

Risky Business:

Consultations with Journal Editors Regarding a Proposed Cooperative Scholarly Publishing Model

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Abstract

Open access is a principle that has been widely embraced by various academic stakeholders, although how to implement sustainable models of open access remains an important question. This report evaluates journal editors' responses to a *cooperative* approach to scholarly publishing that aims to redirect library subscriptions to help support journals in moving open access. I approached 64 journal editors regarding such an initiative: 32 in the context of Libraria, a collective of anthropology and archaeology journals, and 32 in the context of a proposed Canadian cooperative. The primary outcome of the consultations was that participating in a cooperative scholarly publishing initiative was an experiment with an uncertain result. Editors' responses suggest that while financial concerns are universal, they are influenced by journals' publishing structure and ownership. Ultimately, the results of my consultations suggest that cooperative scholarly publishing initiatives are trust- and relationship-building exercises that will take time to develop.

Keywords: scholarly publishing; academic journals; open access; cooperative publishing models

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Introduction

Over the past decade, open access has moved from a marginal to a mainstream principle within academia—one that is increasingly embraced by librarians, research funders, academics and publishers themselves. As John Willinsky (unpublished manuscript) notes, citing Robert Merton: “What was regarded as harebrained utopianism at the turn of the twentieth century has now become an ‘institutional imperative’ of science.” However, those voicing support for open access often do so from very different standpoints (Jackson & Anderson 2014). While grant agencies demand open access in the name of equity and serving the interests of the public who fund the majority of academic research, librarians see it primarily as an issue of access, along with a means of reining in escalating subscription costs.¹ Academics, on the other hand, may be spurred by various motivations, from a personal desire to increase the reach and impact of their research,² or pragmatic concerns about the inefficiency of the publication process, to an ideological commitment to making scholarship more accountable, accessible and ethical (Jackson & Anderson 2014). Finally, corporate publishers have enthusiastically endorsed author-pays versions of open access that enable the generation of new revenue streams (Fuchs &

¹ As Hamann (2013) notes, a clear trigger for the open access movement was the budgetary crisis libraries experienced at the end of the twentieth century as a result of the sharp increases in journal subscription prices over the preceding decade. Likewise, Eve (2013: 109) argues that “One of the main motivations [for open access] has been the aforementioned pressure upon university library budgets, alongside ever-increasing journal subscription costs.”

² As Suber (2012: 15) observes, “Authors who make their work OA are always serving others but not always acting from altruism. In fact, the idea that OA depends on author altruism slows down OA progress by hiding the role of author self-interest.”

Sandoval 2013; Jackson & Anderson 2014; Geltner 2015). In sum, not all those with a stake in open access are committed to it in the same way or for the same reasons.

Relatedly, the term ‘open access’ itself encompasses a variety of models that make publications free to the end user but differ significantly in how they are structured and funded. According to Peter Suber’s (2012: 6) widely used definition, “OA delivered by journals is called gold OA, and OA delivered by repositories is called green OA.” However, Fuchs and Sandoval (2013) point out that this framework fails to differentiate between non-profit and commercial publishers and those that levy article processing charges (APCs) and those that don’t. As they observe, ‘gold’ open access is often treated as synonymous with author-pays models, despite the fact that the majority of open access journals are not funded via APCs.³ Raising some pointed questions about whose interests this conflation serves, Fuchs and Sandoval argue that,

The data reveal that claims that APCs are the most important model of OAJs [open access journals] are flawed. Given that claims and reality diverge, one must assume that there are other reasons, as e.g. the profit interests of the publishing industry, that result in the overestimation of the importance of APCs in the open access-publishing world (2013: 434).

They therefore introduce a third term, ‘diamond’ open access, to refer to “not-for-profit, non-commercial organizations, associations or networks [that] publish material that is made available online in digital format, is free of charge for readers and authors and does not allow commercial and for-profit re-use” (p. 438).

As Fuchs and Sandoval (2013) show, the use of APCs is much less common in open access journals in the social sciences and humanities than in the natural and engineering sciences. Although this can be partially explained by the relatively low levels of research funding in the former fields and the inability of most academics outside the STEM disciplines to pay article processing charges that typically number in the thousands, it’s clear that academics in the social sciences and humanities have a variety of intellectual concerns about author-pays approaches. For example, in a 2013 Taylor and Francis survey on academics’ attitudes to open access, 86% of respondents agreed or strongly

³ Of the 9,437 journals listed in the DOAJ directory as of June 2017, only 37% levy such charges.

agreed with the statement that “publication of research should not be limited by the ability to pay” and 67% agreed with the statement that “the dissemination of research is a common good and should not be monetized in any way.”⁴ Likewise, in a recent Canadian survey of social science and humanities journals, editors expressed strong resistance to author-pays models of open access (Frei and Fleming 2016). In light of these concerns, financially sustainable ‘diamond’ models of open access are clearly worth exploring in the social sciences and humanities.

