




Case Report

The *Transcript* OPEN Library Political Science Model: A Sustainable Way into Open Access for E-Books in the Humanities and Social Sciences

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Abstract: The strategic goal of the project “National Contact Point Open Access OA2020-DE” is to create the conditions for a large-scale open-access transformation in accordance with the Alliance of German Science Organizations. In close collaboration with the publisher *transcript*, we developed a business model that strengthens the transformation process for e-books in the humanities and social sciences. It largely addresses the drawbacks of existing models. Moreover, it is manageable, sustainable, transparent, and scalable for both publishers and libraries. This case report describes the setup of the model, its successful implementation for the branch “political science” of *transcript* in 2019, and provides a Strengths–Weaknesses–Opportunities–Threats (SWOT) analysis. We believe that it has the potential to become one of the major open-access business models for research monographs and anthologies in the humanities and social sciences, especially for non-English e-books.

Keywords: open access; business models; scientific publishing; humanities and social sciences; e-books

1. Introduction

The open-access transformation is gaining momentum in the scientific publishing market. Thanks to the open-access mandates of and funds from research-funding organizations such as PlanS [1] and the global OA2020 initiative [2], among others, an increasing share of journals and articles are published immediately in open access. However, the transformation process largely takes place in the life, physical, and health sciences. Humanities and social sciences fall behind with the open-access transformation for two reasons. First, publishing monographs and anthologies is a main channel in scholarly communication in most humanities and social sciences alongside publishing articles in journals. However, open-access funding or business models for e-books are in their infancy and form a heterogeneous landscape due to the wide spectrum of the existing models. Second, researchers in the humanities and the social sciences rarely have access to third-party funds and often do not face open-access mandates [3].¹ In addition, models with author-related fees (article-processing charges—APCs, or book-processing charges—BPCs) have gained little acceptance in the humanities and social sciences, which is partly due to the very high prices for an open-access e-book (between €5000 and €15,000 [4,5]) and the scarcity of funding opportunities. Few research-funding organizations offer additional funds for open-access e-books (notable exceptions are the Swiss National Science Foundation

¹ In Germany, about 90% of third-party funds for research at higher-education and research institutions come from the German Research Foundation (DFG), the German Federation (Bund), the EU, and the industry. Social sciences and humanities received 15.6% of the DFG funds, 4.2% of the Bund funds, and 3.7% of the EU funds in recent years [3].

(SNF), the Austrian Science Fund (FWF), the Wellcome Trust, and the Netherlands Organization for Scientific Research (NWO) [6] (p. 14). As far as Germany is concerned, most of the existing institutional publication funds support only APCs, not BPCs [7]. To our knowledge, the situation is similar in other EU Member States. As long as these obstacles are not removed, the BPC model cannot significantly contribute to the open-access transformation of research monographs and anthologies.

In addition, publication fees generally contradict the publication culture in the humanities and social sciences. For this reason, many of the publication initiatives that have emerged in the field of open-access monographs are set up in such a way that they do not require direct author fees. Instead, approaches such as library crowdfunding, partnership subsidy, institutional endowment, revenue from commercial activities such as print sales or service provision, community volunteering, and institutional funding are used [8]. Some open-access publishers combine these approaches. Others employ a model with optional BPCs, depending on whether authors can get financial support from a research fund or their own institution. The former subsidizes open-access e-books of authors without financial support.² The specific requirements for publications in the humanities and social sciences, especially with regard to publication venues and the prevalence of national languages, have led to a coexistence of different models and strongly developed publication cooperations and networks.

Author fees such as BPCs have the disadvantage of a large sum usually being required to finance a single book so that budget limits can be reached quickly (the same can apply to APCs). Open-access business models with cooperative approaches such as crowdfunding³ spread the burden across many institutions and are therefore much more attractive from a purely financial perspective. This is particularly true if they are organized in such a way that the price per institution per open-access publication does not or only slightly exceeds the usual price of a closed-access e-book. On the other hand, they are more complex to organize and handle and often have to struggle with the so-called free-rider problem. For academic institutions in Germany, an additional problem is the concentration of open-access e-book models on the Anglo-Saxon area and thus the limited supply of open-access e-books in the German language, resulting in a lack of experience with such models.

