null • Business of Knowing, summer 2021

It's all of our business

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The *Commonplace* began a little over one year ago as a space to bridge the gap between the people who use (or want to use, or could use) open infrastructure and those building it; between ideas and implementation. To that end, there has been a very practical underpinning to our editorial calendar that is central to our mission. Our second series, “[The Business of Knowing: Bringing about \[infra\]structural change to knowledge communication](#)”¹ is no different. Inspired by an essay written in the *Commonplace*²—about the purchase of ProQuest by Clarivate—that sparked interesting and provocative discussion, the series seeks to capture some of that input and to give these ideas a home, to then be harnessed and channeled into real products and cultural shifts we can feel, the kinds that move us.

As we publish the series, we do so with an understanding that this act is, at most, a middle point. It's now our job—all of us—to actively engage with these ideas, provide notes and annotations, and then work to hone them, reflect them in the policies, practices, models, and infrastructures within our control(s) and purview(s) in our respective plots of the knowledge ecosystem.

We're extremely grateful to the sixteen (16!!) authors across eleven (11!!) contributions who set aside time and directed their attentions to this conversation. We all know that both time and attention are scarce resources today and we take their commitment and excitement as inspiration and motivation.

“The Business of Knowing” has three sections: Cultural Shifts and the People who Make Them; The Cost of Change and its Value, and; New Means Towards New Ends. In truth, these essays could have been organized into any number of different groupings, a reflection of both how intertwined the different changes we need to enact really are as well as of the interdependency of the proposed ideas. Knowledge sharing and knowledge creation today are socio-technical acts (some could argue they're the same act) and the lines of communication between those working on either end of the social-> technical spectrum, crucially, need to be free of static.

In this series we find a range of productive imaginings: from drawing on our history to thoughtfully map out our futures³ to reframing infrastructure as an activity⁴; from cooperative-based organizational structures⁵ to cooperative sustainability⁶; from restructuring citations⁷ to opening up grant proposals⁸; from securing sustainability through collective funding,⁹ to subscribing to open,¹⁰ and/or reapportioning existing grants and budgets¹¹; from new authorship models¹² to centering video and other media as valid scholarly outputs.¹³ All of these ideas are community-centered and,

with respect to incorporating them into tools and policies, should be community-driven. It'll take more than economic shifts, or technological innovations, or cultural changes. In fact, it's no longer helpful to think of these separately. We need them all, and we need them together.

It's hard to imagine truly new realities from the standpoint of a current, existing, all-encompassing one. When [infra]structural change requires us to tear down the foundations of the house in which we reside, we tend to focus on the "character" of the beams instead of the structural integrity. We seek to preserve or improve even when rebuilding is warranted, as it is now. We completely understand this impulse because we are guilty of it ourselves. In some ways, our very use of this structure—a call for submissions, a series—came about in the very same rote way so much of how the existing, suboptimal system maintains a hold: we didn't think twice about it.

In our call for submissions, we made other errors. The first was not scheduling enough lead time for submitters to send us their proposals and, if accepted, their drafts. This led to an initial pool of submissions that was predominately white, male, and American. The final lineup of contributions still skews in favor of this demographic (as does academia), though we took steps to improve it and will continue to do so. As we launch our fall series,¹⁴ we've accounted for this and planned for a longer turn-around and more extensive outreach to potential submitters. We're committed to learning from this process and implementing those learnings as we go on to better serve our readers and authors. To that end, we also hope that future series contributors will take us up on the ability to publish works other than essays! It seems, though, for now, that the series format will stick around with us as will the essay. We're keen to see what more we can do with it.

It's easy to feel frustrated in today's scholarly publishing ecosystem to the point of, at best, being resigned to do what we can with what we have. And these practices are admirable, our collective endurance inspiring, and a testament to the importance of supporting open knowledge sharing and the people doing the work where and whenever possible. Yet, as [the essays in this series](#) prove out, it's due time to be inspired not by our endurance but instead by our reimagining and reinvention.

We thank you for contributing, for iterating, for building, and for reading.

—Sarah & Catherine

□ [read more essays in the “Business of knowing” summer series](#) □

Footnotes

1. Our first series is the Media Literacy Toolkit, guest edited by Whitney Phillips:

<https://commonplace.knowledgefutures.org/ml-toolkit> ↵

2. Stein, G., Rich, T., Verdin, Z., & Ahearn, C. (2021). Clarivate, ProQuest, and our Resistance to Commercializing Knowledge. *Commonplace*.

<https://doi.org/10.21428/6ffd8432.fb0245ff> ↵

3.

“...rather than using the impact factor as a method of quality, it should be used to measure the opposite; *de facto*, the impact factor measures inequality of academic rewards. Eliminating the impact factor as an indicator of research quality, however, would only be the beginning. The bigger question is how we can ensure that “*third* and *fourth* rate” men, women, and non-binary persons from backgrounds not as privileged as Bache are an integral part of the scholarly communication system.”

<https://doi.org/10.21428/6ffd8432.5ebdd587> ↵

4.

