

How can existing open access models work for humanities and social science research?

Based on a paper presented at the UKSG One-Day Conference, 'Open Access Realities', London, November 2013

This article addresses some of the issues arising from the continuing research and debate on open access (OA) publishing, primarily from the perspective of an academic in the field of humanities. As an academic, the author feels it is essential that scholars embrace the responsibility of being part of the process that reconsiders how to publish their research, and that they recognize they have a key role to play amongst a variety of stakeholders. The launch of the Open Library of Humanities (OLH) in early 2013 and its growing momentum as a scholarly-led movement over the last 12 months demonstrates that there is an increasing awareness amongst the academic community in the humanities of what is required to build a new kind of publishing model. Aspects of this 'do-it-yourself' culture are considered along with various funding options, concluding with a look at international challenges facing the transformation towards open access and where the OLH fits into the picture.

Introduction

Writing primarily as an academic, I think it is really essential that scholars take on the responsibility of being part of the process that reconsiders how to publish their research. Academics have a key role to play amongst a variety of stakeholders and whilst it might be fair to say that we have been left out of these debates to a certain extent in the past, now with the Open Library of Humanities (OLH)¹ becoming established, we are demonstrating that there is actually an increasing awareness amongst the academic community in the humanities concerning what we need to do ourselves to build a new kind of publishing model, and what steps we can make already.

After briefly considering the definitions of open access (OA), I am going to be contextualizing open access publishing in the humanities in terms of a do-it-yourself (DIY) approach and specifically positioning some of the opportunities we could learn from 'hacker culture', hacking technology, and the practice of 'just getting on with it' whilst the academic publishing landscape changes around us and longer-term policy debates take place. Funding issues and business models will also be discussed before going on to consider the international challenges that lie ahead. The article will conclude with an update on the OLH, which is an academic-led, not-for-profit 'megajournal' and monograph publishing pilot scheme launched in 2013.

When considering the definitions of open access, I think the Budapest Open Access Initiative² drew attention to a couple of things that it is very important to remind ourselves of when considering OA publishing in the humanities and social sciences (HSS). It is worth recalling that the statement is not just referring to journal articles, but also encompasses any unreviewed preprints that academics might wish to put online for comment. This relates to the need for machine access to materials and the question of software being able to index and search an increasingly overwhelming volume of scholarly literature. This idea of preprints is something that I wish to explore here, because I think that humanities scholars



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18 have quite a bit to learn, in some respects, from science, technology and medicine (STM) disciplines, where open access research practices have been developing for a longer period. When I talk to academic colleagues in the humanities, I am often faced with the sentiment that ‘well, don’t we have a distinct research culture? We’re not curing cancer, so do we really need the wider public to have immediate access to our materials?’ My response to such assertions is that sharing our ideas and encouraging feedback and collaboration early on in the research process makes our research stronger.

DIY hacker culture

The history of ‘hacking’ can be traced back to MIT University in the early 1960s, where there emerged a move towards increased access to shared computers and a concomitant intensification of research collaboration in computer programming amongst scientists, academics, librarians and other interested parties. This sharing of software materials that had been developed in academic laboratories changed the nature of copyright – hackers extended the collaborative process by creating new licences that offered a legal framework through which the copyright holder of software could allow anyone to modify and redistribute their work. Richard Stallman, who worked at the Artificial Intelligence Laboratory at MIT, is a key figure in hacker history because of his development of the General Public Licence (GPL), which remains to this day the most commonly used free software licence. Another important moment in the DIY history of academic publishing is the foundation in 1991 of arXiv by the physicist Paul Ginsparg. The arXiv repository allows scholars to circulate scientific papers (primarily in maths, physics, astronomy and computer science) prior to publication. Interestingly, this culture of sharing research material with academic colleagues prior to publication pre-dates e-mail and the internet, and draws on a longer tradition in the sciences of scholars posting hard copies of their papers to one another in an informal professional network. Through its online repository, arXiv is now able to host a substantial volume of scholarly preprints and has over half a million articles in its archive. And this is possible because of the long-established culture of sharing research materials *during* the research process (and not just after the final stage of publication) that scholars in the ‘hard’ sciences have inculcated within their academic community.