In contrast to BPCs and APCs, the non-author-fee models generally aim at the open-access publication of entire packages and are therefore more suitable for promoting the large-scale open-access transformation in the humanities and social sciences. For the selection of an appropriate model, it can be helpful to consider the previous purchasers of printed or closed-access books and anthologies as a potential source of funding. These are—depending on the discipline—very often academic and research libraries that can be activated by an appropriate model for the open-access transformation of e-books in the humanities and social sciences. One such model is the *transcript* OPEN Library Political Sciences, which aims at publishing the front list of a specific discipline (political science) of a specific publisher (*transcript*) in open access. Therefore, it combines elements of a library-funding model, a collaboration/coalition model, and a revenue-of-print-sales model. The goal was to develop a manageable, transparent, and scalable open-access e-book business model that is sustainable for both publishers and libraries.

In the following, we explain the setup of the *transcript* OPEN Library Political Science model and what strengths and weaknesses it has. Finally, we discuss the parameters that must be considered when adapting the model to other disciplines and publishers.

² See, e.g., Mattering Press (<https://www.matteringpress.org/about/funding-model-and-fees>) or punctum books (<https://punctumbooks.com/submit/>).

³ Crowdfunding is a form of funding by a crowd of Internet users. Donations or participation are made via personal homepages, professional websites, and special platforms. Artists, activists, organizers, entrepreneurs, etc., present their projects and state the required sum as well as the expected return services. If the specified amount is reached within a certain period of time, the money flows to the initiators and the idea can be implemented [9]. Library crowdfunding is based on this principle but is specifically aimed at libraries as financial supporters of an open-access project and usually makes concrete suggestions as to how much an individual library should pay.

2. The *Transcript* OPEN Library Political Science Model

2.1. Setup of the Model

Higher-education libraries have several methods to acquire printed and e-books for their collections, for example, purchase of individual books, evidence-based selection, patron-driven acquisition, and purchase of complete e-book collections, so-called packages. The Springer e-book packages are the most successful e-book licensing model in the German market. Libraries are familiar with the acquisition within this model, which enables them to buy front lists of e-book packages to be published next year. Therefore, the open-access business model for the *transcript* OPEN Library is based on it. Libraries “buy”, that is, put into open access, a front list of a publisher. This is the number of titles that will be published in the following period, calculated by the publisher based on the previous years’ production. Compensation mechanisms are developed in the event that the number of titles exceeds or falls short of a certain limit. This includes titles that, contrary to expectations, may not be published under an open-access license. For the *transcript* OPEN Library, this means that all political science e-books will be published open access in 2019. Instead of acquiring the e-book license as usual, the participating library enables the open-access publication of the entire front list “political science of *transcript* 2019” (20 titles) via a fee in the crowdfunding model. In contrast to the purchase of e-books for a single library, the libraries’ financial resources flow into financing the free availability for all. The production costs as well as the costs for the open-access version of a title (“first copy costs”) are financed by the authors (through a printing-cost subsidy) and libraries. To this end, the publisher makes the cost calculation transparent to some degree. This is the basic concept of the *transcript* OPEN Library model (see Supplemental Material and [10] (FAQ)). The publisher may realize additional profits depending on the type of book and sales expectations by distributing print copies. The entrepreneurial risk to the publisher in terms of cost recovery is low once the funding is successfully closed. Currently available studies show no influence of open access on the print sales of a publication [4,11]. However, they note a much wider distribution of content (measured by downloads) [12]. This means that open access does not cannibalize print’s market share per se but represents an additional distribution channel. However, *transcript* expects a drop in print sales in the long term due to changes in the consumer behavior of the so-called digital natives.

To publish the front list in open access, a formal consortium or informal network can be set up to collect the necessary funds from libraries until the calculated sum is reached. For the *transcript* OPEN Library model, an informal network was founded under the guidance of the Specialized Information Service for Political Science (Pollux) at the Bremen State and University Library. Pollux financed half of the package price of €92,000 for 20 titles in political science. The rest of the funding was collected from libraries (called sponsors) via the intermediary Knowledge Unlatched. Alternatively, libraries could choose to pledge their support via one of the affiliated library service providers (Dietmar Dreier International Library Supplier, Missing Link mail order bookstore, or Schweitzer Fachinformation), as these are long-standing agents of libraries and no changes in library workflows were necessary (see Figure 1 for a schematic representation of the process).

