

Accommodating Open Access Publishing: funding issues from a university (library) perspective

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During the recent years there has been increasing attention towards open access to scholarly content. In the open access community there is agreement on the distinction between the two roads towards open access. On the one hand the self archiving road [1], where authors archive a version of their articles published in scientific journals on a publicly accessible server at their institution, often referred to as an institutional repository. The other road towards open access is publishing in an open access journal.

This article will deal with issues related to publishing in Open Access Journals only. The number of open access journals (OA-journals) has grown significantly [2] and the same accounts for the impact of OA-journals [3]. While the overall majority of open access publishers are relatively small in terms of number of journals and relatively fragile in terms of management and financial and technical sustainability some big players have entered the open access publishing scene.

The first and still most important OA-publisher BioMed Central [4] began its OA-publishing activities during 2002. Since then the output and number of journals have been continuously growing. The second important OA-publisher is Public Library of Science (PLoS) [5], who launched its first journal PLoS Biology during 2003.

The growing attention and support to the issue of open access to scholarly content

Librarians, library organizations, researchers, learned societies, universities and research institutions have during the latest years published statements in support of open access to scholarly content.

One of the first of such statements was the Budapest Open Access Initiative (BOAI) [6] followed by the Bethesda statement [7]. Lately the Berlin declaration [8] signed by a number of important research institutions and research councils has gained attention. Major research funders such as the Wellcome Trust [9] have declared support for open access as well. Initiatives like these bear witness about important and widespread commitment to the case of open access.

The emerging open access movement is in open competition with the established and often commercial scholarly publishers. The practice inherent in the dominant model is that authors do not pay for the dissemination of the research, but the readers do, often by means of subscriptions paid by the university, research institutions etc., normally through library subscriptions.

In the open access model the reader does not pay, but of course someone else will have to pay for the costs associated with quality control, dissemination etc.

Basic OA business models – Funding the two roads towards open access

While the subscription based publishing model has well established financial and administrative routines both on the part of the publishers and on the part of the subscribers (libraries) OA-journals do not have such routines.

OA-journal publishing still has to find sustainable business models. While the overall majority of open access journals are operating on the basis of funding provided by government, university, research institutions, departments, as well as on voluntarily, "con amore" work, important attempts to try out business models based on author publication charges and as well as on institutional membership are tested these years.

The most well known example is BioMed Central (BMC). When BMC launched their ambitious OA-publishing venture two payment models were offered. There was a general author publication charge at \$500 per article. As an alternative institutions could sign up for an institutional membership for a fixed fee and in that case

author page charges from authors belonging to a membership institution were waived.

Based on the initial experience BMC has been considering a new model to be introduced in 2005 whereby the institutional membership fee will be related to the number of articles published by authors belonging to a membership institution.

PLoS has by the launch of the first journals also chosen the institutional membership fee concept in combination with author publication charges, although here from the start relatively advanced, meaning that institutions can sign up for different levels of support and thus gain different discounts on the author publication charge.

Regardless whether we have to deal with institutional membership or author publication charges and even article submitting fees [10] a number of questions arise.

Who should pay for an institutional membership – the university, the department or maybe the library??

Who should pay the author publication charge – the author, the institution, the university or maybe the library.

And in addition to that, how can we, if we want to promote open access to scholarly information, free the author from coping with the payment issues and in general remove obstacles to open access publishing.

Present sources for funding access to scholarly content within universities

Currently university spending on access to scholarly content (books, databases, journals) in general is channelled through library budgets. In particular the developments of the last decade with license agreements with large publishers and aggregators have caused a trend towards centralization of funding of e-media often administered by the libraries. Subscriptions to journals or databases taken by individual researchers or research groups have decreased significantly.

In turn library funding is usually generated from the main sources of income in universities – funding for education and funding for research – whether the funds are directly from government or from research grants, tuition fees, library expenses can be considered a part of the operational expenses of universities, often labelled as overhead.

So far consequently access to scholarly content by means of book purchase, subscription to databases and journals etc. has been funded as a combination of government funds, tuition fees and overheads generated from research grants. When then the way of acquiring access to scholarly content is beginning to change – from payment for reading to payment for publishing – it is a straightforward logic that the same sources of income should pay for OA-publishing – and that the unit that up till now have had the responsibility to facilitate access to scholarly content – the library – should administer the handling of economic resources associated with OA-publishing as well.

However things are of course not that simple. First of all, the gradual shift that has taken place during the last decade when it comes to the handling of journal subscriptions, from individual, departmental subscriptions to print journals to the current set-up with centralized and even inter-institutional (consortia) license agreements has to a large extent changed the subscription handling business to a macro business. The number of invoices has decreased significantly and the handling costs associated with journals as well.

When we then consider the author publishing charge model we encounter a totally different environment. Economic transactions at document level, article processing fees, article submitting fees etc [11] are at least so far inherent in the economics of OA-journals.

My point is that if the library community and the research community want to promote open access publishing two things are important: first of all and most important is that incentives are in place for authors who publish in open access and secondly that no obstacles exist, that will make it more difficult or more troublesome for authors to deal with OA-publishing. I will not deal with the incentives. Much of the discussion and debate around open access has focussed on this issue, with all right. This is all about reward systems, improved visibility, more readers, more citations, more recognition etc. Not much discussion has concentrated on the micro obstacles, such as administrative problems, and financial issues related to publication charges.

