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OPEN SCHOLARSHIP POLICY OBSERVATORY



Open Access Monographs

by Caroline Winter | 19 March 2021 | English, Observations, Observations and Responses | 0 comments



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At a glance:

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As the international open access (OA) movement gains momentum, the question of how to make the shift to OA for monographs is becoming more pressing and, in recent years, efforts to determine a sustainable model for publishing OA monographs have increased.

Monographs—book-length studies of a single subject, usually by a single author—are particularly important in the humanities and social sciences, where they are not only crucial for communicating in-

depth, sustained, and complex findings but are also important for professional and career development, such as for the granting of tenure (Hill 345; Maxwell, Bordini, and Shamash 2017; MLA 2007; Schimanski and Alperin 2018; Townsend 2003; see also “[The Review, Promotion, and Tenure Project at the ScholCommLab](#)”).

Over the last few years, numerous studies have been undertaken to better understand monograph publishing and to chart ways it could be transitioned toward OA. Four major reports were published in 2019 alone—these are summarized in a review by Tom Hill (2020):

- *Open Access and Monographs: Evidence Review* (2019), commissioned by Universities UK
- *Towards a Roadmap for Open Access Monographs* (2019), by Knowledge Exchange
- *The Future of Open Access Books: Findings from a Global survey of Academic Book Authors* (Ros et al. 2019), by Springer Nature
- *The State of Open Access Monographs* (Grimme et al. 2019), a Digital Science report

These and other reports highlight several factors that contribute to making the transition to OA particularly challenging for monographs and make recommendations for addressing them. However, because the existing international monograph publishing ecosystem is complex and diverse, and the publishing landscape and market structures vary considerably across countries and continents, solutions that make sense in one market context may not make sense in another.

Business Models

The monograph publishing ecosystem is also distinct from the journal publishing ecosystem, as outlined in the survey by Penier, Eve, and Grady (2019). Compared with journal articles, monographs are expensive to produce, especially since print is still the dominant publishing format, and their development and impact generally unfold over a longer timeframe than a journal article’s (Hill 345; Weigart and Stone).

In addition, print runs and sales figures of monographs are generally small, around 200–500 copies, and are often published at a financial loss for the press (Maxwell et al. 2017). Academic and university presses are frequently nonprofit organizations, though, mandated to publish as a way of contributing to the scholarly record rather than to generate profit. Sustainability is thus the key concern in developing open access business models, rather than profitability. OA publishing of digital monographs has the potential to reduce publication costs, so if the revenue that nonprofit publishers gain from selling monographs could be replaced, OA could provide a path to making OA publishing more sustainable (Weigart and Stone).

Copyright and Licensing

Open licensing is a core tenet of the OA movement. In the humanities and social sciences, where monographs are more common and where scholarship often foregrounds the original expression of ideas and addresses potentially controversial or sensitive issues, licensing and copyright are particularly important considerations. Hill notes, for example, that the most open Creative Commons licences tend to be less popular among monograph authors, as well as those that allow for commercial reuse (Universities UK 2019; Pyne et al. 2019; see also Hill).

Moreover, concerns have been raised that open licensing mandates could further colonial appropriation of Indigenous knowledge and cultures; these concerns must be addressed

in cooperation with Indigenous communities (Khan 2018; see ACUP 2019 and Gatti et al. 2020).

Funding and Infrastructure

Hill notes that the technological infrastructure that enables interoperability among journals is not yet in place for OA monographs (2020), citing discussions in *The State of Open Monographs* and *Towards a*

In order to effect the cultural shift necessary to move from a print-based to a digital or hybrid monograph system, more support is needed from senior stakeholders (Universities UK 2019) as well as from funding organizations (Hill 347; Pyne et al. 2019; Grimme et al. 2019).

Among recent reports related to OA monographs, there is consensus that, going forward, funding organizations need to recognize and respect the needs of different fields and disciplines (Adema 2019; Hill 346; Universities UK 2019).