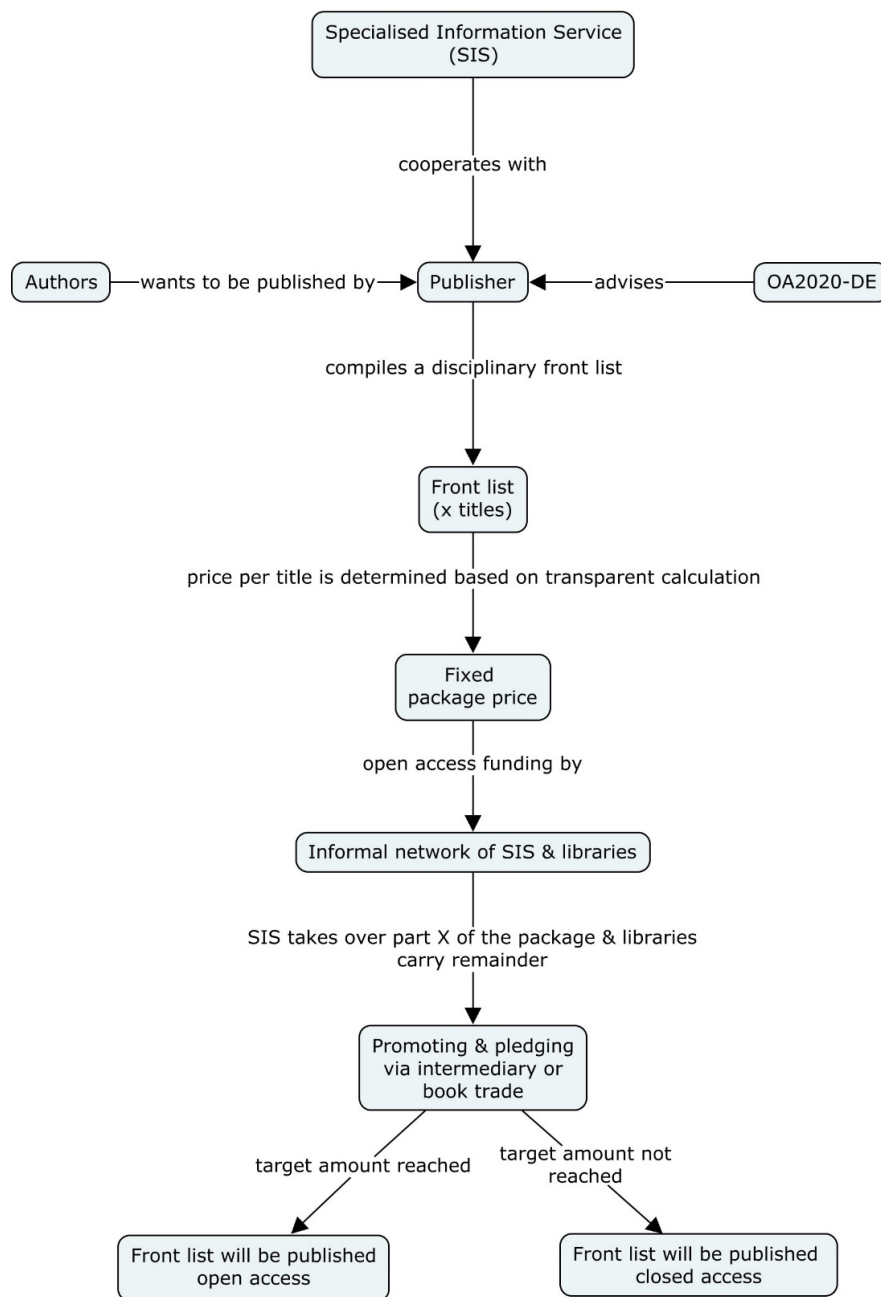


Figure 1. Workflows and relationships in the *transcript* OPEN Library Political Science model.

The final financial conditions for each participating library depend essentially on the number of cofinancing libraries. To provide interested libraries with planning reliability concerning the amount to be invoiced, a minimum number of sponsors (20 libraries) was set. The maximum invoice amount was calculated to be €2,300 per library if 20 libraries join the network. The invoice amount was proportionately reduced as more institutions participate in the funding. If there had been less than 20 funding libraries, there would be no billing and no open access to the front list. To meet budgetary concerns, the funding is used to publish open-access e-books—not for an open-access transformation of the e-books. The publication mode is open access due to relevant scientific-political demands (establishing open access as the standard of scientific publishing, strengthening participation in scientific findings), if the authors agree. Specialized information services play a central role in funding as laid down in the open-access component of the “Guidelines for the Purchase of Publications in the DFG-funded System of Specialized Information Services for Research” [13].

