm not talking about predatory publishers at all here – but I'm talking about some journals, perhaps non-English journals, not always being registered in DOAJ, not always knowing about DOAJ, not always being able to comply with all the requirements of DOAJ, they may not have the capacity internally to be able to comply. So there's work to be done, because there's some really quality journals that also need to appear in DOAJ for compliance for example for Plan S or other service providers or even for our researchers going forward.

We're also seeing of course with thousands of journals that there is a duplication of effort in these areas. Many of them have to comply with certain technical requirements or they need to adapt their policies and because they are all on different islands with very few bridges, there is a duplication of effort. So I think there's more that can be done there.

There's also a lack of access of DOIs and we know how important that is to locate research. That's partly a financial problem but not only, and also anti-plagiarism software is not always available to all. And furthermore, there's also a lack of data on the costs. What are the costs of OA Diamond? So although it might be free to the reader, or to the author, of course it has a cost. And the financial status – I'll tell you a little bit about that. So there are some concerns here, some real challenges I think which are probably common and recognisable to many of you. We also asked, with a full text question, I think we had more than 400 responses, and more than 200 said that there was a real need for shared tools and services, as well as then structural funding coming in second, but tools and services, how can we work together in certain areas to help us with some of the areas that I just mentioned.

So I'd like to talk to you about building capacity in OA Diamond. I think and I hope that you'll agree with me that what we really need to do is we need to build technical capacity, editorial, financial, which I already mentioned, and administrative capacity. So across the board there are areas where we can collaborate. And that can also strengthen our sector and mature it, so connect those more mature and larger journals with the smaller, that can help us innovate together more cost-effectively and it will save us costs and prevent that duplication of effort. And I think what's also really important [is] that if we do build capacity going forward, we'd need to have a say on how this system, how this new capacity building centre will work. What I'm suggesting is not that we centralise everything, that we federate and collaborate where it makes sense, so streamlining where things make sense. And when we build things together, we need to co-govern. It needs to be community-governed, and that we have a say, meaning we – you as publishers – have a say in how it's developed and maintained.

So what you can do to build human capacity is that you develop more partnerships, as I said, to build common services, to discuss issues and solutions to some of those bigger challenges like indexing or preservation, where you can also share expertise and upskill at webinars or workshops and trainings, and I think what's also important, developing

quality standards together. Now you might say, well there are plenty of standards, that's partly the problem – we have standards, DOAJ, Core, COPE, EASE, OASPA, but we also need to build a common standards structure that we can all use to build that strength in the sector going forward. And I think communities of practice and resource hubs will help us, so in different languages, for different domains, for different areas and issues.

We can work on monitoring costs and look for example, if you look at some of the resources that have been put out there over the last couple of years or so, if we're thinking about looking at how our costs can be better administered, look at this together with our colleagues and find something that works for OA Diamond as well. Or we collaborate on joint projects and join up or we use and develop more shared services, so here we've got a range, and next week SPARC Europe has an event, a webinar, we'd really like to invite you to attend, where we're bringing some national and regional open access publishing platforms together, to talk about their approach to publishing, who they're serving, what their vision for the future is, and that's probably going to start a short series to discuss some of the opportunities and the challenges that some of those larger platforms have. So collaborating on some of those issues that I mentioned.

And what about the financial sustainability? So I was talking about human capacity where we can build those bridges together by collaborating together, by building services, or building knowledge; what does the financial situation look like?

Well first of all, running an OA Diamond journal largely is run at a very reduced rate. We looked at this across the board also some of the more affluent countries in Europe still are running journals on the price of a couple of APCs per year. So the large majority running under 10,000 US dollars or Euros. So how do they do it? Well, how they do it is 60% rely on volunteers and 86% of those have a high or a medium reliance on volunteers, so a lot of in-kind contribution from institutions. And I think what we asked ourselves is, we would like to know more about what is the role of the volunteer? Is it part of the career development of the researcher or is it because there aren't enough resources to go around and so, out of the good heart of some passionate researchers who are running some of those journals, you know, they are working outside of their hours to run a journal or support a journal. And I think we also thought that, you know, what kind of reward structures are there for those involved in OA Diamond publishing?

So, then, looking at the financial status, we also asked, what's the current financial status of the journal? We saw that, the large majority did break even, but 25% said that they were making a loss, and over 30% said that they weren't sure, and that was because they weren't recording the financial data of their running costs. Now who funds Diamond OA? It's largely as I said universities who have established these journals or who are running them, national funding, or government agencies, some publishers, scholarly or learned societies and libraries, I think there's no surprises there, but we have very few research funding organisations so far funding Diamond.

And the type of funding: so as I said, due to volunteers, lots of in-kind support and voluntary labour and also there is quite some dependence on grant funding, so if you think of, normally grant funding is to fund innovation but we are talking about funding operations, so I think there's a disconnect there and there's a concern. So there really is a need to fund OA Diamond journals and there are, there is quite some creativity, we have a range of different funding models, you can see them here on this graph, and I think it's

also important that journals diversify and don't depend too much on one particular funder unless they have structural funding for here and for the rest of all time, which I think probably nobody does. So what we said was, what's important is for governments, research-performing organisations and research-funding organisations to fund both operations and development. Often they are funding innovation but it's the operations. And to develop funding strategies to avoid the ad hoc funding of certain journals who knock on their door, but it's to really think about what is the offering, who needs funding, and according to what kind of principles and selection criteria should we fund OA Diamond?

And I think those funders they also – because this is really still a new area for funding – they need to also look at how to fund, who is already funding OA Diamond, how are they doing that? And what are the structures? In some countries, it's very difficult for them to fund things that are free. So it's also looking at how could they adjust policies and legislation going forward?

So what you as social science and humanities journal editors can do is, you can improve your cost accounting, so do you have that clear, what your costs are, so that you can see where efficiencies can be gained, how you can save costs. I think it's also important to share lessons learned and good practices on funding models, so both things that have worked for you in the past, but also at the present, so new things which you're working out, or you're innovating new things together with others. And it's important also to raise awareness of the need for funding to your institution, not everybody does, and also to other funders like research funding organisations and you can do that by domain or by region, and do that by joining forces together. And I think I already mentioned, to diversify funding sources.

So I think I'm just going to end on this point: that I think collaboratively, really by working together, building capacity amongst many journals, so trying to build those bridges between the islands, we can more cost-effectively build shared services, build our knowledge to help fill some of those gaps and strengthen our sector, and also financially we can also do the same by sharing good practices and looking at diversifying our funding models. And that will really help us become more resilient and I want really an ecosystem that's really diverse so that this can be continued and that we continue to have the small islands, I think that by working together more, I think that we can sustain that thriving, rich, diverse, scholar-led publishing ecosystem. And by connecting more, it's much more of a connected ecosystem than it is today. Thank you very much.