

A vision from a number of Dutch stakeholders on the future of academic publishing

While it was necessary, ten or even five years ago, to advocate the case of Open Access, today this would be preaching to the choir in the academic community. The most striking illustration of this is the Position Statement¹ of Science Europe, published in April 2013. In its statement this umbrella organization of national research in Europe once again expounds the necessity of open access, in both a scientific and societal sense, on behalf of all its members.

The question why open access has not yet become standard practice in spite of this can be easily answered. The traditional business model of the major academic publishers is based upon the exploitation of intellectual property. This model is far more profitable than the open access model, which presupposes a service-driven market. The established publishing industry has, until now, managed to successfully oppose any changes to this financial system. But developments like those in Britain, where publishing in open access was recently ruled mandatory by law, and the letter that state secretary Sander Dekker addressed to the House of Representatives of the Netherlands in November 2013, which detailed similar plans, have caused a paradigm shift even among publishers. Out of necessity they are now beginning to take a more positive view on open access, provided that their income is not affected negatively by it.

The golden open access model

In his letter state secretary Dekker appears to aim for the “golden” open access model, which imparts the need for collaboration by the academics as well as the publishers: “With a transition towards open access, the Netherlands could represent an interesting pilot by the publishers for other nations.”

By means of a letter from the Royal Netherlands Academy of Arts and Sciences (KNAW) and the VSNU (the association of all Dutch universities) the universities in the Netherlands have expressed their agreement that the golden open access model is the most future-proof model. But at the same time it is a model that leads to substantial additional costs during the transition phase. After all, it requires the universities in the Netherlands to bear the cost, not only of the open access publications of their own academic staff but also of licensing scientific production in other countries. Additionally, the publisher’s income from corporate users will disappear, as businesses gain free access without sharing to the financing model anymore. Furthermore, these costs increase when the difference in open access adoption rates between countries grows. This underlines both the critical importance of international

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http://www.scienceurope.org/uploads/Public%20documents%20and%20speeches/SE_OA_Pos_State%20ment.pdf

collaboration during the transition towards open access and the need for a continued usage of the green route of archiving publications in repositories during that phase.

The question that needs to be answered is how existing infrastructure, in particular university libraries, can be utilized to prevent an escalation of the costs of academic publishing during the transition towards the “golden” open access model, while simultaneously maintaining their quality control through peer review. The Royal Library, SURF, the Radboud University Library and the KNAW have commissioned a research into this matter.

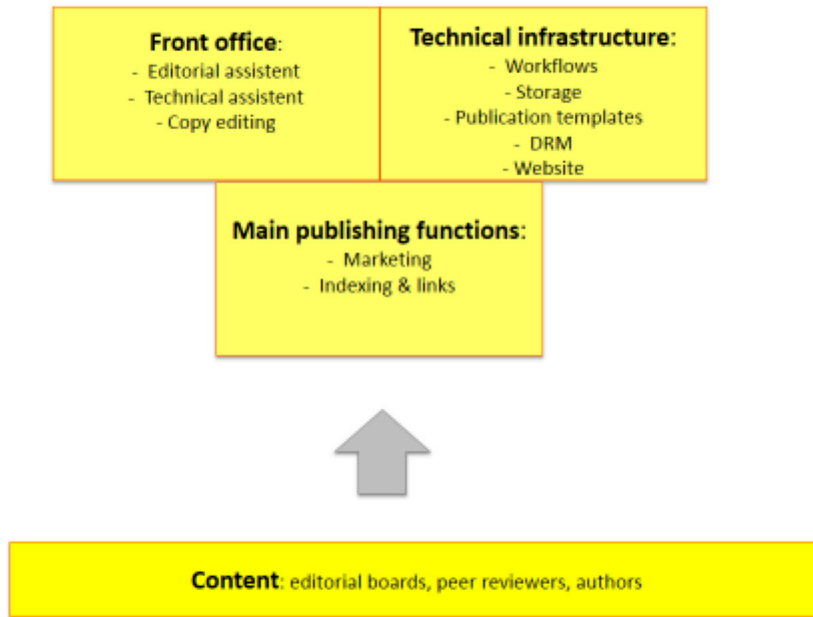
The conclusion of the research calls for a powerful interruption of the hegemony of the traditional publishers through the creation of (in part, alternative) professional publication options for academics in order to ensure a competitive publication environment.