One such model is a cooperative approach to scholarly publishing that brings together journals, learned societies, libraries and funding agencies to design a sustainable open access infrastructure. Drawing inspiration from Suber’s (2007) notion of a ‘flipped’ business model, where library subscription fees are re-conceptualized as publication fees in order to enable universal open access, the underlying premise of the cooperative model is that there are already enough resources in the system to support open access (Willinsky 2006; OA Cooperative Study 2017). In keeping with this idea, the cooperative model therefore proposes to redirect library subscription fees in order to help member journals move to open access. Intended to be both expense-neutral for libraries and revenue-neutral for journals, funds are allocated in such a way that a sustainable model of open access is created without the outlay of individual APCs (see Jiménez et al. 2015; Willinsky 2006, Willinsky forthcoming, Willinsky unpublished manuscript).

There are numerous precedents for this cooperative model of scholarly publishing (Willinsky 2006), and international ventures such as SCOAP³ and the Open Library of the Humanities demonstrate the kinds of possibilities offered when libraries, journals and funders come together to support alternative models of open access. However, a variety of questions remain about how much interest there is amongst key stakeholders in exploring a cooperative publishing model and the kinds of barriers that exist to its implementation.

⁴ Clearly, research dissemination is already monetized via subscriptions, but the financial aspects of this system have historically been outside the purview of academics themselves. For example, Beall (2013), an influential critic of the open access movement more broadly, argues that by introducing a financial dimension into the author-publisher relationship, APCs corrupt scholarly publishing. It is this same view that seems to underpin respondents’ concerns about monetization, given that academics were asked specifically about the limitations of open access publishing, not scholarly publishing more broadly.

These questions form the central preoccupation of this report, although I consider them exclusively through the lens of one distinct (albeit particularly influential) kind of stakeholder: journal editors themselves. Supported by a MacArthur Foundation grant awarded to the Public Knowledge Project, my aim was to consult with journal editors regarding their potential interest in participating in one of two initiatives: 1) Libraria—an existing international collective of anthropology and archaeology journals; and 2) a proposed cooperative of Canadian journals in the social sciences and humanities.⁵

Overview of Libraria and the Canadian scholarly publishing scene

Although many anthropologists⁶ are not particularly invested in, or knowledgeable about, open access (Jackson & Anderson 2014), in recent years there have been a number of high-profile initiatives in this area. These include new open access publishing ventures such as *HAU: the Society for Ethnographic Theory* and *Medicine Anthropology Theory*, along with the transformation of existing initiatives—the most influential being *Cultural Anthropology*'s rebirth in 2014 as an open access journal. Libraria emerged organically out of this burgeoning interest in open access and brings together many of the key players involved in this area. Formed in 2015, it consists of an international group of anthropology and archaeology societies and journals that, in partnership with the Public Knowledge Project (PKP) and the Scholarly Publishing and Academic Resources Coalition (SPARC), are exploring cooperative alternatives to scholarly publishing. Current members include: the Wenner Gren Foundation (which publishes *Current Anthropology*), the European Association of Social Anthropologists (which publishes *Social Anthropology*), the Society for Cultural Anthropology (*Cultural Anthropology*), the European Association of Archaeologists (*European Journal of Archaeology*), the Society for the Anthropology of Work (*Anthropology of Work Review*), and the journals *Valuation Studies*, *Limn* and *Critique of Anthropology*. However, only a small proportion of anthropology and archaeology journals are currently open access. Moreover, while the American Anthropological Association has indicated its openness to

⁵ At the outset, the goal was to formalize such interest via a signed 'expression of interest' signaling journals' commitment to exploring the viability of a cooperative publishing model. However, it quickly became apparent that this was overly ambitious, given the three-month timeframe of the internship.

⁶ I am using the term 'anthropology' here in its North American sense, which encompasses the field of archaeology as a sub-discipline.

a variety of publishing models (Lende 2012), it has cited significant financial barriers to a move to open access (Brown 2011), and in May 2017 renewed its contract with Wiley—a commercial publisher that will keep the portfolio of journals under a traditional subscription model.

