


# Community-Led Infrastructures for Open Access Books: A Sustainable Model and Platform

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## Abstract

This paper introduces two major outputs of the Community-led Open Publication Infrastructures for Monographs project, the Open Book Collective (OBC) and platform and the Opening the Future publishing model. The OBC, a charitable entity, will host an infrastructure and revenue management platform for the support, access, distribution, and promotion of open access (OA) books beyond models relying on book processing models. I then discuss a revenue model for publishers who wish to flip to an OA model without book processing charges. This 'Opening the Future' model has already been successfully implemented by two publishers, the Central European University Press and Liverpool University Press.

This paper relates to the conference theme of sustaining positive change. The international move towards OA book publishing must be approached through models that render OA books equitable and accessible to the widest variety of international readers and authors. This necessitates thinking beyond book processing charges and the potential monopolisation of the OA landscape by major publishers, supporting a diversity of approaches in a networked model we call 'scaling small.'

**Keywords:** open access books, open access publishing, infrastructure, publishing models, open access platforms



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## **Introduction**

The [COPIM](#) project (Community-led Open Publication Infrastructures for Monographs) is an international partnership between OA publishers, librarians, researchers, and infrastructure providers. Its mission is to build and design the infrastructures to support a landscape for open access (OA) books that is equitable, sustainable, non-hierarchical, and communal. We believe that publicly-funded research should be OA, globally, without technical or economic boundaries. But the future of OA book publishing is uncertain. The danger of monopoly by a large commercial publisher, the takeover of OA spaces via the processes of platform capitalism (Srnicsek, 2016), and the dominance of business models that rely on inequitable and unsustainable book processing charges necessitates intervention in this space that are not for profit, non-hierarchical, and devoted to horizontal, cooperative, and knowledge-sharing approach that allows smaller and more diverse publishers to flourish. We call this perspective 'scaling small' (Adema & Moore, 2021). This paper introduces two major outputs of the COPIM project, the Open Book Collective (OBC), which is launching later this year (2022), and the Opening the Future (OtF) publishing model which is already being implemented by two academic publishers.

## **The Open Book Collective**

The OBC is a community-governed UK charity. The membership is broadly made up of three caucuses: OA book publishers, librarians, and OA service providers. The OBC operates according to several core values:

- the care and curation of high-quality academic books;
- a commitment to bibliodiversity;
- collaboration and resource-sharing over competition;
- networked community-building over profit-driven centralization;
- horizontal working relationships over exclusive hierarchization; and
- growing and safeguarding open accessibility to, and reuse of, academic books for global readers without technical or economic barriers.

It is important to note in registering as a charity, and setting out our values in our Articles of Association, the OBC creates safeguards against any future attempts at incorporation by for-profit companies.

The heart of the OBC is our online platform. Here, potential supporters, most of whom we expect to be academic libraries, can compare different so-called 'library membership programmes' offered by publishers and OA infrastructure providers. This is a funding model that is becoming increasingly widely used within the OA publishing space and allows institutions to commit to providing regular financial support to OA initiatives, based on their past track publishing or infrastructure provision track record. Specifically, the platform makes it possible for

potential supporters to assess different library membership offerings and to potentially design their own bespoke combination of financial support to different initiatives. In addition, potential supporters can easily assess the values, business models and subject foci of publishers or publisher collectives they might wish to support. This is hugely time-and-labour saving for librarians who may be faced with a confusing array of OA schemes and options and be unsure where best to commit their budgets. Another advantage for libraries is the fact that the OBC provides comprehensive, maximally readable metadata through the open-source metadata dissemination system [Thoth](#): our librarian colleagues have told us in OBC workshops that consistent metadata for open access books can be hard to find and integrate into their workflows (Corazza & Fathallah, 2022). The OBC is thus a mutually beneficial network that allows librarians easy, time-efficient ways to compare OA offerings for investment, and sustainable support for small-to-medium publishers without the need for book processing charges. The problems with models relying on book processing charges are manifold, but in short, this model tends to consolidate the dominance of large publishers within the OA space and it tends to favour and promote already-established academics in wealthy institutions.

### Opening the Future

The OBC supports a variety of publishing models that assist publishers in moving away from book processing charges. One of these models, which is another output of the COPIM project, is the [Opening the Future](#) scheme. This model was pioneered by Martin Eve and Tom Grady, and is already utilized by university presses such as Liverpool University Press and Central European University Press. This model is suitable for established publishers with a traditionally published backlist, who wish to transition to an OA revenue model for the future. In short, libraries sign up to the scheme and subscribe to a curated portion of the closed backlist provided by the publisher at a special price. That library then has access to those books in perpetuity, after three years of membership. The publisher then uses the funds generated to publish their next frontlist books open access, which are available to everyone, globally. Publishing the OA titles is a rolling process: as soon as they have the funds to produce a title, the press can publish the next one in line, and so on.

Building on the idea of successful journal subscription schemes, the OtF model ensures that no institution bears a disproportionate burden and costs are equitably spread between subscribers. Moreover, as more library members join the scheme, the cost per OA book goes down, spread as it is across multiple institutions. For example, if an annual membership of €800 (approx. \$950 USD) gives access to 50 backlist titles, and funds a further 25 OA per year, yielding a total of 75 books per year that are accessible (and growing every year) - with only 200 member libraries this equates to around €11 (approx. \$13 USD) per library, per title. If a press hits their revenue targets, they could charge less in future years or publish more books; if the revenue target is exceeded, the surplus can go towards funding infrastructure projects devoted to enhancing open book dissemination.

The OBC and the OtF model are just two outputs of the COPIM project, which is committed to a sustainable, equitable, and diverse future for open access books. We believe that OA Book publishing stands at a crossroads, with an enclosed, monopolized and inequitable publishing field as one possible future, and an open, diverse, horizontal and equitable network of communities as another. We are committed to the second option, and believe our projects help to forward this.

### Author's Contributions

This paper was written by Judith Fathallah.

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### Ethics Statement

Not applicable.

### Conflict of Interest

The author does not declare any conflict of interest.

### Data Availability Statement

All COPIM, OtF and OBC outputs can be found at <https://zenodo.org/communities/copim/> and on COPIM's dedicated Documentation Site <https://copim.pubpub.org>.

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### Resources

[The Open Book Collective \(OBC\) on Twitter](#)

[Community-Led Open Publication Infrastructures for Monographs \(COPIM\)](#)

[Opening the Future: A New Model for Open Access Books](#)

[Community-Led Open Publication Infrastructures for Monographs](#)

[Thoth: Open Metadata](#)