Commonplace • Series 1.3: Global Transition to Open

Help Shape the Transition to Open

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Our task

Some of the popular open access transition strategies, mostly promoted by publishers, manage to achieve more open access. But they lack much of what we need: making publishing accessible for everyone, lowering the costs of publishing, coping with an increasing number of publications, reducing the dependency on commercial publishers, transparency of procedures and costs, and a sustainable and irrevocable flipping of journals to open access [1]. The goal of achieving open access as the standard in academic publishing has been set for years now. Who do we trust with accelerating the speed of the transition while assuring the inclusiveness, transparency, and sustainability of the publication system? Clear principles must be reconciled with the will to break new ground. Libraries are in a good position to shape this transition to open.

[Technische Informationsbibliothek \(TIB\)](#) has the mandate to provide both academia and industry with information from natural sciences and engineering. The library is strongly committed to [openness](#) in its mission. Measures include providing access to scholarly literature, deploying infrastructure, and conducting research. In terms of open access, TIB is deeply involved in defining concepts and tools that actively help shape the transition to full open access. In this post, I will give a short overview of the current activities of TIB.

Call for Methods

Financing and business models for open access seem to be well established. However, there is still (and fortunately) a wide variety of approaches. Libraries need to establish workflows and evaluation criteria to decide which of these approaches fits their mission and strategy. One criterion is, of course, the benefits of a service to the research institutions we provide with information and literature [2]. But we should not narrow the discussion too much by considering only a few criteria based on past usage, e.g. institutional download numbers or papers by authors from our own organization in previous volumes. Especially when it comes to independent, scholar-led or library-based approaches, there are many alternative models that deserve consideration in money-allocating decisions that will require a closer look. Past usage needs to be put in perspective, and we should also consider the future potential of a service.

In addition, we need to develop criteria to define trustworthy open access offers. Libraries will have to define criteria that match the goals of fairness and transparency. When supporting and sustaining scholar-led publishing is on the agenda, libraries might also look at investments into infrastructure that support such kinds of independent publishing.

During all steps of this process we will have to deal with free-riding problems: Whereas in the short term, an individual library might not be obliged to contribute to a particular pure open access model, the library might still consider participating in this model in order to safeguard a publication that researchers are interested in as readers and as authors.

Highlights From TIB's Approach

At TIB, there are four major strategies underway, all based on the clear commitment to help shape the transition:

1. We established a library publishing service, TIB Open Publishing, to offer professional publishing services for non-APC, scholar-led open access journals and conference proceedings.
2. We developed our leading role in traditional library consortia by establishing models for open access consortia, e.g. through the KOALA project.
3. We contribute to collectively funded open access publications and systematically integrate this into our acquisition budget.
4. We help sustain open infrastructure for the open access landscape.

These strategies complement regular participation in read & publishing contracts (e.g. the national '[project DEAL](#)' contracts with Wiley and Springer Nature) and many other common open access activities, but also take part in national and international committees discussing the current and future state of the publication system.

TIB Open Publishing

With [TIB Open Publishing](#), TIB has started its own library publishing program for both journals and conference proceedings. [We take on the task](#) of distributing scholarly publications and making them accessible to everyone, and we place special emphasis on professional and scalable workflows that allow us to offer affordable professional

publishing services[\[3\]](#). With this new platform, TIB supports the foundation of new publications, but also the flipping of established journals: journals that do not have sufficient open access options in their current situation could start publishing with us and find a supportive, fair environment that aims for optimal access and discoverability.

The emphasis on proceedings is related to a historical and ongoing collection focus on grey literature and conference proceedings, which also complements other TIB activities aimed at academic conferences. Consequently, the [first users of TIB Open Publishing](#) are conference organisers. We do not only work on the continuous development of our services, but also improve the underlying software, PKP's Open Journal Systems (OJS).

Library publishing is an important pillar of the contribution of libraries to the transition to open, as it enables publishing research for reasonable costs and with a trusted partner. As such a partner to scholars, libraries are capable of running and maintaining the technical and editorial components building upon a very long experience with and orientation towards metadata, standards, and interoperability.

Consortia

Library consortia are an important means of collective funding of open access [\[4\]](#). TIB comes from a strong focus on the organization and administration of traditional (subscription and read&publish) national consortia, but has also been engaged in open access consortia (e.g. [SCOAP³](#)). In a new project, [KOALA](#), we explore best ways to build and run open access consortia for journals and book series. This includes looking at existing models and talking to librarians about their acquisition and funding strategies, but is also clearly aimed at starting consortia, each comprising periodicals from a certain field of study. KOALA-consortia fund open access periodicals that do not rely on APCs or other forms of author payments. We want to achieve collective funding, mostly by libraries, that enables editors (with or without the help of commercial publishers) to publish without barriers for readers as well as authors.