In contrast to the field of anthropology, where agitation for open access is primarily a bottom-up phenomenon, the Canadian government has expressed a strong commitment to the principle. In 2015, the three national funding agencies (the Canadian Institutes of Health Research, the Social Sciences & Humanities Research Council [SSHRC] and the Natural Sciences & Engineering Research Council) implemented an open access policy requiring recipients of their research grants to ensure that all publications stemming from funded research were available within 12 months of publication, whether via green or gold open access (Government of Canada 2015). Likewise, the Canadian Research Knowledge Network, representing 75 Canadian university libraries, and the Canadian Association of Research Libraries, representing the 29 largest university libraries in the country, have expressed their commitment to open access, with the former involved in a partnership with Érudit⁷ to support open access journals and transition others to open access after a one-year embargo period (Frei & Fleming 2016). However, a recent survey of 75 Canadian scholarly journals suggests that many are concerned about their sustainability under an open access model—even a cooperative model that aims to maintain journal revenues from library subscriptions (Frei & Fleming 2016). Survey respondents also expressed concerns about decision-making processes in a collaborative model and their ability to maintain editorial independence.

These findings are borne out by the recent joint efforts of the Public Knowledge Project and Érudit to solicit Canadian journals' interest in a cooperative publishing model, where editors largely echoed the sentiments expressed in Frei and Fleming's report. Likewise, the final report of the Canadian Scholarly Publishing Working Group, published in July 2017, suggests that while the various stakeholders in the Canadian publishing sector

⁷ Érudit is a Quebec-based non-profit publishing platform. A consortium of several Quebec-based universities, it is the largest provider of French and bilingual scholarly journals in Canada.

(namely, journals, presses, libraries, funders and government agencies) support ‘openness’, key players have different ideas about what openness means and how it might be accomplished. For example, the position of the Canadian Association of Learned Journals (CALJ) is that “a diversity of business models is integral to the health of the scholarly publishing industry, and that we should not overlook the fact that established subscription journals bring in substantial revenue from outside Canada and at the same time widely disseminate their content” (CALJ 2017a). This would suggest they place a lower priority upon open access, although CALJ’s recent proposal for a Journal Impact and Innovation Fund acknowledges the need for publications to be “as openly and publicly accessible as possible in a timely manner and consistent with the policies of Canada’s research funding agencies” (CALJ 2017b: 3).

These different contexts likely influenced the responses of the journal editors I approached regarding each cooperative. In particular, Libraria is an existing organization with a number of prestigious members and influential advocates, while the Canadian cooperative is a *proposed* venture in a country where multiple interconnected and separate initiatives around scholarly publishing and open access are currently unfolding. Extensive consultations have already occurred with Canadian journal editors regarding open access and cooperative scholarly publishing models, potentially creating a certain level of fatigue around this topic, especially given the widespread perception that open access mandates have been imposed from the top-down. Thus, these contexts are crucial to bear in mind when considering the results of my consultations.

Methodological notes

For *Libraria* recruitment, I developed a list of 32 international anthropology/archaeology journals and interdisciplinary journals with a strong emphasis on these fields. I used various resources to develop this list, including the World Council of Anthropological Associations, the websites of corporate publishers, and my own existing knowledge of journals in the field—especially those where I already had contacts. The list was vetted by *Libraria*'s Executive Committee, with follow-up input from several members of the European Association of Archaeologists regarding additional archaeology journals to approach.

The process to develop the list of 32 Canadian social science and humanities journals was somewhat more complicated. To identify Canadian journals, I used Ulrich's Periodicals Directory, conducted a search of Canadian journals in Scimago Journal and Country Rank, and accessed the list of Canadian journals that had previously been identified by the PKP in the context of prior projects. However, in attempting to compile a list of eligible candidates, I was quickly confronted with two dilemmas. First, how should a 'Canadian' journal be defined? Based on its title and content? Where it's published? The location of its editor and its editorial board? Second, should I contact journals that had been approached less than six months before in the context of the joint PKP/Érudit initiative mentioned above, given the clear potential for confusion and annoyance?

In addressing the first of these two issues, I ultimately decided to use a modified version of SSHRC's eligibility criteria for journals seeking financial support, with journals needing to meet at least two of the following criteria: 1) Canadian published; 2) Canadian focused

in title and/or content; 3) Canadian-based editor-in-chief; and 4) with at least one third of the editorial board members based in Canada. To sidestep the second issue, I decided to exclude journals that had previously been approached by PKP/Érudit, which effectively limited me to journals published in English. Additionally, I ensured that the candidates were all carried by the libraries of the top four research universities in Canada (McGill University, University of Toronto, University of British Columbia, University of Alberta), using these as a proxy indicator of the journals' quality and credibility. Finally, I gave lower priority to periodicals that lift embargoes on subscription papers after a one-year period, based on the assumption that such journals are already making strides towards open access.