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So how can humanities scholars adapt certain techniques for their own disciplinary practices? I want to look at the way in which a project like arXiv might be of relevance to the different scholarly climate within the humanities – and to consider whether we could adopt and rework some of these principles of research collaboration and the sharing of draft articles, or preprints. One case study that I should like to draw your attention to is an open access journal that I set up and run with Martin Eve from the OLH – called *Alluvium*³. This is a slightly different model from the proliferation of smaller open access journals run through the Open Journal Systems (OJS) management system that are run at many universities, since *Alluvium* is run through WordPress. Just to give a quick overview of the journal, we publish four original short-form academic articles (of around 2,000 words) every two months in electronic form only, and these articles explore the growing field of 21st-century approaches to literature. Since the launch in June 2012, it has been interesting to note how *Alluvium*’s contributors (primarily ‘early career’ researchers as well as some senior colleagues in the field) are evolving new practices around sharing, discussion and the development of their ideas. Through feedback from the authors I have been gauging, from an editorial perspective, how the journal is being received in the field and what its new format might be doing to shape different styles of literary scholarship. It has been really interesting to see that scholars are welcoming the opportunity to write shorter journal articles and are using this chance to develop new pieces of research. Because the journal is intended to be interactive, and uses social media functions as well as fostering debates in the comments boxes accompanying each article, scholars are then able to build on the feedback they receive from their articles, which they incorporate when working up these short articles into full-length pieces that they often subsequently submit to traditional journal publishers. So in this sense, I would like to suggest that *Alluvium* is functioning in a similar way to arXiv, as a repository of preprints in the humanities – making available in a very quick timescale new

19 research ideas that are not yet developed into their full, final form and encouraging scholars to offer constructive feedback and dialogue to aid the research process, out of which extended articles can then be developed. A corollary effect of the journal has also been to establish a supportive community of scholars in this field who are the most active users of the journal's website, and whose discussions have led to new classroom practices as well as plans for collaborative teaching and the design of new course material. So, whilst an open access WordPress-run journal like *Alluvium* is only operating on a small scale within a distinct disciplinary area, an example like this is very important in signalling the way in which humanities scholarship can learn and borrow from the sciences, with its long-established culture of sharing, collaboration and circulating preprints.

"... humanities scholarship can learn and borrow from the sciences ..."

Gift culture and resource sharing

Another way in which HSS scholars can perhaps learn from hacker culture returns us to the question of what has been called the model of a 'gift culture' in academic scholarship. As has been well documented, since the early scholarly societies were established in the late 17th century, scholarly publishing has operated on the premise that scholars publish not for remuneration but for prestige. We are privileged as scholars to be able to give away our own research for free to the community, which radically differentiates our labour from that of creative practitioners like film makers, artists, musicians, and so on. But this idea of gift culture extends beyond producing academic publications like journal articles or monographs without remuneration, to the voluntary labour that academics can offer in building new publishing resources; including writing code, hacking existing software, and creating an open source set of publishing tools that dramatically bring down the cost of DIY publishing for scholars.

It is a very exciting time to be working in open access publishing at the moment and there are numerous projects starting up around the world. This raises the crucial question of sharing resources to save costs across the sector, particularly for independent, non-commercial and scholar-led open access publishing ventures like the Open Library of Humanities. With this in mind and in the spirit of the long-established academic gift culture mentioned above, Martin Eve at the OLH has been co-ordinating the Open Access Toolset Alliance (OATA)⁴, which brings together open access projects to develop open source software for scholarly publishing. Various different groups are working on this project including colleagues from Public Library of Science (PLOS), the Public Knowledge Project (PKP), Ubiquity Press, the University of Heidelberg, E-Life and Hybrid Publishing – and the group has met several times already to co-ordinate specific projects to work on refining components of technology necessary to improving the workflow of open access publishing (for example, Martin is currently undertaking funded research to develop his citation parser). So, the OATA network demonstrates a new phase in open access start-ups which are now at the stage of being able to share resources and improve the quality and efficiency of their open source software – which brings together both a proactive DIY hacker mentality and the gift culture tradition of scholarly practice.

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Funding and business models

Given the anticipation that funding is going to be increasingly hard to come by over the coming years, the crucial question of economics – in terms of new business models for funding open access publishing – is of course uppermost in all of our minds at the moment. I think this is something we all have to take very seriously. John Willinsky's point that open access is not ignoring the necessary economic costs involved in publishing remains pertinent in this context. The open access movement, as he argues in *The Access Principle*, "is not operating in denial of economic realities. Rather it is concerned with increasing access to more of the research literature for more people, with that increase measured over what is currently available in print and electronic formats".⁵ Obviously, there are costs attached to setting up journals,

20 recruiting skilled editors and administrators, hosting digital repositories, setting up management systems and subscribing to essential archival and preservation services such as LOCKSS and CLOCKSS, as well as DOI assignment. So these necessary publishing costs need to be met, and there are different ways in which you could try and fund an open access journal, depending on its size.