The State of OA Monograph Policy Now

In Canada, the [Tri-Agency Open Access Policy on Publications](#) applies to research articles and research data funded by the Canadian Institutes of Health Research (CIHR) only, not to monographs (Government of Canada 2016).

Recognizing the importance of the monograph to humanities and social sciences research, the Federation for the Humanities and Social Sciences released an Open Access Policy for the [Awards to Scholarly Publications Program \(ASPP\)](#) in 2015. Based on a review of international OA policies for monographs and consultation with stakeholders, this policy asserts “The Federation will actively promote and facilitate Open Access publishing of ASPP-funded books” (Federation 2015, p. 3).

In Australia, the [Australian Research Council’s \(ARC’s\) OA Policy](#) already applies to all ARC-funded research outputs, including monographs, book chapters, and edited volumes. These must be made open access within 12 months of their publication date through deposit in an institutional repository, an OA subject repository, or other means (ARC 2017).

In the UK, the [Wellcome Trust’s OA policy](#) also applies to monographs and book chapters, which must be shared through PubMed Central (PMC) Bookshelf and Europe PMC with an embargo of six months or less (Wellcome Trust n.d.). As of January 2021, research articles must be published OA upon publication and openly licenced, but the existing policy will continue to apply to monographs and book chapters.

The UK’s [Research Excellence Framework \(REF\) 2021 OA policy](#) applies only to research articles and published conference papers, but monographs are expected to be included in the policy in subsequent REF submissions (HEFCE 2016). Meanwhile, a review of UK Research and Innovation’s (UKRI’s) OA policy is currently underway, with consultations that include policy issues related to monographs (UKRI 2020; see “[UKRI Open Access Policy Review and Consultation](#)”).

[Plan S](#), which has signatories in Europe, the UK, and the US, applies in principle to all scholarly publications, but recognizes that transitioning to OA for monographs is a complex process that is still underway. Its current principles and guidelines apply to scholarly articles only, but cOAlition S has stated that it will release principles and guidance related to monographs by the end of 2021 (cOAlition S 2020; see “[Plan S and cOAlition S](#)” and “[Plan S Update: Rights Retention Strategy](#)”).

By the end of 2021, then, major funding bodies in Australia, the UK, Europe, and the US will have open policies in place relating to open access monographs (Jisc 2019).

OA Monographs in the Press

In several pieces for *Inside Higher Ed*, Lindsey McKenzie examines topics relating to OA monographs. In her [survey of the most downloaded OA monographs](#) (2018), she notes that, although monographs usually sell only a few hundred copies, some OA monographs are downloaded thousands of times: the most popular title in her list was downloaded 227,336 times in the two years since publication.

In a piece about [the subscribe to open model piloted by MIT Press](#), McKenzie notes that transitioning to OA monographs is not just an issue of access; the current publishing models are not working well,

suffering from shrinking sales and rampant piracy, and that new models must work for smaller presses too in order to maintain bibliodiversity (2019a).

In her piece about the University of North Carolina's [Sustainability History Monographs Project](#), she notes that the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation grant that funds the project is for a pilot only; more stable funding is needed to make OA monograph publishing sustainable in the long term (2019b).

OA Monograph Publishing and the INKE Partnership

In addition to the Federation's OA Policy for the ASPP, other INKE members are also contributing to the advancement of OA monographs.

John Maxwell and the Canadian Institute for Studies in Publishing have published several pieces relating to OA monographs. In 2017, Maxwell, Alessandra Bordini, and Katie Shamash published an [evaluation of the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation's Monograph Initiative](#), which provided 13 grants totalling nearly ten million dollars to universities across the US for advancing OA monograph publishing (Maxwell et al. 2017).