Between May-July 2017, I made at least two attempts to approach every journal editor to provide information about the initiative in question and solicit their interest in “hearing more about the cooperative publishing model”, specifically asking about their “impressions of it and the various obstacles that inhibit your ability and willingness to participate in an initiative of this type” (see Appendix A for samples of template emails). For various candidates, I made three or more attempts to establish contact—in several instances calling editors' offices to leave messages or try and catch them by phone. Despite these efforts, I was not able to successfully contact nine of the editors I approached regarding the Libraria initiative and five I approached for the proposed Canadian cooperative. Although one might assume that this was largely a consequence of the timeframe of the project and the fact that it occurred during a period when many academics are out of the office, it is worth noting that I received out-of-office notifications from only three of the 15 editors and I sent follow up emails to all after they were due to return. I therefore think it's safe to assume that a lack of response is itself a response of sorts, which is how I treat it in the analysis that follows.

Institutional ethics approval was not obtained for this project because it does not meet the definition of ‘research’ involving ‘human participants’ outlined in the *Tri-Council Policy Statement: Ethical Conduct for Research Involving Humans* (TCPS). First, its primary goal was to consult with journal editors with the intent of building support for cooperative publishing

initiatives as opposed to “extend[ing] knowledge through a disciplined inquiry and/or investigation” and this report is evaluative in intent—an activity excluded from review under Article 2.5 of the TCPS. Second, I was approaching editors as formal mouthpieces for their journals who are able to speak on behalf of the journal *as an organization*. I was not interested in their own personal opinions except insofar as they informed their journal’s stance on the cooperative model. However, throughout this report I have followed good ethical practice by ensuring that the identity the journals I approached cannot be ascertained from the information provided and by obtaining explicit permission to quote from email dialogue and meetings in all instances where I have done so. One editor asked me not to use the information they provided during our correspondence, and I have therefore discussed their response only in aggregated form.

Before proceeding to the analysis itself, it is important to note that although I was able to connect with 23 editors of anthropology/archaeology journals and 27 editors of Canadian journals out of 32 contacted in each case, the *quality* of this contact varied dramatically, ranging from polite brush-offs and superficial replies, to thoughtfully composed responses and more sustained dialogue—which occurred either in the form of back-and-forth via email or Skype or in-person meetings. As a general comment, I would say that the depth of engagement was relatively similar across both initiatives: I had meetings with five candidates for Libraria and six for the Canadian cooperative⁸ and back-and-forth email dialogue with another five or so in each case. However, even brief responses often provided useful information about where journals stood on open access and editors’ willingness to consider a cooperative publishing model. These responses, along with chains of email dialogue and detailed meeting notes, were imported into qualitative data analysis software (NVivo) to facilitate analysis of patterns and emergent themes.

⁸ I had one in-person meeting and four Skype meetings regarding the Libraria initiative. In one instance, I arranged this meeting rather than attending it; due to the time difference, Alberto Corsín Jiménez from the Libraria Executive Committee attended and provided a summary afterwards. I had two in-person meetings and four Skype meetings regarding the Canadian cooperative.

Analysis

Composition of journals for each initiative

There were significant differences in the publication arrangements of the journals I approached for the Libraria and Canadian initiatives that likely had some bearing on how editors responded to the cooperative model⁹ (see figures 1 and 2). In many respects, these differences echo broad contrasts between local journals and those aimed at an international audience, with the latter dominated by corporate publishers and the former dominated by self-published and university press journals. The differing scope of operations for small and large journals also mean that the logistics of self-publishing are more feasible for local journals with a modestly sized audience than for those receiving thousands of submissions per year and subscribed to by institutions on a global scale.

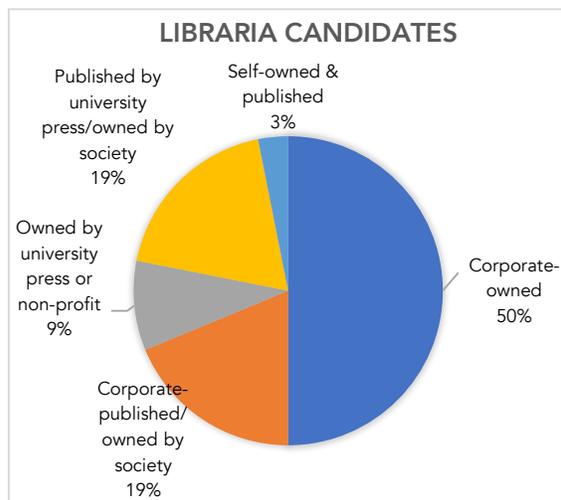


Figure 1. Publishing structure of Libraria journals (n=32)