These consortia will also be instrumental in facilitating the 'flipping' of journals to open access. Since 2019, TIB has supported [Quantitative Science Studies \(QSS\)](#), a journal that has emerged from the Journal of Informetrics after the editors walked out in support of better access. [We have started our support](#) with the explicit goal of enabling the search for a collective funding model (and learning from such a journal conversion).

Contribute to collective OA funding

TIB is participating in the funding of open access journals and platforms including [Scipost](#), [Open Library of Humanities](#), and [Knowledge Unlatched](#). We have also pledged support for [Direct2Open](#) (MIT Press) and [Algebraic Combinatorics \(ALCO\)](#) (through LYRASIS [OACIP](#)). We have contributed to the journal flipping initiative [MathOA](#). Using library funds from the regular acquisition budget, not from temporary or special funds, to help sustain these open access projects supports our mission of ensuring optimal access to literature.

Sustain open infrastructure

Open infrastructure is needed for a diverse publishing landscape. Often, important parts of that infrastructure lack funding, despite being used daily by librarians and scholars. TIB continues to contribute to these services including [arXiv](#), Directory of Open Access Journals ([DOAJ](#)), and Public Knowledge Project ([PKP](#)). But we also strategically choose to build our services upon existing free software and to contribute code and feedback to these community-supported software projects including [DSpace](#) (for open access repositories), Open Journal Systems ([OJS](#)) (for open access journals and our own TIB open publishing platform), and [VIVO](#) (as a Current Research Information System or CRIS). In many [projects](#), we explore new features and services that might benefit the open access and scholarly communities.

Putting fair and sustainable at the heart of an OA strategy

It is very important to have a common set of criteria or principles to put at the heart of a library open access strategy. These could include:

1. **The benefit for our patrons and communities.** Do researchers find good open access venues to publish their research? Is using these journals, publishers, and platforms easy enough? Is anyone excluded, e.g. when they are lacking funds to pay for publishing there? Are our transformation and flipping strategies aiming at those publications that our researchers are most interested in—not just in the past? Do we get the best value for our money? And if, as usual, we do not have enough money to

pay for everything our patrons need and like, how do we choose? Which approach gives us the biggest increase in the open access share?

2. **The potential benefit.** Besides established solutions, where do we see potential for current and future publication of research? How do we assess which emerging journal or platform is worth our investment? Considerations should also take into account that authors (and readers) might switch to new and better models when and if libraries are able to get them off the ground. In any case, it must be clear which benefits and services libraries get in return for their investment. Libraries pay for open access because (and when) the services are in line with their tasks and obligations; they are not in the position to donate money.
3. **Common and universal principles of the transition to open.** How do we identify and rank such principles? How do we weight fairness and sustainability compared to size and popularity? How do we make sure that we actually achieve an irrevocable transition to open access (including in transformative agreements and R&P deals)? What is the mid-term perspective for any given model, how sustainable is it in the foreseeable future? How does this model influence the distribution of costs between organisations (will it concentrate costs at research-heavy or publication-heavy organisations)?

There are, of course, existing frameworks and sets of criteria that we will look at. For the approaches described above, we drew heavily from the [Plan S principles \[5\]](#). They are compelling and it would not make sense to formulate new proposals that are not in line with current and future requirements of research funding. The [Fair Open Access Principles](#) have been a guideline for evaluating fair and transparent journal models as well.

Learning and doing

We will achieve sustainability if we manage to collectively raise and relocate the necessary money to fund the publication of research. Libraries are best suited to negotiate and facilitate this change to open because of their expertise in evaluating relevant information and funding its access. We do not need to reinvent the library's mission for this shift to open, but we do need to update the criteria in our decision-making processes and then adjust our course. Libraries are well-positioned to direct funds towards fair, sustainable, and inclusive forms of publishing and to address freeriding from an angle of value for scholarly communities. Libraries cannot do

everything, but we cannot wait for the perfect model to emerge before doing something.

To make any combination of models sustainable for libraries, we need to consider the limited resources of acquisition budgets alongside with staff time, as Johnson (2021) points out [6]. We will need to think of the ever-rising number of publications and overcome the harmful impact of journal metrics. We will need to discuss whether journals (and books) are still the most suitable model to distribute scholarly information. Any set of criteria, any model that we develop, needs to be tested and evaluated, and it will most likely change over time. Libraries should allow themselves to test approaches, to look for new opportunities, and to be agile in responding to new challenges. How else can we provide sustainable access to the information our research communities need?

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