A 2019 report by John Maxwell et al. surveys the open-source software publishing landscape, including several book-oriented tools and programs (see "[Mind the Gap and POP!: In Conversation with John Maxwell](#)"). The book-oriented open-source tools and programs surveyed in the report include

- [Editoria](#): a web-based platform for collaborative monograph editing and production
- [PubPub](#): a platform for collaborative, community-based publishing for books and other publications
- [Manifold](#): a platform for publishing books with tools for annotation and reader engagement
- [Omeka](#): a platform for publishing digital collections and exhibits with robust metadata that could also be used to publish media-rich books
- [Scalar](#): a platform for writing and publishing media rich long-form digital publications.

The report notes that, while changes in journal publishing practices such as the shift to digital journals or OA publishing do not tend to affect the basic form of the journal article, technical innovations in digital and open book publishing are opening up new forms and formats for monographs (Maxwell et al. 2019).

In a [report by the Canadian Association of Research Libraries \(CARL-ABRC\)](#) about the changing open scholarship landscape in Canada, scholarly practitioners emphasize that research communities must be consulted in discussions about the shift to OA, including OA monographs (CARL 2020; see "[CARL's Advancing Open Event and Report](#)").

OA Monographs was also a topic of discussion at [Engaging Open Social Scholarship](#), an online gathering of the [INKE \(Implementing New Knowledge Environments\)](#) and [CAPOS \(Canadian-Australian Partnership for Open Scholarship\)](#) groups in December 2020. In their lightning talk, [Michael Sinatra and Marcello Vitali-Rosati of the Université de Montréal](#) discuss [Parcours numériques](#)—a hybrid print/digital publishing model—and its applicability for scholarly editions.

Also at [Engaging Open Social Scholarship](#) and drawing on Maxwell et al.'s "[Reassembling Scholarly Communications: An Evaluation of the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation's Monograph Initiative \(Final Report, May 2016\)](#)," featured speaker Gabriel Miller (Federation for the Humanities and Social Sciences) discussed challenges and recommendations for the transition to OA monographs in his talk, "[Supporting the Transition to Open Access: How to Move Forward, Together.](#)"

OA Monographs and the Broader Academic Community

Although OA monograph publishing has gained momentum in the past few years, this momentum builds on previous innovations, many of which have been ongoing for years or even decades.

One example is [ScholarLed](#), a consortium of five nonprofit, OA academic publishers based in the UK and the US: [Mattering Press](#), [meson press](#), [Open Book Publishers](#), [Open Humanities Press](#), and [punctum](#)

books (n.d.). Founded in 2018, ScholarLed is a partner in the Community-led Publication Infrastructures for Monographs (COPIM) project. **COPIM** works toward furthering the transition to OA monograph publishing by developing infrastructure to enable OA monograph publishing at lower cost (n.d.).

TOME (Toward an Open Monograph Ecosystem) is a five-year pilot project launched in 2017 by the **Association of American Universities (AAU)**, the **Association of Research Libraries (ARL)**, and the **Association of University Presses (AUP)**. Participating colleges and universities provide grants of \$15,000 to faculty to publishing an OA monograph. The participating university presses produce digital OA editions with open Creative Commons licenses that are deposited in institutional repositories. Its goal is to make monographs more widely available using digital technologies and part of the open web, and to ensure that the scholarly publishing ecosystem is sustainable in the long term (Tome n.d.).

In March 2021, MIT Press announced a new initiative called **Direct to Open (D2O)**, a collective-action publishing model in which payments from participating libraries are redirected from purchasing copies of titles to funding the OA publication of scholarly monographs.

In 2017, the **Canadian Scholarly Publishing Working Group (CSPWG)** published a **report** that surveyed the state of OA monograph publishing in Canada and made recommendations about developing a model framework to make it sustainable in the future. The CSPWG's member organizations include several INKE Partnership members: **CARL**, the **Canadian Research Knowledge Network (CRKN)**, **Érudit**, the **Federation for the Humanities and Social Sciences**, and the **Public Knowledge Project**. The report notes that policies must take into account that the existing Canadian publishing infrastructure and funding frameworks are complex and its market small but diverse. Overall, the report compilers address the essential challenge of publishing OA monographs: balancing financial sustainability with openness and accessibility (CSPWG 2017).

