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# The Community-Led Open Publication Infrastructures for Monographs (COPIM) project

## A transformative open access monograph initiative

**T**he open access (OA) movement was taking libraries by storm, and scholarly communication librarianship was trending in 2009 when I was the coordinator of the Humanities Collection Group (Huma) at the University of California-Santa Barbara (UCSB). All of the buzz centered on STEM journals and commercial publishers. The Huma librarians—subject librarians for the humanities—were curious about how the OA movement and scholarly communication issues impacted the humanities.

We convened a study group to explore the question. Targeted themes included OA monographs, economic models, intellectual property issues, author rights, and advocacy. We uncovered much about the crisis in scholarly publishing in the humanities. Most importantly, we discovered how serials inflation jeopardized our library's ability to purchase books and our ability to adequately support humanities research and teaching on campus.<sup>1</sup>

### The crisis in scholarly publishing

The crisis in scholarly publishing that UCSB Huma librarians stumbled upon was an issue long before 2009, and it still exists today. It is the new normal. Within the existing scholarly communication system, libraries are no longer, and they may never be, able to keep up with the growth of academic publishing across disciplines and formats.<sup>2</sup> Another defining issue behind the crisis is a crippled university press system. Underfunded not-for-profit university presses aren't selling enough books to underfunded, under-

staffed, and newly reinvented libraries<sup>3</sup> to break even. Thus, the crisis in scholarly publishing is largely seen as an economic crisis that threatens the future of humanities publishing. But what about the mission and primacy of the university and its press—the sharing and advancement of knowledge for the public good, and the cultivation and dissemination of knowledge? Perhaps returning to our core values is the answer to the crisis.

In an era of Transformative Agreements, the humanist in me is currently concerned with examining transformative OA monograph initiatives, in particular, the Community-Led Open Publication Infrastructures for Monographs (COPIM) project.<sup>4</sup> How might we apply transformativeness to OA monograph publishing? Is transformativeness measured in strictly financial and transactional terms, or should more qualitative measures be considered? And, if so, what might those measures be?

Or, as Kathleen Fitzpatrick ponders, “What happens if we shift our thinking about open access from a focus on costs to a focus on values, though without entirely leaving behind the overwhelming and at times quite grim economic realities by which we are surrounded?”<sup>5</sup> This is what the COPIM project is doing. However, let's first take a moment

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to look at transformativeness before checking out COPIM's values and what makes it transformative.

## **Transformativeness**

The University of California Libraries Scholarly Transformation Advice and Review (STAR) Team, which evaluates potentially transformative OA initiatives for investment, considers a scholarly communication effort transformative “when it is developed principally to a) remove or reduce impediments to the flow and availability of knowledge, especially of quality-filtered (peer-reviewed) material; or b) create a more sustainable set of economic transactions among stakeholders, especially payments from content consumers and originators to publishers for access to content.”<sup>6</sup>

For the STAR Team, what makes an initiative transformative goes beyond the market-driven, transaction-based article processing charge (APC) business model underlying the transformative agreements<sup>7</sup> that have been developed to transition science journals to OA. Furthermore, in U.S. copyright law, what makes a work transformative is whether the new or derivative form provides the public with an added value that wasn't previously available.<sup>8</sup> Transformativeness is an appropriate lens to view the COPIM project.

## **The COPIM project**

Officially launched November 1, 2019, COPIM is a three-year project funded by Research England and the Arcadia—a charitable fund of Lisbet Rausing and Peter Baldwin—that intends to transform OA monograph publishing by delivering major improvements to the infrastructures used by publishers, and by developing best practices for transitioning legacy publishers to OA. Towards that goal, the project is piloting a range of initiatives to support transparent, sustainable, and community-governed infrastructures for the production, dissemination, discovery, and long-term preservation of open content and its data.