“In this article, I propose a conception of infrastructure that goes beyond its functioning as a necessary tool in our kit. I claim that infrastructure is (1) an activity that involves (2) an agent and (3) her trust in (4) the tools she uses. This conception of infrastructure lets us see why it matters so much. Infrastructure is tied to who we are, and our engagement with it impacts who we can become.”

<https://doi.org/10.21428/6ffd8432.ae158f91> ↵

5.

“Although the number of new open access initiatives is growing, to many in academia the only thinkable options are framing these under [for-profit or non-for-profit frameworks](#), each of these having their challenges, each in a way exploitative. Indeed, for-profit publishing models benefit a select few by exploiting academic research outputs. However, the not-for-profit models (such as many independent Diamond OA journals) often [leverage unremunerated](#) work seen as the “[labour of love](#).” This, however, may be just as [exploitative](#) of academics — especially early-career scholars — providing their [time and expertise free of charge](#) in the hopes that this might help them to obtain stable employment in academia in some distant future. We believe there is another way for scholarly publishing initiatives: platform cooperativism.”

<https://doi.org/10.21428/6ffd8432.0ed64224> ↵

6.

“New sites of knowledge sharing can be truly sustainable if they sustain the people who occupy those spaces. The operation of such spaces must veer away from conservation-focused practices that have led to the devaluation of intellectual labor, the devaluation of critical and creative production. We must acknowledge that such production sustains us, individually and as communities, in profound and mundane ways. Only with such signification can we begin to approach meaningful transactions and exchanges toward a thriving industry for publishing.”

<https://doi.org/10.21428/6ffd8432.72cb6467> ↵

7.

“Despite being so crucial, citations — the pieces of metadata that serve as references to works — are often ignored in discussions of types of open knowledge. Historically, citations and their cross-references have been laboriously collected (by hand, then by computational techniques) in bibliographic indexes. These indexes, once published in serial print volumes, are today generally offered as web-based, paywalled subscription products by scholarly entities or for-profit companies.”

<https://doi.org/10.21428/6ffd8432.5af8c64c> ↵

8.

“With open proposals, because the funding could come from anyone at any time, there is a reduced tendency for the proposal to warp to match any individual funder's call. The result is less gamesmanship and more authentic curiosity.”

<https://doi.org/10.21428/6ffd8432.d5a0db9b> ↵

9.

“Any alternative to the prevailing scholarly communication system must be built atop a different funding model, one that excludes neither readers nor authors. In broad strokes, that model will center on direct support for publishing, drawn from funds currently allotted to subscription and APC spending. The same funders who finance the tolled-and-APC system—libraries but also foundations and government agencies—will, on this approach, redirect budgets to underwrite a diverse, community-led publishing ecosystem. Call it the collective funding model, predicated on open access for both readers and authors.”

<https://doi.org/10.21428/6ffd8432.250139da> ↵

10.

“The open access business model Subscribe to Open (S2O) continues to capture attention from the scholarly publishing community. cOAlition S provided a [recent endorsement](#), stating it “encourages publishers to seriously consider the Subscribe to Open Model as a model for achieving full transformation to open access publishing and Plan S compliance... What accounts for S2O’s growing momentum? Why has it captured the interest of a growing number of publishers, librarians, and funders? Will it prove sustainable?”

<https://doi.org/10.21428/6ffd8432.20811f1e> ↵

11.

“The lack of funding for open infrastructures is a systemic problem. As such, it is tempting to think that in order to solve this problem, we just need to find one large-scale mechanism to fix it at the same scale that the big corporations act upon. For example, a portion of each research grant should go towards open infrastructures used for the execution of that research. Or that a certain share of each university library budget should go there. Or that funders pool money that will be distributed among open infrastructures depending on their use.”

<https://doi.org/10.21428/6ffd8432.a1d2856b> ↵

12.

"[A] promising but underexplored solution path for this authorship bottleneck is to build tools that integrate authoring contributions to discourse graphs into the intrinsic tasks of effective scholarship practices. Here I describe one example point of integration: reading and sensemaking for literature reviews."

<https://doi.org/10.21428/6ffd8432.8b4aad0c> ↵

13.

"Just because a thing doesn't exist today doesn't mean it won't exist later. Today we routinely publish our research and findings about scientific, technical, and medical progress in scholarly articles and monographs. However, we didn't do that before the development and widespread use of what they call alphabetic letterblock printing, all of which began some 500 years ago. With audio and video production and distribution technology now available on laptop computers and cell phones, and becoming as ubiquitous and as much a part of the vernacular as print, could we be sliding into a phase of human communication where this medium too, now, is catching up to the message?"

<https://doi.org/10.21428/6ffd8432.22ccbe45> ↵

14. Lair, S., & Brundy, C. (2021). The Global Transition to Open: Structuring Library Sustainability Toward a More Equitable Knowledge Ecosystem. *Commonplace*.

<https://doi.org/10.21428/6ffd8432.f52e979a> ↵