Small-scale journals, which are often run through the voluntary labour of postgraduate students and use the free, open source system OJS, only incur low operating costs, which might be absorbed by university library and IT budgets due to the minimal tech support. These smaller open access journals, then, cannot exist without the free labour offered by postgrads and academics, as well as the unpaid peer review work undertaken by a wider network of academic colleagues (part of the extended scholarly gift culture). This means that at a small scale we can have a relatively large number of these OJS (or even WordPress) journals, and this is a wonderful thing. Unfortunately, this does not address the systemic question of how we might scale up much larger journal platforms (particularly in the humanities) capable of concentrating large volumes of articles into single repositories, with the obvious benefit of increasing access to articles through the reputation of the repository or publisher, or group of publishers. It is important that we are able to go to particular places and find large volumes of information which do not have permission or access barriers.

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Another option for funding a larger open access publishing platform would be advertising revenue. It is not one that we favour at the OLH, since it raises various problems concerning who you might choose as your advertisers, but perhaps over the coming years some publishers will be exploring this model. Then we come to the hotly contested funding model of the article processing charge (APC), or the ‘author pays’ model. Clearly, this is the model that many of the commercial academic publishers are adopting and whilst it is very encouraging that APCs have been reduced in price by some publishers, I have a certain reserved scepticism about how long those charges can remain at an affordable level for the publishers. Moreover, I really don’t think that we can rely on APCs as the only method for funding open access. Given the diminishing size of university research budgets, I think that we need to come up with more creative solutions for an affordable and fairly distributed method of funding open access on a larger scale.

This brings us to the question of building library consortia for the collective funding of open access publishing projects. Such a model addresses the issue of reallocating resources (for instance, moving away from the exorbitantly priced journal subscription ‘bundles’ system to investing in new, cheaper open access publishing models), improving the efficiency and cost of open access publishing by sharing resources, and thinking about constructing consortia beyond individual institutions – at the level of networks that are national and/or international, with the combined leverage of supporting the transition to open access. These are the areas in which the OLH is campaigning at the moment.

Our funding model is what we are calling the Library Partnership Subsidy (LPS) model. We are currently in the process of collecting various streams of seed funding in order to consolidate this approach, which involves developing consortia agreements with various library networks. We are not the only open access publisher to be exploring this model of funding.

Knowledge Unlatched (KU), for example, is also working on a model of library funding and we are in discussions with them about potential collaborative efforts. However, KU is focusing more on the monograph side whilst we are looking primarily at the journal side of open access publishing. The LPS model relies on a certain amount of initial private funding, which allows us to collect agreements from enough libraries to join our scheme in order to set our library partnerships subsidies at as little as £200 or £300 annually (banded according to the size of the university library budget), which we think is a reasonable model to enable libraries to invest in open access publishing. Of course, there remain some concerns about the so-called ‘free rider’ problem, where libraries might not want to pay

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21 to invest in open access material when they can access it for free. However, we have been informed by KU that a recent survey of European libraries revealed that the overwhelming majority of libraries would be interested in investing in open access publishing, so we are hoping that this is a good way to proceed.

International challenges

International challenges are an essential aspect of open access publishing. As Peter Suber observes in his book, *Open Access*, the motivation for open access is partly to help solve a problem of access gaps, which are radically asymmetrical around the world. To illustrate this, Suber cites the following statistics: in 2008, the number of serial journals that Harvard University subscribed to was 98,900; at Yale it was 73,900; and at the Indian Institute of Science (which is the highest-funded research library in India), it was 10,600⁶. This starkly demonstrates the inequalities of funding and access to traditional subscription journals around the world. Meanwhile, the point that open access is not the same thing as universal access needs to be taken seriously. There are still significant barriers to access, which include the following: we still have censorship in some areas and methods of filtering content online; we still have language barriers and the current status of English as the *lingua franca* for scholarly publication excludes a vast wealth of research; machine translation still remains quite weak in some areas; and the internet continues to pose what Suber refers to as ‘handicap access barriers’⁷ as well as barriers of connectivity across the digital divide.