The seven work packages created to accomplish the above are outlined on COPIM's Open Documentations Site's FAQ page.<sup>9</sup> Work package 1 covers internal management of the COPIM project, external communications via a website and social media, and the organization of stakeholder workshops and public conferences. Work package 2 is developing and launching a modular, scalable revenue generation and management platform for OA books. Work package 3 is facilitating a knowledge exchange among publishers, academics, learned societies, and open technology developers to explore alternative business models that will enable non-OA presses to transition to OA. Work package 4 is developing governance best practices for open source, collectively owned infrastructures, and OA presses. Work package 5 is developing technical protocols and an infrastructure to better integrate OA books into library and repository systems. Work package 6 is championing experimental publishing and its re-use and impact by exploring how to align the existing experimental publishing technologies, workflows, and infrastructures with the workflows of OA book publishers. Work package 7 is identifying the key challenges associated with archiving OA research monographs in all their variation and complexity, as well as developing new solutions to accomplish their effective preservation.

The COPIM project is a major strategic international partnership, consisting of world-class universities, established scholar-led presses, libraries, and infrastructure providers dedicated to realigning OA book publishing away from competing commercial service providers to a more horizontal and cooperative approach to knowledge sharing. Project partners include Coventry University; Birkbeck University; Lancaster University; Loughborough University Library; Trinity College, Cambridge University; the ScholarLed consortium; University of California-Santa Barbara Library; Jisc Collections; and the Directory of Open Access Books. Project partners are also working closely with the OPERAS-P proj-

ect, and with the British Library and the Digital Preservation Coalition.

The COPIM project and its network view publishing as a community service, rather than as a commercial enterprise to be sustained by the free labor of academics and price-gauging libraries. As Janneke Adema astutely observed,<sup>10</sup> “How sustainable would the for-profit journal publishers be without the donated research of authors, and the free labor of editors and peer reviewers[?] These plantation capitalism practices and values of commercial publishers, which fuel the crisis in humanities publishing, have reached their limits.”

COPIM’s goals align with multiple strategies for the transition to OA outlined in the University of California’s influential “Pathways to Open Access” report. The report calls for two notable universal strategies to promote the transition to OA. They include developing concerted strategies for supporting the humanities, which traditionally do not have sufficient OA publishing opportunities, and for participating in regional, national, or global efforts to transition resources and financial support toward sustainable OA publishing. These endeavors can help build momentum, foster communities of practice, and lead to the development of shared strategies, with a preference for investment in scholar-owned OA.<sup>11</sup> The COPIM project was imagined by, and is being built upon the strong foundation and success of, a mighty network of resilient scholar-led OA initiatives, including Open Library of Humanities, and the presses of the ScholarLed consortium—Mattering Press, meson press, Open Book Publishers, and punctum books.

## Conclusion

Although it’s clear that OA publishing is here to stay, the path forward for the humanities and social sciences has been murky and is controlled by market driven presses and service providers. The crisis in humanities publishing still looms large.

The publishing infrastructures relied on by university presses and commercial publishers are based on book publishing charges (a model adopted from STEM fields and serials publishing) and cost analysis alone. The model is inadequate for OA humanities and social sciences publishing, and has contributed to the crisis and in scholarly publishing. The agility and nimbleness of small-scale scholar-led presses allows them to be more innovative, and collaborative.

As COPIM’s Lucy Barnes explains, the philosophy of scaling small is the “idea that publishing open access books should be something that a wide range of publishers, of differing sizes and with a variety of business models, can accomplish sustainably and at manageable cost through collaborative effort and effective network building. We therefore want to develop, collectively, a significantly enriched not-for-profit, open source and community-governed ecosystem for OA book publishing, to support and sustain a diversity of publishing initiatives and models, particularly within the Humanities and Social Sciences.”<sup>12</sup> By doing together what would be difficult to do independently, COPIM demonstrates what a commitment to academic values can look like, as we navigate the shift to OA in monograph publishing.