Of particular importance is the achievement of the following goals:

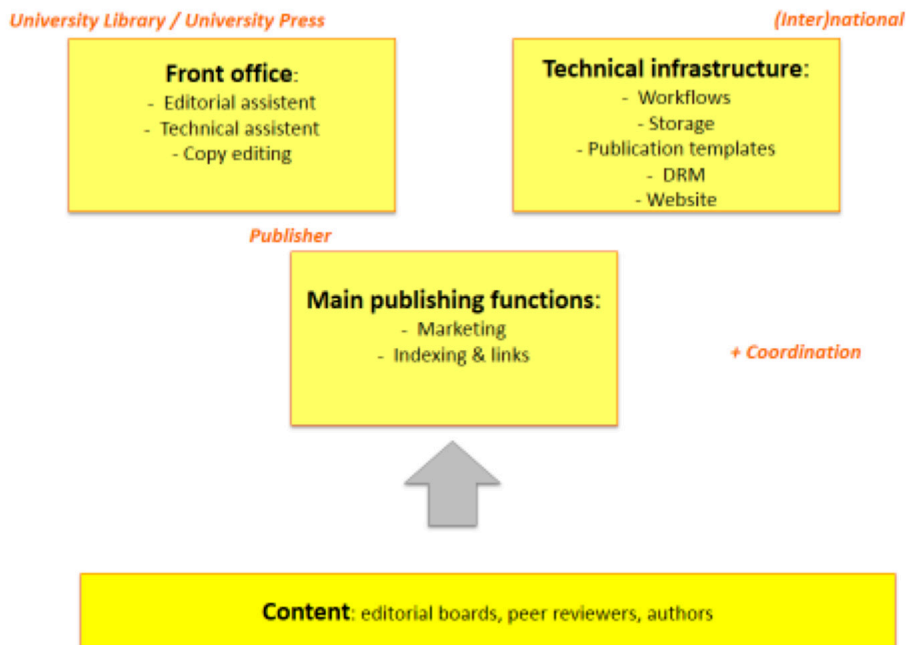
- Distribution of the “total” publishing operation (which is currently concentrated among the traditional publishers) among separate parties – for example, it should be possible for other parties than the publisher to arrange the technical aspects of publishing. In such a network of services and activities every party is compensated according to their contribution.
- Publishing functions such as the organization of peer review can be allocated to existing infrastructures like university libraries. In this way, a reduction in the costs of publishing can be accomplished.
- No exclusive transfer of copyright to publishers or journals.
- Although eventually no single entity will be “owner of the whole” (akin to the situation in other networks or service chains), there will be a need for coordination (for example at the national level).

The figures below represent the present publishing model (all functions and roles concentrated and owned by the publisher) and proposed new disjuncted model (with functions and roles distributed among different parties and not exclusively owned by one of them).

Present model



Disjuncted journal model



Current situation

Unfortunately, recent developments in the UK where open access was ruled mandatory by law in 2013 have led to an *increase* of hybrid journals, in which merely a portion of the articles appear in open access, for which the publishers refer the publication costs to the

authors while simultaneously persisting in charging the same subscription fees worldwide for the complete journal to the libraries. This ‘double dipping’ has also of course increased the total costs of publishing.

Moreover, a recent study ‘Developing an effective market for open access article processing charges’ by Bo-Christer Björk and David Solomon ² shows that the average APC for publication in hybrid journals is \$ 2,727, about twice as high as that in ‘open access only’ journals, that have followed PloS One’s lead with APCs in the range of \$ 1,350. It is assumed that the traditional publishers are trying to discourage authors to publish in open access by charging highest possible costs, thus frustrating the transition towards gold open access.

The study, reviewed by The Times Higher Education (THE) of the 12th of March 2014³, also states that, consequently, take-up of open access options in hybrid journals has been low and suggests three possible routes by which “a number of influential funders worldwide”, acting in consort, could fix the “dysfunctional” market in hybrid fees.

All three routes proposed involve article processing charges for hybrid journals, and although we think that negotiations with the commercial publishers on this aspect of the publishing business should be conducted, we think that it is also very important to explore our disjuncted journal model, and thus actively involve *academics* themselves in the process to open access: the editors, authors and peer reviewers of existing journals.

Editorial boards of existing high impact journals transfer their journals (activities) to ‘only’ open access publishers with low apc’s

More and more editorial boards of prestigious journals are not satisfied anymore with their publishers, due to the fact that services are decreasing, transparency of costs and sales are blurred and the costs of open access for their authors are perceived as too high. They prove to be enthusiastic supporters of an open access publishing environment in which publishing costs are as low as possible.