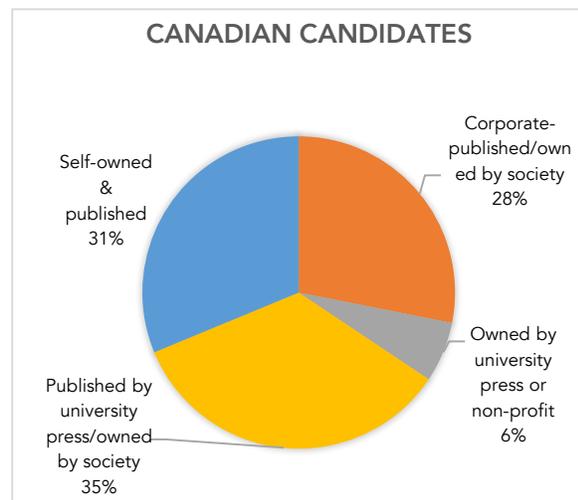


Figure 2. Publishing structure of Canadian journals (n=32)

⁹ And, indeed, their willingness to respond at all, as I go on to discuss.

Although local journals are likely to have some similarities across national settings, and some of the journals I approached for Libraria could themselves be considered ‘local’ insofar as they were national journals primarily focused on an internal audience, the composition of Canadian journals does, to some degree, also reflect “the unique features and relatively small scale of the Canadian environment” (CSPWG 2017: 3). Due to its close proximity to the USA, the Canadian government has channelled funds into domestic publishing since the 1960s in a way that has few parallels in other national settings (Lorimer 2012). Many Canadian journals rely on SSHRC funding for their financial survival; thus, SSHRC eligibility requirements have to some extent dictated their form and publishing structure. This helps to explain the complete absence of corporate-owned journals in the Canadian sample, as the SSHRC Aid to Scholarly Journals grant specifically excludes journals in which a non-Canadian publisher owns the exclusive copyright to their contents.

It is also worth noting that the dollar value of the cooperative model being presented, with its goal of redirecting library subscription expenditures to journals, was rather different in each context: annual subscription fees amounted to an average of CAD\$336/journal (range: \$45-\$636) for the Canadian initiative, and an average of CAD\$858/journal for Libraria (range: \$101-\$2,151). In conjunction with the differences between the initiatives themselves, it’s difficult to argue that the same proposition was being presented in both cases. I have therefore chosen to describe responses to each initiative separately, although I go on to discuss commonalities across both settings.

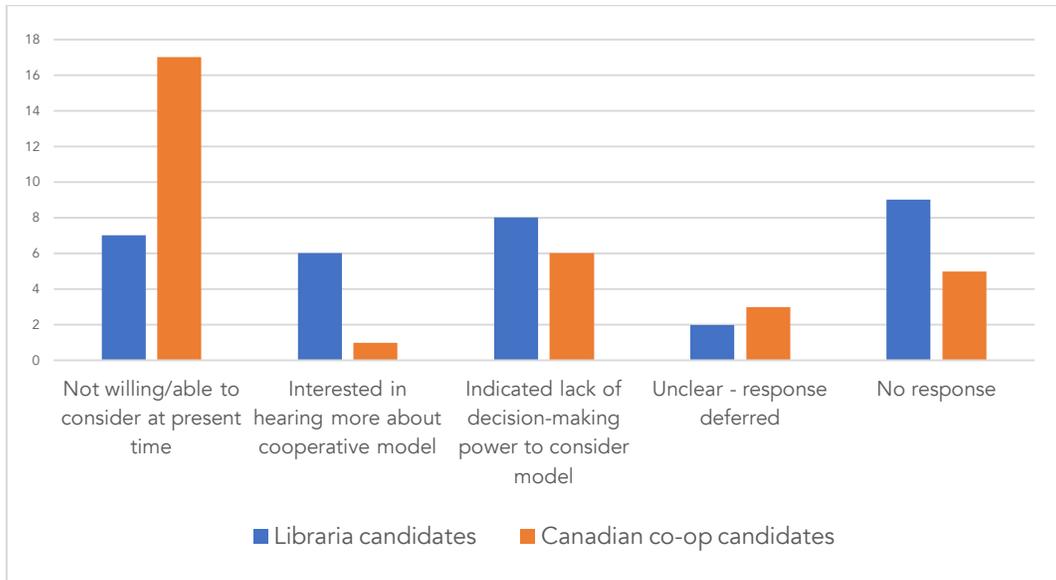


Figure 3. Overview of responses to invitation to consider the cooperative model

Responses to Libraria initiative

The editors I approached regarding potential participation in the Libraria initiative were relatively even split between those who were not willing to actively consider it, those who were, and those who indicated that they did not have the power to make a decision of this kind. In light of the fact that 59% of the journals I approached were owned by their publisher, I suspect that this latter factor also partially explained the relatively high non-response rate. As six of the nine scholars I did not hear back from edited journals owned by their publisher, my sense is that most may not have thought it was worth their time to respond to a proposal that they saw themselves as having little say in.¹⁰