When providing a public good such as an open-access e-book, the free-rider problem has to be taken into account. To reduce it, we attributed characteristics of a so-called club good to the open-access e-book by the following measures:

- We selected a subject area (i.e., political science) where primary research publications of German-speaking researchers appear mostly in German language. This ensures that public funds from Germany, Austria, and Switzerland predominantly benefit the German-speaking scientific community.
- The cofinancing libraries receive a print copy of each title of the front list without additional costs for their library collection upon request.
- The specialized information service and the cofinancing libraries act as sponsors. As part of the sponsorship, names and logos of the libraries or their parent institution are prominently placed in the books and on the website of the publisher. This establishes a connection between the e-book and the funders. The specialized information service and the cofinancing libraries are gaining visibility and reputation.
- The cofinancing libraries receive metadata deliveries for their catalogues.

These club-good attributes serve as positive incentives for the libraries to participate in the funding. They reduce the free-rider problem to some extent.

To allow even smaller institutions to participate in the sponsoring network, universities of applied sciences had the opportunity to make use of the “Sponsoring Light” offer. “Sponsoring Light” means participation through half funding, that is, only half of the regular contribution is due. In return, the visibility as a sponsor is limited to an entry in a sponsorship list (no logo). In addition, half sponsors can get only half of the titles as free print copies. Of course, the universities of applied sciences were free to participate in the regular sponsoring.

2.2. Successful Funding and Final Conditions

The *transcript* OPEN Library Political Science model was developed and established in 2018. In spring, we started the promotion together with Knowledge Unlatched. In August, more than half of the minimum number of participants pledged their financial support. At the end of 2018, a sponsoring network consisting of the specialized information service Pollux and 46 academic libraries financed the publication of the open-access e-books. Pollux funded 50% of the package price; the remainder was distributed pro rata to 44 full sponsors and 2 half sponsors. In 2019, 20 e-books in political science will be published open access by *transcript* [14] with the following main features:

- Easy access for researchers and students, even without VPN (no DRM) through Creative Commons license
- No restrictions on the use and provision of open-access publications in teaching (digital semester apparatus, etc.)
- DOI allocation on a chapter level
- Long-term archiving at Portico
- Deployment via OAPEN, HathiTrust, and JSTOR with rich metadata

Throughout the pledging period, special emphasis was given to transparency concerning the business model, prices, and services. *transcript* has explained the model and listed all cofunding libraries on its webpage [10]. The publicly available information comprises the package price, the share to be funded by Pollux, which library pledged its financial support (almost in real time), and whether it is full sponsoring or “Sponsoring Light”. By this, each cofinancing library and interested web user can calculate the final financial conditions for each institution and the publisher’s revenue from the e-books. OA2020-DE, *transcript*, as well as Knowledge Unlatched jointly developed quality standards for the open-access provision of e-books [15]. The quality standards show what services libraries, authors, and readers should expect from publishers of open-access e-books.

2.3. Strengths–Weaknesses–Opportunities–Threats (SWOT) Analysis

After the successful ending of the pledging period, we made a SWOT analysis to learn for the next steps.

2.3.1. Internal Strengths

First, the *transcript* OPEN Library Political Science model fits well for subject areas where the primary research communication takes place by publishing books in languages other than English or where the research has some other regional aspects. Second, the model establishes a network of different parties involved in the publishing process: libraries, publishers, authors, intermediaries, and a specialized information services. Working together creates a sense of community and social capital. Strong connections between the partners and open communication about the framework and financial conditions lead to in-built guarantees for fair cooperation and pricing. Third, libraries that engage in e-book funding receive some exclusive benefits, which limits the free-rider problem. Fourth, the model offers smooth workflows. Authors do not have to deal with book BPCs and the publisher can run its business as usual (besides the financing part). Fifth, no title selection is necessary; the publisher offers a complete series. This implies that there is no risk for the libraries to get only the low-demand titles. Finally, we believe that the model is scalable. It transforms e-books and library acquisition budgets from subscription to open access without changing the dimension of both components. Libraries get the “same” books from the same publishers as before and pay almost the same. There is virtually no need for new funds or significant changes in workflows, which could be pitfalls to scalability.

