

ATG Special Report – Beyond the BPC: Making Open Access Book Publishing Fair, Sustainable and Equitable

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In today's world, access to scholarship through subscriptions and print purchases is no longer doing justice to the academic research we publish. As the pandemic hit, many publishers temporarily pulled down their paywalls, acknowledging that the current system was not serving the needs of their researcher demographic. Seeing the impact of open access (OA) on usage, publishers and librarians now have a clear view of the future. Yet, how free digital access is financed and sustained remains a challenge and is bringing innovation in academic publishing.

At the Charleston 2022 conference, we saw books catching up with journals with a showcase of new business models designed to transition long-form publishing to OA. Now, with an increasing number of OA mandates for monographs and book chapters, the goal is to find a model, or several models, that encourage bibliodiversity, increased visibility and sustainability of long-form publishing, affordable funding and equal opportunities to publish OA.

BPC models are at various stages of trial, these include [TOME](#), designed to support researchers through central administration university funding; [UCL Press](#), a bespoke press funded by a wealthy university that allows free publishing for their own scholars, and charging when publishing others; [Cambridge UP Flip it Open](#), that turns monographs into OA once a threshold has been reached through conventional sales; and Springer OA who piloted a model akin to journal [read and publish deals with UC Berkeley](#).

The other approach focuses on non-BPC models. Many presses employ a mix of revenue streams, sometimes combining library subscription/membership schemes with print sales and other income streams, including one-off BPCs when authors can access them. The library subscription models are predicated on principles not dissimilar to [Subscribe to Open \(S2O\)](#), used by some journals, that rely on multi-year membership commitments. Take for example, the [Path to Open](#) (referred to initially as [Third Way](#)) that offers a collection of eBooks via JSTOR to subscribing libraries and which embargoes content for three years, after which the eBooks are converted to OA; MIT Press' [Direct to Open](#), which seeks to open approximately 90 titles per year; Michigan UP's [Fund to Mission](#), which aims to publish 75% of the frontlist OA with the help of library community funding; and the [Luminos](#) program at the University of California Press which, in a similar way to Michigan UP, employs a cost-sharing mix of contributions. In the case of Luminos, they fund OA monographs with contributions from the author's institution combined with a library membership scheme plus subsidies from the Press itself. Another emerging program is [Opening the Future](#) (OtF), a model developed in partnership with [COPIM](#) for smaller presses and which is being piloted by the Central European University Press and Liverpool University Press. OtF leverages backlist package sales to

open frontlist titles. At CEU Press, the aim is to convert 25 titles per year into open access, financed by backlist package subscriptions.

In a sense, the non-BPC programmes like OtF are offering an alternative to institutions that are paying to publish their own authors in OA through read and publish-type deals or through BPCs alone. So-called "diamond funding" models like OtF are perhaps better thought of as an attempt to build an open, global "collection" that is shared by libraries in common, around the world. The cost of producing OA books is paid for by the collected library subscription fees: the more libraries sign up, the more OA books can be published.

BPC-centric models still run the danger of excluding authors who do not have access to additional publication funding – a concern especially for authors in the social sciences and humanities, as well as from the global south, or from less well endowed universities unable to support BPC payments. Without a variety of alternative models, academics without access to BPCs will be unable to extend the reach of their publications beyond gated access, and [studies have shown that OA leads to greater usage and citation](#).

In order to make OA fair, the link between publication and author payment needs to be broken – that way, publishing can be truly free and accessible to everyone, no matter their affiliation.

Models like MIT Press' [Direct to Open](#), Michigan UP's [Fund to Mission](#) and our own [Opening the Future](#) model rely on library funding coming either from ScholCom budgets or redirecting library acquisitions. Author-facing charges for BPCs are eliminated, and library commitments are made for multiple years, providing a known recurrent expenditure line for the library and security of cash flow to the publisher. They are all designed for long term financial sustainability for both publishers and library budgets.

Through library participation, funding for frontlist OA monographs is collected via annual payments varying between publishers and with tiered pricing to allow all types of institutions to participate. The benefit for the library is two-fold: backfile access to heavily reduced eBook packages to continue collection development, and the reduced need to spend budget on purchasing front list titles – these can be made available open access for global consumption.

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At CEU Press, OtF offers an annual subscription to a curated eBook backlist package and an incremental opening of frontlist content: once the funding threshold for a title has been reached via library backlist subscriptions, the next monograph in the publication list can be published open access. And so on. The production cost per title is about \$8,500 USD, which is financed on average through about ten package subscriptions.

Upon publication, we distribute all OA titles to all major aggregators and OA platforms. By committing to opening content ahead of publication, we avoid any accidental

double-dipping: titles to be published OA are chosen three months before publication to avoid pre-publication eBook sales, and to allow the altered metadata to be disseminated and integrated into all relevant third-party systems.

But in the OA monograph world, there are still areas that can be improved:

- Spreading the understanding of open access in the academic research community. Perceptions on the quality of open access research need to reflect reality.

The workflows for peer review, the editing process and production values all remain the same whether a publication is closed or open.

- Greater participation in models that are scalable and that suit the institutional mission. For a publisher, this requires more foresight, experimentation and willingness to engage with change. For libraries, this means participating in more than one model, sharing feedback and supporting the creation and use of OA research.

Most important is a *willingness* to participate. Open access is the future of academic publications. We need many library

participants to join one or more models – not just to finance alternatives, but also to provide feedback on the accessibility, sustainability and suitability for their academics and institutions.



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