Five of the seven editors who gave an outright ‘no’ were primarily skeptical about the financial viability of the model, with their specific concerns centring on its capacity to cover their journal’s running costs. In one instance, an editor also expressed doubt that libraries would continue to sustain their support over time, noting:

It is quite likely that if a journal becomes entirely open access, cash-strapped libraries would stop paying for a subscription as their readers could read the

¹⁰ This interpretation is borne out by the fact that one editor I didn’t initially hear back from responded to my follow up email noting that they had received the first note but hadn’t responded it because their journal was owned by a corporate publisher, so it would be the publisher’s decision, not theirs.

journal anyway, so either the subscription income would dwindle or some libraries would have to agree to basically subsidize everyone else (editor of journal published by university press).

Interestingly, the editors who took the firmest stance against the cooperative model were virtually all run or owned by university presses or other non-profits.¹¹ In various instances, editors indicated that their decision was the outcome of conversations with their publisher; indeed, one editor who expressed personal concerns about the viability of the model ultimately deferred to their publisher, noting that it was the press's call.

Eight editors indicated that they did not have the power to consider participating in *Libraria*. Perhaps unsurprisingly, the majority edited periodicals owned by their publisher (including five corporate-owned journals and one owned by a university press).¹² Interestingly, four of these editors noted that they had been pushing open access conversations with their publisher. Several drew explicit connections between their inability to make headway on this front and their lack of independent capacity to consider participating in *Libraria*, despite their personal support for such an initiative. For example, one editor observed that:

I have been involved in various internal debates led by [publisher]. You're right that they're interested in doing something but they don't really know what, not yet. I keep pushing. The problem with journals like ours is that we don't belong to any learned society that could take ownership of the journal. So whereas I do wholeheartedly support OA, and I push as much as I can, there are serious limitations for journals like ours in regard to becoming fully OA (editor of corporate-owned journal).

Another noted that while their journal was supportive of open access initiatives, in light of their lack of say in their publisher's business model, they didn't have the time to take a more activist stance, which is what they realized would be required. Indeed, for the two corporate-owned journals who were actively considering participation in *Libraria* at the time of writing, there was an awareness that this might potentially require a willingness to "go on strike".

¹¹ The primary exception was a corporate-owned journal, where the editor noted they had no control over their destiny but didn't see the cooperative model as an improvement to the current situation. I go on to discuss this response in more detail below.

¹² Somewhat more surprising was the deference shown by editors of two corporate-published journals owned by associations, both of whom indicated that their publisher needed to be involved in this decision.

Responses to proposed Canadian cooperative

In contrast to editors' responses to *Libraria*, where outright resistance was relatively low, seventeen Canadian editors indicated that they were unable to actively consider a cooperative scholarly publishing model. However, their responses fell into two distinct categories: dismissals that seemed to betray a lack of engagement with the model ($n=7$), and more considered reflections that typically indicated an interest in open access but a sense that the cooperative approach would not work for their journal ($n=10$). In six of the seven¹³ outright dismissals, I was told a variant of "we've just renewed our contract with our publisher so this isn't something we can presently consider." Interestingly, these responses shared much in common with the emails I received from six editors indicating a lack of power to consider the cooperative model. In most of these cases I was told variants of "this is beyond my paygrade and you'll have to speak to [the association/the publisher] about this." In some instances, these responses seemed to be dismissals in disguise, especially in cases where editors of journals owned by an association referred me to their publisher. Indeed, the number of refusals is probably much higher than the official numbers suggest, especially if we treat those who failed to respond entirely as implicit 'no's'.¹⁴

For the journals that demonstrated a more engaged consideration of the cooperative model, their primary concern related to its financial viability. Interestingly, there was no distinct pattern in responses based on the journal's publishing structure: financial concerns were raised by corporate-published journals, university-published journals and those that are independently operated. The following quotes from meeting notes and emails provides some sense of the specific types of concerns raised:

¹³ The seventh declined to give a reason for their stated lack of interest.

¹⁴ It may not be a coincidence that three of the five journals that did not respond were CALJ members, an organization that has made its opposition to the cooperative model clear. On two occasions, editors of CALJ journals responded to my email by saying that they were happy with their publication model and that I should get in touch with CALJ directly.

It is possible that a cooperative could reduce costs enough for us to balance our books but I am skeptical – even if it provided for foreign subscriptions. Foreign subs had been declining over the years as universities, especially in the US and UK, cut back on journal purchases. You are aware that many Canadian universities have been cutting back on journal purchases as well. We had to spend an increasing effort to maintain Canadian university subscribers but even so, we did lose a small number of them (corporate-published journal editor).