The CSPWG report alludes to points of disagreement by two participating organizations, which are addressed in two responses to the report by the **Association of Canadian University Presses (ACUP–APUC)** and the **Canadian Association of Learned Journals (CALJ)**. The **ACUP response** notes that ACUP agrees with the report in principle but takes a more cautious stance toward OA, arguing that existing OA monograph publishing models are not sustainable and do not safeguard the diversification of risk that is essential for academic presses (ACUP 2017). The **CALJ statement** similarly outlines its differing stance toward OA, noting that financial sustainability should be the priority, and that there are many ways of disseminating research, including—but not limited to—OA publication (CALJ 2017).

OA Monographs and Open Scholarship

Scholarly monographs are key elements of the scholarly communication ecosystem, but tend to be left behind in institutional and funder OA policies, which often focus on journal articles. As Maxwell, Bordini, and Shamash point out, though, both monographs and journals are part of the same complex ecosystem: the increasing cost of journal subscriptions is one factor in the decline in monograph sales (2017).

Open monographs would not only make long-form scholarship more widely accessible for reading and text mining, but would also make it more accessible for policy makers, something especially important in the social sciences (Weigart and Stone). In addition to potentially raising the profile of humanities and social science research, developing a robust model for OA monograph publishing could also help make academic book publishing more sustainable in the long term.