“...open access is not the same thing as universal access ...”

I want to briefly address the case study of African library networks and their position with regard to open access scholarship. But first, let me draw your attention to the fact that open access is actually booming in other parts of the world. However, part of the problem is that open access publishing outside Europe, North America and Australasia all too often goes unnoticed by the Anglophone and European scholarly communities. As Jagadeesh Bayry has recently written, in a letter to *Nature*⁸ which highlights this problem, the *Directory of Open Access Journals* (DOAJ) reports that the UK has 587 open access journals, Spain has 465 and Germany has 286 – whilst in Brazil 843 open access journals are published, which is second only to the United States with 1,312 publications. India and Egypt are also very significant, publishing 518 and 363 journals, respectively. So, as Bayry reminds us, countries beyond Europe such as Brazil and India may have far more open access journals, but part of the problem is that journals publishing in languages other than English don’t always get picked up by the scientific databases and so academics in North America and Europe are not aware of these publications.

The Open Library of Humanities is an extremely international project, and we are proud to have a vibrant Internationalisation Committee dedicated to questions of international publishing such as access for scholars around the world, issues concerning translation, and the challenges confronting publishing in languages other than English (for example, with English abstracts, keywords and metadata so that increased bodies of scholarship can be indexed within Anglophone searches). To return to the question of African library networks raised above, we have a number of colleagues on our committees working in Africa and with African research libraries and collections. Hadithi, for example, is a growing repository of African scholarship and is also working to raise awareness of open access research across the continent. (They recently partnered with the Digital Public Library of America.) We also have colleagues from the African Digital Libraries Support Network (ADLSN) working with us at the OLH, and colleagues in library and information management who work with the International Conference of African Digital Libraries and Archives (ICADLA). This level of expertise is vital if the OLH is to understand the challenges facing researchers and librarians in countries across Africa. To quote from the ICADLA website, ‘initiatives for digital libraries and archives are well established in most countries in the global north, but in Africa these are lagging behind and in the main are in embryonic stages, limited and

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22 not well co-ordinated. There is widespread scarcity of expertise and resources to manage digital infrastructure and information'. So we wanted to recognize these challenges facing colleagues working in information management, digital preservation and academic research around the world. And the international aspect of our publishing mission in the humanities is a core part of what we are trying to achieve.

The Open Library of Humanities

The Open Library of Humanities, as mentioned earlier, can be seen as both a megajournal and a monograph publishing pilot scheme, and in the remainder of this article I would like to explain more about the OLH and where it fits into the bigger picture of open access publishing today.

With the OLH we are borrowing from the model of a megajournal like *PLOS ONE*, but there are clearly key distinctions to be made, since the question of scale in humanities journal publishing is very different from practices in the sciences. Another distinction worth noting is that at the OLH we are advocating rigorous peer review. We can perhaps address this in a few years' time as recommended by our Steering Committee of leading scholars across the humanities disciplines, but since the question of peer review is a very delicate issue in the humanities, we will launch with rigorously peer-reviewed articles. The other key distinction to be made is we that are aiming to launch without any APCs. This is absolutely essential to us and is the reason why Dr Martin Eve and I started this project. Having worked both inside Russell Group Universities and at 'post-92' institutions, I am only too aware of the pressures that librarians and research budgets face, and that academic researchers themselves face, and that is why we are looking to build an alternative business model around library consortia.

There is a real problem of prestige in humanities scholarship as it currently stands, which leads to the perception that open access publishing in online-only journal platforms is not quite as legitimate or reputable as placing your work with traditional academic publishers who have built up their brands and reputation over a much longer period of print publishing. This puts pressure particularly on younger or 'early career' scholars who are often advised against open access publishing on the grounds that such work would not be 'returnable' in national quality assessment frameworks like the Research Excellence Framework (REF) in the UK or the Research Quality Framework in Australia (RQF) which can then impact on hiring decisions; and, over in the United States, younger scholars are sometimes advised that open access publications would not be admissible for tenure hiring committee portfolios. So we decided that this was an issue that really required confronting head on and led to the establishment of our Early Career Researchers' Forum which advises specifically on how to attract younger academics to submit work to the OLH. Of course, the main attraction for scholars (at all stages of their careers) in submitting their work with us when we launch will need to be the prestige and scholarly reputation of the OLH as a publisher, which we have worked hard to establish through our committees, editorial boards and networks of support. For that reason, if you visit our website you will find that we have secured some of the most high-profile colleagues across the humanities disciplines onto our various committees. We are extremely proud to have the active support of individuals working for key organizations – including (to name but a few) UNESCO, PLOS, the Wellcome Trust, Jisc Collections, the OAPEN Foundation, the Creative Commons, the Modern Languages Association (MLA) in North America (which is the largest scholarly association in literary and language studies), professors working at Harvard and Stanford, publishers working at MIT Press, researchers working at the Institute of Humanities Research (IHR), the Public Knowledge Project (PKP), and colleagues at the British Academy. As founders of the OLH, Martin and I very deliberately approached such a diverse and influential range of individuals and organizations and were delighted to receive their instant support. The integrity of our committee structure and the high-profile status of the academics, librarians, editors, programmers and information managers who make up the OLH signals the reputability of the project and ensures that it can enter a rapidly