The editor notes that one of the issues with the cooperative model is that materials seem to focus very much on the cost savings generated by the OJS [Open Journal Systems¹⁵] platform, but this is ultimately only one sliver of the costs of publishing... However, in principle, the editor likes the cooperative model (editor of self-owned/published journal).

In meetings with four journal editors, they went over their revenues and expenses with me in some detail, pointing to areas they saw as inadequately addressed by the cooperative model. Specific sticking points were international subscriptions, individual subscriptions and aggregator income, which were also singled out by journal editors surveyed in Frei and Fleming's (2016) report on Canadian journals' perspectives on open access.

Delving further into financial concerns

As the overview of responses to the two initiatives suggest, skepticism about the financial viability of the cooperative model was the most commonly expressed concern across both sites, regardless of their publishing structure, ownership and their current financial state. Importantly, even editors of journals actively considering participation at the time of writing ($n=7$) expressed such apprehensions, which were a key barrier to journals signing a formal expression of interest. Tellingly, several editors indicated that while they were unwilling to consider participation at the present time, they wanted to be kept in the loop as the initiatives developed—and evidence of their sustainability emerged. As the aforementioned editor who raised concerns about 'cash-strapped' libraries pulling out of

¹⁵ *Open Journal Systems* is open-source software for the management and publication of academic journals created by the Public Knowledge Project.

the initiative concluded: “I have quite a conservative, risk-averse managing board that owns [journal], so regardless of what I think, I don’t see this happening until there is a more substantial trial and evidence base”.

Nevertheless, the specific kinds of financial concerns expressed by journal editors tended to differ depending on the nature of their ownership—patterns that were evident across both initiatives. In particular, while many journals were concerned about the financial sustainability of the cooperative model and its ability to cover their operating costs, editors of journals owned by societies and associations tended to focus on the impact of the cooperative model on society revenues. As the following selection of quotes from meeting notes and emails illustrates, this was evident regardless of whether they had a corporate publisher, were published by a university press or were self-published:

Our journal is owned by the [name of] Association, and subscription royalties are currently needed to support the activities of the association beyond just the publication of the journal itself. [Publisher] also manages our membership list for us, which reduces the workload of the secretary of the association (editor of journal published by university press, Canadian cooperative).

Given that most of their subscription monies come from individual subscriptions, this is a serious sticking point in terms of their ability to be based in a cooperative that uses institutional subscriptions to ‘flip’ them to open access. The editor does not think their members would be willing to continue to pay their current membership fees if they could receive the journal for free (editor of self-published journal, Canadian cooperative).

The Association signs all agreements with publishers and holds the money for subscriptions... the journal subscription/membership has kept the association afloat (corporate-published journal editor, Libraria).

The editor notes that they are a society journal and journal royalties are a primary source of revenue for the society, asking whether this has been considered in the model (editor of journal published by university press, Libraria).

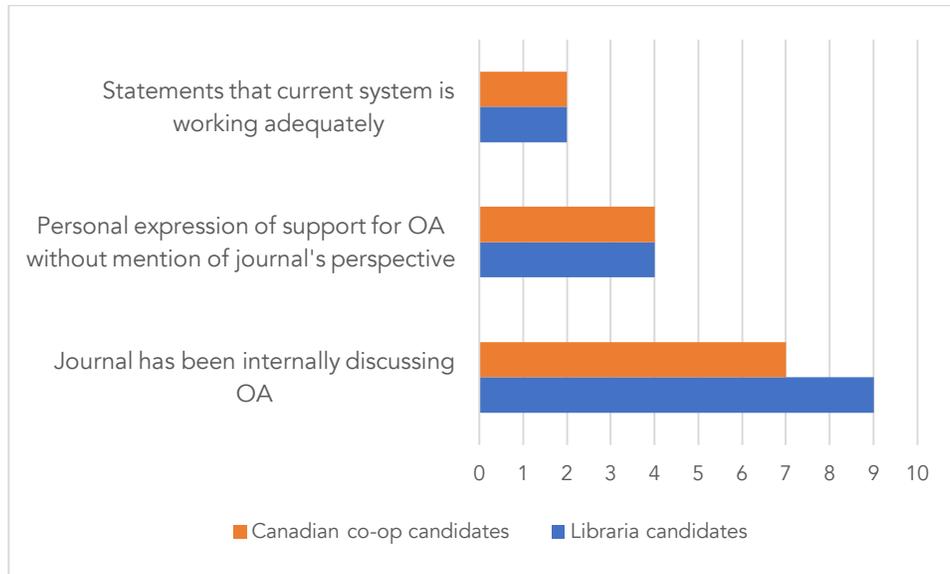


Figure 4. Mentions of open access in journal editors' responses ($n=28$)

