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Investing in the Open Access Book infrastructure - A call for action

Books play an essential role in scholarly communication, notably but not only within the Social Sciences and Humanities. Open science benefits the quality and value of research and scholarship. If open access is to benefit society as widely as possible, it is logical to include academic books. In a 2019 briefing paper, Science Europe reported that: “Open access to academic books must be considered in the wider open access policies developed by research institutions, funders, and governments”.¹

In recent years, Knowledge Exchange, a joint network of six key national organisations in Europe, has been working on gaining a better understanding of the open access book landscape, identifying existing initiatives as well as gaps that need to be addressed in the countries concerned.² In general, there is a clear will in the scholarly community to accelerate open access for academic books in order to better serve research and society's needs.

However, to overcome the obstacles identified by research activities, reports and networks, and to roll out good practices and increase opportunities, additional coordinated support is needed, in particular from research and funding organisations. In February 2021, a one-day virtual workshop brought together stakeholders from a number of European countries, all with a common understanding that open access for academic books needs further attention and support. The prerequisites for the implementation of a well-functioning and sustainable open access book infrastructure are discussed below.

This position paper, undersigned by the workshop participants, identifies three legs of a policy stool that together will support the full transition to open access for academic books. It brings together people, technology and knowledge:

1. **Engaging people** in a common place to discuss issues and share knowledge related to the development of open access books.
2. **Sustaining the technology** needed to host, disseminate, index, preserve, ensure access and quality to open access books.
3. **Gathering knowledge** to monitor the transition of the academic book towards open access under several perspectives and the implementation of open access book policies.

¹ Science Europe Briefing Paper: On Open Access to Academic Monographs, p3
https://www.scienceurope.org/media/qk2b1cq4/se_bp_oa_books_092019.pdf

² Between 2016 and 2021 the Knowledge Exchange (KE) ran a project on open access academic books in order to evaluate and understand the landscape. Project research outputs included:

- Ferwerda, Eelco, Pinter, Frances and Stern, Niels. (2017). [A landscape study on open access and monographs](#).
- Stone, Graham and Marques, Mafalda. (2018). [Knowledge Exchange Survey on Open Access Monographs](#).
- Adema, Janneke. (2019). [Towards a Roadmap for Open Access Monographs](#).
- Angela Holzer, Pierre Mounier, Jeroen Sondervan, Graham Stone (2020, June 9) Open Access to academic books: Working towards the “tipping point” <https://www.knowledge-exchange.info/news/articles/09-06-20>

Challenges

In this perspective, different challenges have to be overcome:

→ *Bibliodiversity vs Scalability*³

Funder policies for open access books began to appear in the first decade of this century but progress has been relatively slow so far. By definition, the book publishing industry is diverse, local and multilingual. This creates challenges, in particular in terms of scalability. It is important to point out that this bibliodiversity is also intrinsic to book publishing, and should therefore be nurtured.

→ *Lack of knowledge and awareness*

The research and reports published by Knowledge Exchange have created a knowledge base on open access books in a selected number of countries and regions. There is a need for further insight into the international landscape as a whole to achieve a level playing field for open access books. There is also still much to be done to raise awareness amongst book authors and editors of the opportunities offered by open access books and to share good practices between experts.

→ *Lack of support for open access books services*

Many academic book service providers still focus on print copies and toll access dissemination, diverting most of the library resources from supporting open access. This results in a lack of consistent investment in services dedicated to open access books.

→ *Lack of interoperability across the system*

The different digital platforms and services that support the open access book workflow from drafting to preservation are generally not well connected or interoperable. This means that the various stages often fail to exchange content and metadata. This may result in duplication of effort or loss of information.

There are existing communities that are engaged and willing to meet these challenges but resources are lacking. For example, the Open Access Books Network (OABN) was launched in September 2020, as a community-building and knowledge-sharing initiative.⁴ However, OABN is led by a small team of volunteers, which makes it difficult to scale and serve the growing needs of the open access books community beyond the short term.

This paper posits that investment and alignment of stakeholders will enable these decentralised initiatives to contribute to a sustainable system, based on the three components (engaging people, sustaining technology, and gathering knowledge) identified here. This infrastructure needs to be strengthened to develop the capacity, expertise and support that will sustain and grow the publication, dissemination and usage of open access books.

³ Adema J. & Moore S. A., (2021) "Scaling Small; Or How to Envision New Relationalities for Knowledge Production", *Westminster Papers in Communication and Culture* 16(1). p.27-45. doi: <https://doi.org/10.16997/wpcc.918>

⁴ <https://openaccessbooksnetwork.hcommons.org/>

The signatories have formulated the following position and propose a list of actions to address these challenges.

Our position

Immediate investment in the areas identified will significantly increase open access book publishing across disciplines and countries, thus strengthening researcher trust and reader awareness.

1. OA book community engagement and capacity-building

Sustain and develop the OABN to continue building the community and achieve mutual support and the sharing of knowledge of open access book policies and practices between all stakeholders. This will facilitate a more open dialogue about the challenges and opportunities posed by OA books, raise awareness of new solutions to current problems, and help to build capacity in the OA book community. It will also inform policy makers, funders, libraries, and service and infrastructure providers.

2. Technical services

Developing a sustainable infrastructure based on interoperable and robust services (e.g. quality assurance, hosting, dissemination/discoverability, access, indexing and preservation) for open access books requires coordinated and long-standing support. Current and developing services need more support and it is necessary to identify and fill gaps in the infrastructure. All stakeholders need to be involved in the development of this infrastructure, which should be open, community-governed and transparent. This will allow for the effective implementation of any future open access book policies.

3. Open Book Watch

Tracking open books by setting up an Open Book Watch (OBW) that will monitor the development of scholarly books using a variety of agreed metrics (output, business models, impact). The emphasis will be on open access books. The OBW will aggregate open data in a structured way and display it transparently to the benefit of all stakeholders in the open access books community (research funders, policy makers, researchers, research institutions, publishers, libraries etc.). However, the prototype of the Open Book Watch will be focused on serving the needs of research funders that have deployed open access book policies. It will allow funders to monitor the success of their own policies, through alignment of data and monitoring techniques, and to monitor the success of a transition to open access for books.

Concrete actions should be undertaken to ensure the sustainability of these critical components: through landscape and gap analyses, designing and prototyping, planning and assessing, and upgrades and improvements. Finally, investment in the open access books infrastructure is required as a matter of urgency to benefit the research community and society as a whole.

Signed by (alphabetical order)

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- Dirk Pieper (Bielefeld UL, OpenAPC/BPC, OpenAIRE)
- Vanessa Proudman (SPARC Europe)
- Claire Redhead (OASPA)
- Olaf Siegert (ZBW, Leibniz Association)
- Jeroen Sondervan (Knowledge Exchange OA Working Group, UU)
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The signatures in the first version of this document include workshop delegates. The document will stay open [here](#) for additional signatures. We will update this document (and version it) as appropriate.