2.3.2. Internal Weaknesses

First, the dependencies within the sponsoring network are a weakness. The model does not work without enough participating libraries and funders. Without the financial support of a specialized information service for research, the package price or the minimum number of participants could be too high or the title quantity too low. Some libraries bewailed that they could not afford to support the open-access publication of 20 political science e-books of *transcript* because they are not used to buying so many books from this publishing house. Second, the model still relies on a printing-cost subsidy from the authors (although the subsidy could be removed and compensated by a higher package price). Third, the model works only for e-books directed at researchers, without interest for a wider audience. This is because the funding of the model totally relies on library acquisition funds. If publishers have a major income stream from outside research libraries for their closed-access books, they probably will not abstain from it, so that either libraries will have to pay much more or the publisher will not choose this open-access model. Both variants are not beneficial for the success of the model. Fourth, it is a balancing act between the preservation of trade secrets and the disclosure of structures for pricing. Finally, there is some uncertainty surrounding the exact number of front-list titles that the publisher can produce. What if there will be fewer or more than 20 titles produced in political science in 2019 by *transcript*? The mechanisms and provisions still have to be tested for this case.

2.3.3. External Opportunities

After the successful funding of the pilot project, we started to plan a community-building process that brings together authors, publishers, funders, intermediaries, libraries, and so forth, as enablers of open-access publications. There is an opportunity for a community-driven and organized scholarly communication process. Further opportunities are the restrictionless use and provision of publications through Creative Commons licensing, the visibility of the cofinancing libraries through sponsorship, the anchoring of a specialized information service for research in the subject-specific open-access publication process, and a pluricontextual localization of libraries in the network of authors, publishers, science communities, and the public.

2.3.4. External Threats

The binding of library budgets through big transformative agreements or other APC models is a big threat not only to our model but also for all small- and medium-sized publishers. Currently, the focus of libraries and research funders is on journals rather than books. Therefore, PlanS could be a threat as well as other changes in science policy orientation.

2.4. Possible Modifications of the Model

In our opinion, the *transcript* OPEN Library Political Science model fits particularly well for the social sciences and humanities that have some specific regional aspects (e.g., not written in English or dealing with local issues). However, it could also be worth testing the model by applying it to English-written monographs and anthologies with interest to an international audience. Possibly, it may also be adopted to legal science and STM subjects. In contrast to the social sciences and humanities, royalties are an issue in legal science, and the publications are typically of interest for researchers as well as practitioners. In STM, research communication overwhelmingly takes place through publishing in journals and conference proceedings. Therefore, e-books in STM are often textbooks or handbooks. There are no scientific–political calls (yet) to open such content.

The *transcript* OPEN Library Political Science model can be adjusted to fit the needs of other publishers or subject areas. The parameters are:

- Participation of and share to be funded by a specialized information service
- Number of front-list titles
- Minimum number of cofunding libraries
- Level of the book-processing charge/price per title
- Level of printing-cost subsidies to be paid by authors

We recommend adjusting the minimum number of sponsors so that the maximum price per title for each cofunding library does not exceed twice the price for a comparable licensed e-book.

3. Conclusions

This report and the overwhelming conclusion of the pledging period, which had more than twice as many libraries involved as required, clearly show that crowdfunding concepts in the field of open-access transformation of monographs and anthologies can be successful if certain criteria are met and framework conditions are observed. The flexible application of the crowdfunding model in a specific national and disciplinary environment enables all actors involved in the publication process to realize open-access projects in partnership. The direct involvement of libraries and research institutions in the publication processes can strengthen their influence on the publication ecosystem. In addition, such collaborative models have the potential to rethink publishing practices in a disciplinary context and radically change the publishing landscape.

The model piqued the interest of authors and libraries as well as other publishers. Discussions are currently taking place with some other small-to-medium-sized publishers to implement a similar model to a specific humanities or social science discipline from their publishing program.

Open access pursues the goal of making equal use of the opportunities of digitization for authors, publishers, and libraries alike. With the help of sustainable and transparent offers from the publishers' side as well as the financial participation of libraries, new possibilities for positioning in the scientific publication system arise for all actors. We are confident that we can contribute with this model to the open-access transformation of scientific publishing.

Supplementary Materials: The following are available online at <http://www.mdpi.com/2304-6775/7/3/55/s1>, Table S1: Excel tool for calculating the parameters and price conditions of the *transcript* OPEN Library Political Science model.

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Conflicts of Interest: The authors are project staff of the National Contact Point Open Access OA2020-DE that developed the model and promoted its implementation. Some members of the project group are employed by libraries that took part in the funding of the *transcript* OPEN Library Political Science model.

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