Michael R Leach has initiated discussions about the issue of handling publication charges in the OA-model [12]: "Should a library handle the transactions for the OA author 'page/article charges' in addition to paying for the 'fee'?"

My spontaneous answer to this question is yes.

If we consider expenses related to publishing in OA-journals, institutional membership fees and author publication charges associated with OA-journals should in principle be considered as

expenses related to access to scholarly information. These expenses should accordingly be allocated within the library budget.

As of today this standpoint will probably generate a lot of discussion and several objections. And indeed some issues instantly come to mind.

One of these issues is that expenses are difficult to predict. Whereas the library community for years has been complaining over the often 2-digit percentage price increases from journal publishers and database providers, at least prices were known beforehand and prices could be calculated in the preparation for next years budget. Especially in the case of author publication charges in OA-journals no solid experience exists as to the publishing activities of a specific institution in specific journals. Accordingly it will be difficult to predict the expenses needed to cover publication charges [13]. On the other hand it is fair to say that the volume of OA-journals and OA-publishing of articles is still marginal and will probably not in the foreseeable future exceed 10% of articles published.

Possible improvements in OA publishing models

As mentioned earlier a significant proportion of current OA-journals are funded in such a way that they do not so far need to charge authors or generate funding by other means than for instance institutional membership. There is no doubt that if we want OA-publishing to reach a significant proportion of the most reputable publishing, OA-publishers cannot rely on up front funding from government, institutions etc. but must somehow generate funding from publication charges and/or some kind of support from the research communities, that is the reader communities. Institutional membership is one example of this kind of support.

All publishers need financial liquidity. It is interesting to note that the scholarly publishing business probably is one of the few industries where customers (libraries/universities/research institutions) pay for the goods in advance. Payments for subscriptions to print journals, access to databases, and licenses to electronic journals in consortia are paid in advance giving the publishers a lot of money to work with.

It is not a surprise that OA-publishers need the same conditions. Sticking to an author publication charge model will not give the necessary financial security. That is probably why the institutional membership model has been introduced by the two leading OA-publishers.

From a university library point of view I find it quite difficult to "sell" an institutional membership to a specific faculty or to fund it

directly from a library budget without having a clue as to how many articles the university would be likely to publish within a given year. A well proven model from the library community should be tested here. Libraries all over the world have for years been in the business of delivering articles by interlibrary loan as photocopies for a handling fee. Instead of bothering with endless numbers of invoices of very small amounts it has been the custom to offer frequent customers a deposit account, where the customer deposits a fixed amount, which in turn is depreciated according to delivery of documents.

In order to speed up the process of gaining support for OA-publishing and give the publishers finances to work with I would recommend the same solution for OA-publishers. Introduce a model operating with institutional deposit accounts where the size of the amount deposited will qualify for reduced article processing fees.

This would give OA-publishers money to work with, it would make it legitimate for libraries to deposit funds and make it easy for libraries to administer article processing fees on behalf of the authors.

In the existing subscription based model the library pays on behalf of the reader. Readers should be aware of that, but should not have to bother. In the Open Access model the library should pay on behalf of the author. Authors should be aware of that, but should not have to bother.

Notes and links

[1] Although the term archiving can generate different associations – i.e. archiving meaning preservation – nevertheless self archiving is the dominating term so far for describing authors publishing pre- or postprints of their works via institutional repositories.

[2] Directory of Open Access Journals – <http://www.doaj.org>

[3] The Impact of Open Access Journals. Thomson ISI - <http://www.isinet.com/media/presentrep/acropdf/impact-oa-journals.pdf>

[4] BioMed Central - <http://www.biomedcentral.com/>

[5] PLoS - <http://www.publiclibraryofscience.org/>

[6] BOAI - <http://www.soros.org/openaccess/>

[7] Bethesda Statement on Open Access Publishing - <http://www.earlham.edu/~peters/fos/bethesda.htm>

[8] Berlin Declaration on Open Access to Knowledge in the Sciences and Humanities - <http://www.zim.mpg.de/openaccess-berlin/berlindeclaration.html>

[9] Scientific publishing - A position statement by the Wellcome Trust in support of open access publishing - <http://www.wellcome.ac.uk/en/1/awtvispolpub.html>

[10] Open Access journals have as well to recover costs of the work done associated with rejected papers.

[11] Author charges is not a new thing. Payment for color, graphics etc have been in place a long time.

[12] Michael R. Leach: The Library as Open-Access "Fiscal Aggregator", posting to the Lib-License List (liblicense-l@lists.yale.edu), March 30th 2004

Svensk sammanfattning

Open access rörelsen har enats om att särskilja två vägar till OA: egenarkivering respektive publicering i Open Access tidskrifter. Denna artikel diskuterar bara frågor som rör det senare alternativet. OA-publicering behöver fortfarande finna hållbara affärsmodeller. Vare sig vi talar om institutionella medlemskap, publiceringsavgifter, och/eller "submission fees" för författare uppstår många frågor.

Vem skall betala för ett institutionellt medlemskap – universitetet, institutionen eller kanske biblioteket?

Vem skall betala författarens publiceringsavgifter – författaren, institutionen, universitetet eller kanske biblioteket?

Vill vi främja Open Access till vetenskaplig information måste vi fråga oss vad vi kan göra för att befria författarna från att behöva hantera olika typer av betalningar och för att generellt undanröja hinder för OA-publicering.