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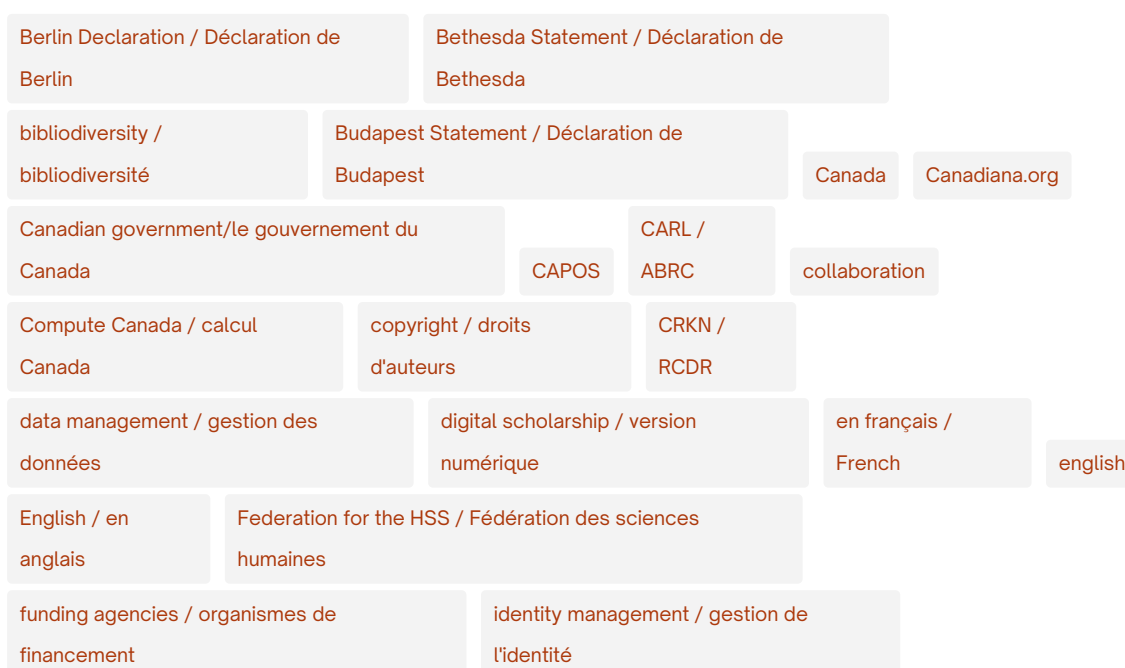
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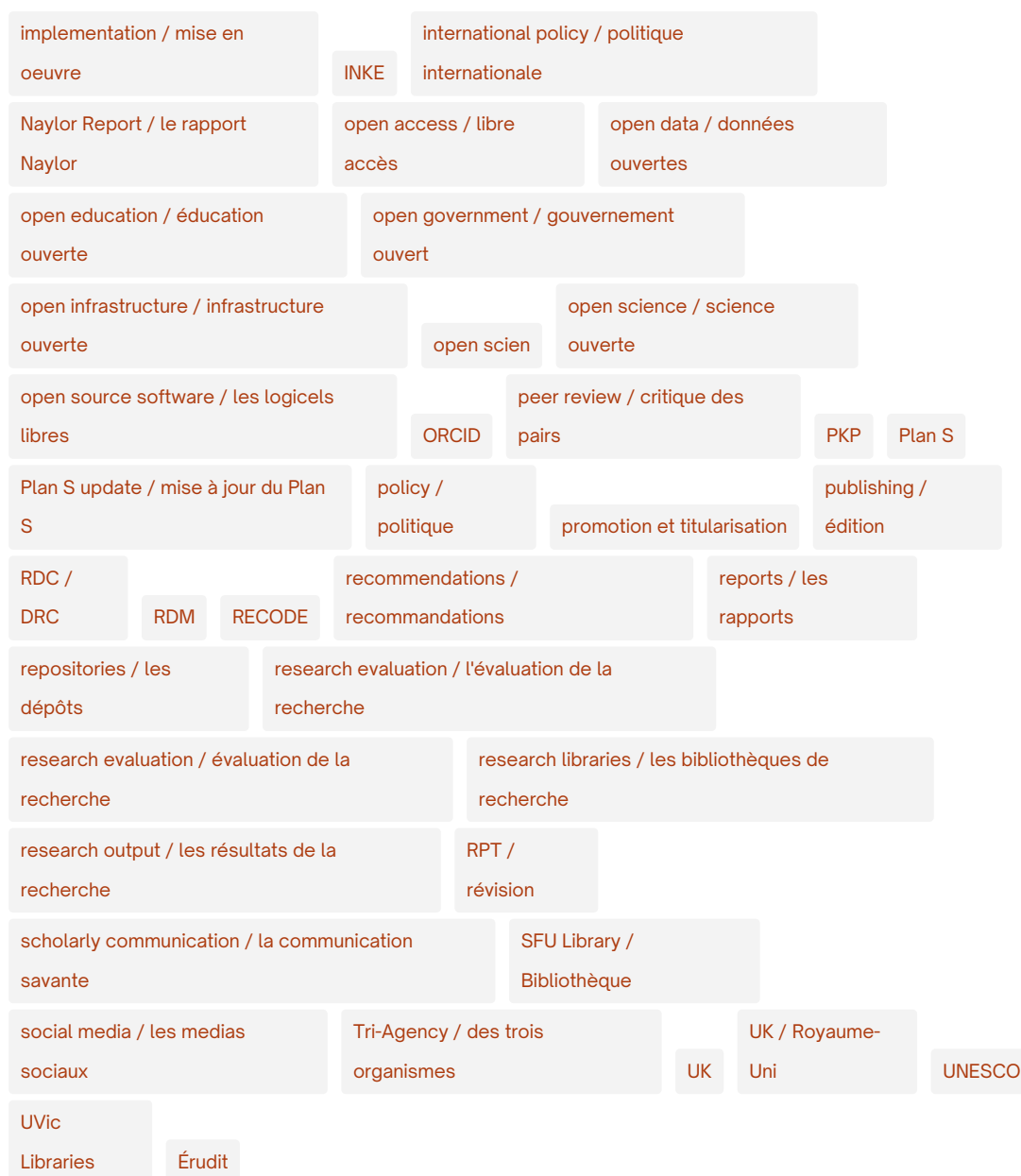
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