In the Netherlands, a start has already been made to provide these editors with opportunities for and help in the transition of their journal to ‘only’ open access journals that charges (sometimes far) lower costs for open access than their current traditional publishers do (see above). We are confident that it will be possible to ‘migrate’ the field of existing Linguistic journals to either the reputed open access publisher Public Library of Science (PloS) or to a fairly new kid on the block, Ubiquity Press, a start up from University College London.

These publishers have offered to supply the infrastructure and workflows plus marketing tasks . The costs will be lower than in their usual model as they are prepared to lower their *article processing charges* (APCs) for open access publications if the editorial boards are supported

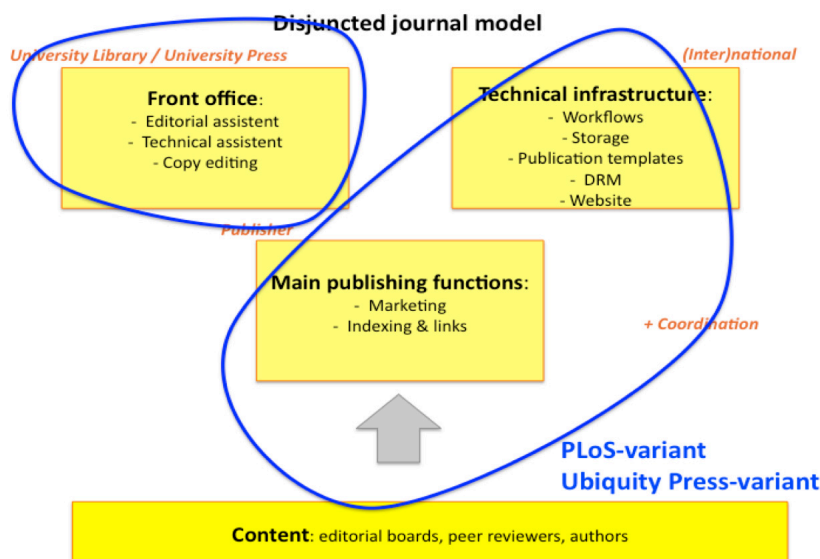
²http://www.wellcome.ac.uk/stellent/groups/corporatesite/@policy_communications/documents/web_document/wtp055910.pdf

³ <http://www.timeshighereducation.co.uk/news/open-access-report-suggests-funders-could-set-threshold-for-hybrid-fees/2012033.article>

by a third party, to respectably € 800 and € 300 per article⁴. At this moment five university libraries in the Netherlands are prepared to offer publishing services to the editorial boards. These libraries would become concerned with the *organization* of peer review including technical helpdesk and editorial assistance plus sustainable storage in national facilities – all of this within the context of their open access activities and academic concerns.

In relation to figures above we have in this model 2 parties involved:

- Technical Infrastructure + Main Publishing Functions provider
- and a University Library (or University Press) as a Front Office supporting editorial board



Editorial boards of established journals with a high reputation

A publisher usually possesses the sole rights to the *title* of the journal or series. The editorial boards, authors, and peer reviewers are not owned by the publisher, yet collectively they *do* determine the value of the journal. The impact, citations, and renown of the journal will therefore be quickly restored in the event of a transfer to a different publisher. For this reason, we consider it important to start with established journals with a high reputation.

Covering APCs in the transition phase towards open access

Throughout our conversations with the editorial boards we approached for participation in the pilots it was apparent that the APCs are their greatest concern. Their fear is that the APCs constitute an obstacle for their authors to join them in the transition. After all, the traditional journals currently do not require compensation for these publishing costs (yet). The editorial

⁴ Please bear in mind that the specific information given here is highly confidential: about the providers (PLOS and Ubiquity Press) and APC's offered by them in this model, and the fact that the field of Linguistics is prepared to migrate to alternative publication channels.

boards favor a solution in which the APCs do not come at their expense in the transition phase towards open access, but are rather covered centrally.

We are convinced that this model, in which university libraries take up an important role in supporting quality control and academics themselves take a lead, will promote price competition, in the long run restore the market and help a lot in respect of overall cost control. We would therefore strongly advise the EU to conduct this and similar pilots for various disciplines in STM and HSS. It is important to carry out such projects in order to deliver a proof of concept of an alternative and affordable Open Access model for high quality scholarly publishing, to set an example for other editorial boards so that more of journals will be able to follow.

Open Access Publishing Services - OPuS

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