In the first year of the project, numerous academic librarians from many geographic regions, nationally and internationally, participated in stakeholder workshops to assist COPIM partners in designing and building the necessary infrastructures for transitioning monograph publishing to an open commons. These infrastructures will be available for widespread adoption, with the objective of mitigating, if not resolving, the long-time crisis in humanities publishing.

Libraries and universities that are committed to these values and goals should similarly align both the direction of their scholarly communication programs and the principles underlying their collection

development policies around a reimagined and transformative OA monograph publishing system for the 21st century that aims higher, beyond transaction-based cost transparencies and openness, to center on service, production efficiencies and streamlined workflows, community, collaboration, and innovation. Scholarly communication librarians, collection librarians, and others making acquisition decisions, should at the minimum be working together to set values-based advocacy and budget priorities as the OA ecosystem continues to diversify, and as we plan for a post COVID-19 future, where business as usual is not an option. As collections and scholarly communication librarians, we should be actively supporting, innovating, and advancing open and sustainable models for knowledge generation and dissemination. To do otherwise is wasteful.

Since Huma librarians began investigating how OA publishing was impacting the humanities, we've seen much progress, but there is still much to do. The COPIM project represents that progress, as well as the future. After decades of dominance and control by market driven publishers, I'm confident that collaborative, mission-driven, scholar-led OA publishers, and others fed up with the plantation capitalism of commercial publishing, will be a significant part of the future of monograph publishing.

To follow the progress of COPIM, visit the website, which functions as a blog and open documentation platform for the project. You can also follow @COPIMproject on Twitter.

## Notes

1. If you want campus humanists to pay attention to open access, show them that unless something is done about commercial journal publishing, the library will not be able to buy books. See Denise Stephens, "A Campus Conversation: Report on the State of Funding for UCSB Library Collections," (October 2014): 4, <https://escholarship.org/uc/item/2xm7129m>.

2. Aileen Fyfe, et al, "Untangling Academic Publishing: A History of the Relationship Between Commercial Interests, Academic Prestige and the Circulation of Research," (May 17): 8, accessed August 7, 2020, <https://zenodo.org/record/546100#.Xy2v3yhKg2w>.

3. Lorcan Dempsey, Constance Malpas, and Brian Lavoie, "Collection Directions: The Evolution of Library Collections and Collecting," *portal: Libraries and the Academy* 14, No. 3 (2014): 393-423. Libraries have responded to budget crises and networked environments by reinventing themselves as services providers and changing patterns of investment.

4. COPIM'S website, <https://www.copim.ac.uk/>.

5. Kathleen Fitzpatrick, "Giving it Away: Sharing and the Future of Scholarly Communication," *Journal of Scholarly Publishing*, 43, no. 4 (July 2012): 348.

6. "Scholarly Transformation Advice and Review (STAR) Team Criteria Summary," last modified April 20, 2020, accessed on July 31, 2020, [https://libraries.universityofcalifornia.edu/scgl/star/criteria\\_summary](https://libraries.universityofcalifornia.edu/scgl/star/criteria_summary).

7. "Transformative Agreements," Efficiency and Standards for Article Charges, accessed July 31, 2020, <https://esac-initiative.org/about/transformative-agreements/>. The Efficiency and Standards for Article Charges (ESAC) initiative provides a definition of transformative agreements and what makes them transformative.

8. See "Transformativeness," in Wikipedia, August 17, 2020, <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Transformativeness>.

9. Lucy Barnes, "COPIM FAQ," accessed August 17, 2020, <https://copim.pubpub.org/pub/3x691fzn/release/4>.

10. Janneke Adema, personal communication, 4 June 2020.

11. University of California Libraries, "Pathways to Open Access," (February 27, 2018): 38, 39, 30, accessed August 3, 2020, <https://escholarship.org/uc/item/5gc4r5mg>.

12. Lucy Barnes, "COPIM FAQ," accessed August 17, 2020, <https://copim.pubpub.org/pub/3x691fzn/release/4>. *zz*