"There is a real problem of prestige in humanities scholarship ..."

23 changing publishing landscape with confidence in its position as a prestigious academic-led organization. Meanwhile, our editorial structure has expanded into a truly global network, with section editors already signed up from universities in China, Taiwan, North America, Latin America, Europe and Australia. Our definition of humanities is inclusive and so editorial sections cover traditional disciplines such as theology, history, literature, modern languages and philosophy, as well as incorporating some disciplines that border the social sciences, such as legal theory, media theory, political science and digital humanities.

Returning to our monograph pilot scheme, the OLH is partnering with four very prestigious and internationally respected publishers, three of which are university presses and one of which is a born-digital publisher. The monograph pilot has been set up to collect transparent data about costings so that we can establish how much it actually costs to produce a scholarly monograph – from author submission to the finished product. At the end of the pilot we will publish this data. Another benefit of working with high-ranking publishing partners on the monograph pilot is that these partnerships have the benefit of conferring prestige on the journals side of our publishing. The term ‘megajournal’ (by which we mean a large-scale, interdisciplinary, open access journal publishing platform), remains a frightening word for many humanities academics, who are concerned that publishing in volume and on a continuous rolling format (rather than holding articles in a queue to form discrete issues) can only work in the sciences disciplines. In this respect, the humanities need to be understood as a set of disciplines with their own distinct cultures and research identities – and we are working at the OLH on strategies to protect and maintain the distinctiveness and uniqueness of specialist fields via a system of individual ‘overlay’ journals within the megajournal base repository.

“There are exciting things we can do with monographs in the future ...”

So, whilst our monograph publishing partners are helping us to ease both wary and enthusiastic humanities scholars in the transition towards open access journal publishing by enhancing the legitimacy of the OLH and its commitment to editorial rigour and quality, in combining a monograph pilot with a megajournal publishing platform we aim to generate surplus funds from our LPS business model which can be routed back into monograph publishing. As I am sure many of you are no doubt aware, monograph publishing faces huge challenges over the coming years and the transition to OA is not going to be easy. The academics involved at the OLH are in agreement that we feel strongly about supporting monographs as a valued form of publication in the humanities. There are exciting things we can do with monographs in the future – we can open them up, embed different hyperlinks and pathways through a monograph which would transform the reading process, for example – but all of these innovations rely on the continued funding for monograph publishing which has suffered in recent years as a result of the inflated costs of journal subscriptions to university libraries. So if we can find a way to financially support our monograph publishing through the OLH pilot scheme, this could suggest a productive revenue stream borrowed from journal publishing that helps ensure the continued vitality of the monograph sector.

In conclusion, then, we are taking questions of technology and of bringing down the costs of open access publishing very seriously at the OLH – not just for our project, but for other open access publishing projects as well. This seems to us to be essential when funding is increasingly hard to come by. We recognize the importance of digital preservation and we see part of our role as a megajournal platform as helping protect vulnerable and small-scale journals, many of which have already enquired about transferring to our platform. To return to my earlier discussion of a DIY inheritance borrowed both from hacking and from the long-established tradition of a scholarly gift culture, I do think that academics can perform a really positive role in this landscape where policy implementations are sometimes slower moving than we would prefer. The OLH proves that academics can become active agents in architecting their own publishing future, working in partnership with both publishers and librarians. If you are interested, please do check out our website and get in touch with us – we’d love to hear from you.

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To cite this article:

Edwards, C, How can existing open access models work for humanities and social science research? , *Insights*, 2014, 27(1), 17–24;DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1629/2048-7754.135>