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### OAPEN-UK

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ADVISOR REVIEWS—STANDARD REVIEW

OAPEN-UK

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Composite Score:

★★★ 1/2

Reviewed by: Michael Hughes

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## Abstract

OAPEN-UK is the United Kingdom branch of Open Access Publishing in European Networks, a research project that aims to devise a comprehensive, equitable, and sustainable model for Open Access (OA) publishing in the humanities and social sciences (HSS) that is agreeable to all stakeholders: publishers, authors, readers, librarians, and others. The heart of the project is a pilot involving an experimental group of 29 OA titles paired with the same number of traditional route-to-market books in a control group. Matched as closely as possible by subject, timeliness, price, format, and sales over time, the monographs are made discoverable via MARC records, previews in Google Books, on author and publisher Web sites, and, for each title in the experimental group, a full-text PDF in the OAPEN Library, a repository of more than 800 HSS monographs. Now entering its third year and slated to end in Spring 2015, the full impact of OAPEN-UK's Open Access "disruption" is unknown. Consequently, this review appraises the project's research design, preliminary results, and potential for building new infrastructure in OA monograph publishing.

## Pricing Options

Open Access; N/A

## Product Description

The conversation on Open Access has heretofore been dominated by consideration of one particular information product, the journal article, which remains the primary vehicle for communicating research in the "hard" sciences. In the humanities and social sciences, however, the monograph is king, and key to tenure and promotion.<sup>1</sup> The economics of monograph publishing differ from those of journals such that the so-called Green and Gold roads to OA—depositing articles in institutional repositories and paying article-processing charges respectively—are of limited application in opening the monograph to free and unrestricted use.

While monograph sales decline, due in part to slashed library budgets and the rising cost of serial subscriptions, the value of the medium has not. As John Willinsky reminds us, the monograph is still "what it means to work out an argument in full, to marshal all the relevant evidence, to provide a complete account of consequences and implications, as well as counter-arguments and criticisms." (Willinsky 2009)

So the monograph will, and must, live; but how to ensure its health during a time of economic retrenchment and changing reader behavior? How to maintain high standards of quality—formatting, copyediting, and, above all, peer review—while removing price barriers and ensuring the widest possible dissemination of research? There are

bold experiments under way that aim to answer these questions while charting a course forward: MPublishing at the University of Michigan; Amherst College Press, based in that institution's library; and the recently announced Library Publishing Coalition, a network of more than 50 academic libraries "that intentionally addresses and supports an evolving, distributed, and diverse range of library production and publishing practices." (Educopia Institute 2013)

Add to this growing list OAPEN-UK, a seedling of the Open Access Publishing in European Networks project, which recently wrapped its research phase with a library of more than 800 OA titles in the humanities and social sciences (HSS). Like its parent on the continent, OAPEN-UK intends to devise a sustainable model for Open Access publishing in HSS disciplines, one agreeable to all stakeholders, including authors, publishers, institutions, and readers. Funded by JISC, a nongovernmental organization promoting digital technologies for education and research, and the UK's Arts and Humanities Research Council, OAPEN-UK operates on a grassroots philosophy, which is to gather evidence on a local level in order to influence the international collaboration necessary to grow change in every corner and constituent of academic publishing.

To that end the project, which is ongoing, began a real-time pilot in September 2011 to analyze whether and how Open Access disrupts the sales and usage of HSS monographs from commercial and university publishers. The heart of the project is a twinned set of monographs, an experimental group of 29 OA titles paired with the same number of books sold through traditional route-to-market channels (i.e., booksellers, libraries) and the publisher itself. The OA monographs are made discoverable by providing MARC records to libraries, allowing full page viewing in Google Books, depositing full-text PDFs in the OAPEN library, and linking from author and publisher Web sites.<sup>2</sup> Matched as closely as possible by subject, timeliness, price, format, and sales over time, these books will generate quantitative data on the measurable impact of Open Access on the monograph business.

## Critical Evaluation

OAPEN-UK is a longitudinal research project in midstream. Reviewing it at this stage is like reviewing *Led Zeppelin IV* without John Bonham's drum track. Necessarily incomplete, OAPEN-UK cannot be evaluated except on its research design, preliminary results, and future potential. Nevertheless, the available evidence suggests a well-managed and thoughtfully executed study that could add steam to the growing but slow transition to majority OA publishing.

A key feature is the project's sensitivity to the complexity of publishing and the varieties of perspective that stakeholders bring to negotiations. The tone overall is sensible, even respectful, and contrasts sharply with the overheated rhetoric of blogs and tweets where much



## OAPEN-UK Review Scores Composite Composite: ★★☆☆ 1/2

*The maximum number of stars in each category is 5.*

### Content: ★★☆☆

We can't evaluate the full measure of OAPEN-UK's research outcomes until the project wraps in 2015, but the study has already produced useful findings, surfacing barriers and opportunities in stakeholder focus groups and conducting surveys of OA awareness and attitudes thereof. Best of all, the study's pilot has freed 29 HSS monographs for free and unrestricted public consumption. It is easy to imagine a follow-up review adding a half-star or more to this rating.

### User Interface/Searchability: ★★★

OAPEN-UK's Web site is functional but unremarkable. A clearinghouse for the project, it is text-heavy but easily navigated. A no-frills search bar is included.

### Pricing: N/A

### Contract Options: N/A

of the OA debate continues to unfurl.<sup>3</sup> "Collaborative," a buzzword too often made indistinct by vagaries, is backed in this instance by substance. Initial focus groups, for example, involved eight representatives from each of the seven stakeholder categories: institutional representatives (e.g., librarians); publishers, including those not participating in the pilot; academic author-readers; HSS funders; learned societies; e-book aggregators; and research managers and administrators. Each subgroup was given an opportunity to tease out the barriers, opportunities, and conceptual concerns of OA publishing from its unique vantage point. Results from each meeting were then published to the OAPEN-UK project page and later summarized in a separate document in order to highlight areas of overlap and contradiction. This comprehensive picture of the writing-and-publishing landscape, in turn, will be used to shape surveys and other evidence-gathering activities across the life of the study.

One such survey will chart how stakeholder awareness, knowledge, and perceptions of OA change over time. If uncritical biases or misconceptions initially color a respondent's outlook, will participation in the study work to erode, correct, or confirm those biases? Initial results will be compared against follow-up polling once participants have been exposed to the sales and usage data generated by the pilot up to that point. A separate survey of 690 HSS researchers solicited opinions on a range of issues in scholarly communication, from for-

mat preferences, to the value of publisher services, to awareness of Creative Commons licensing. The results detail the publication process, from conception and funding to publisher selection and distribution. They provide insight into the ways books are discovered, read, and the aspects of those books that readers most highly value. Such grist gives shape to the kinds of issues that will have to be addressed in order to fashion an OA business model that satisfies the majority of stakeholders in the HSS publishing ecosystem.

These focus groups and surveys, in addition to the monograph pilot, form three prongs pointed at the Spring of 2015 when the project will come to a close, hoped to result in a comprehensive, equitable, and sustainable solution to this variant on the irresistible force paradox: What happens when HSS monographs meet Open Access? The pilot with its paired sets of OA and traditional books is the core of the project and the data it generates, not public as of this writing, will have the most impact in helping authors and publishers to determine what happens when long-form scholarship is offered up as a free download to all and sundry. Even before the data is gathered in full, analyzed, and released for public consumption, the OAPEN-UK pilot has already produced a net good in the form of 29 HSS monographs, from quality academic publishers, slapped with a CC-BY-NC-ND license, and made freely available online (the full list of titles is available as an Excel spreadsheet here: <<http://goo.gl/4MtcJ>>).<sup>4</sup> This all-in commitment from participating publishers allows for a richness of data that distinguishes OAPEN-UK from some of the scope-limited surveys that precede it. But only time will tell if these outcomes are sufficiently compelling to drive change in contemporary publishing models.

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## Contract Provisions

N/A

## Authentication

OAPEN-UK lives on the open Web and can be explored by anyone with a computer and an internet connection.

## Author's References

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## Endnotes

1. This is true of most T&P processes today and will likely remain the norm for some time, but rumblings of change grow louder every year. See Stacey Patton's recent article for the *Chronicle of*

*Higher Education*, "The Dissertation Can No Longer Be Defended," for examples of scholarship's digital evolution.

2. Metadata for all titles in the OAPEN Library, including the 29 monographs in OAPEN-UK's pilot, is offered in several formats: ONIX XML; MARCXML; a CSV text file; and XML optimized for Excel. Conversion and cleanup may be required. Files are available at: <http://oapen.org/metadataexports>
3. For example, Mike Taylor, a research associate at the University of Bristol, referred to academic publishers as "the enemies of science" in a 2012 article for London's *Guardian* newspaper.
4. A CC-BY-NC-ND license is a non-revocable Creative Commons license that allows readers to copy and distribute the work with attribution, but not to create derivatives or use the work for commercial purposes.

## About the Author

**Michael Hughes** is an Instruction/Liaison Librarian at Trinity University in San Antonio, Texas. He works with the departments of Engineering Science, Mathematics, Physics and Astronomy, Philosophy, and Film Studies. ■

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