Open access and preconceptions about what it means

Excluding the 14 non-responses, more than half the journal editors I corresponded with (59%) spontaneously discussed their perspective on open access in their responses: 15 journal editors I approached regarding the Libraria initiative and 13 I contacted about the potential Canadian cooperative. Interestingly, there were remarkable similarities in the kinds of statements they made (see figure 4). It's clear that many journals are having internal conversations about open access and see it as something they need to be actively thinking about ($n=15$). However, these conversations typically led to the conclusion that the move was not something that could be considered in the present, although it might be an option at some vaguely-defined future point, as notes from meetings with several editors suggest:

Basically, the editor thinks that in the next five years, [journal] will need to start thinking about moving in the open access direction; however, they are not ready to commit to the direction at this time. Therefore, they would like to be kept informed of 'major milestones' in the co-op, with the idea that this is something they're potentially open to long-term but not ready to move towards, because their current arrangement is working very well for them (corporate-published journal, Canadian cooperative).

The editor was recently part of a panel on open access at a [discipline-area] conference and so it's something the journal is definitely thinking about—although they really don't see how it could work financially... their financial position is currently extremely tenuous. Their only sources of revenue are

subscriptions and their membership fees, along with occasional donation drives they do amongst the society's membership (self-published journal, Canadian cooperative).

Furthermore, as I noted above, various editors expressed their personal support for open access even though they indicated that it was not something their journal could actively consider ($n=8$). However, others ($n=4$) stated that the current system was working adequately, with most pointing out that their journal already allowed individual authors to make their papers openly available via APC and green open access models.

Such interpretations of open access speak to a larger issue that was evident across both sets of responses, namely, differing conceptions of what the term means. This, in turn, seemed to create a degree of confusion about what the cooperative approach entails. Although some editors readily grasped the fundamentals of the model, others seemed to have a strongly prefigured sense of what constitutes open access that dictated their perception of the cooperative model and their willingness to engage with it. Typically, open access was described as if it was a singular model, such as when various editors shared that their journal or organization had previously looked into open access but decided that it wasn't the right move for them. They generally didn't describe the model of open access they had investigated, although there were some hints that it was mostly the prevailing author-pays model, which, as noted at the outset, is treated as synonymous with 'gold' open access. For example, the editor of a Canadian association journal published by a university press responded to my email as follows:

Well, to tell you the truth, I have serious reservations about the « golden » open access model (if that is what you have in mind), which I find valuable on a philosophical basis, but very risky on financial basis, especially for an organisation like ours [association name] which entirely depends on its members' yearly subscriptions. Over the last months, we had a pretty intensive discussion about transforming our publishing model, but I expressed my opinion that we shouldn't adopt the « golden » standard » at this point in time.

Although the editor clearly wasn't sure if I was talking about the 'golden' open access model (as evidenced by the "if this is what you had in mind" addendum), this nevertheless seemed to inflect their perception of the cooperative model.

Likewise, this view of open access was at the heart of the concerns expressed by the editor of a corporate-owned journal I approached regarding the Libraria initiative. The editor stated that they didn't see the cooperative system as an advantage over the prevailing system, explaining:

Now everyone can publish, but not everyone has access. In the future brave new world, it might be everyone can read but only the rich in elite institutions and disciplines will be able to publish and they will basically be buying their way into print. Or what am I missing that makes you committed to the new model?

In both instances, my attempts to clarify the nature of the cooperative open access model via follow-up emails did little to change the editors' mind. This was also an issue in meetings, although I was able to more successfully correct such perceptions when I encountered them in that context, as illustrated by my meeting notes with the aforementioned editor of the Canadian journal that was thinking about moving in an open access direction in the next five years:

The editor notes that [publisher] already offers the capacity for the journal to publish open access—as they are reminded each year by representatives, via their pay-to-publish structure. This brings the editor to the journal's second reason for not pursuing open access: the journal is not comfortable with the pay-to-publish approach. We talk a bit about this and I reiterate that the point of the co-op model is to move away from the APC approach.

Discussion

Journal editors' responses to the cooperative open access publishing model suggest that there are certain barriers that will need to be addressed in order for these initiatives to develop and expand. In many respects, these barriers are primarily *perceptual*, but that doesn't make them any less important to attend to from the standpoint of journals.

The prevailing thrust of the consultations was that participating in a cooperative scholarly publishing initiative was a *risky business*: an experiment with an uncertain outcome.

Although editors were being asked to consider the viability of a cooperative publishing model rather than commit to a move to converting to open access, editors seemed to want assurance that the move would not be a risky one. These concerns are entirely natural, although they are irresolvable to the extent that future outcomes cannot be predicted with any certainty. As Kevin Haggerty, the editor of the *Canadian Journal of Sociology*, notes of his initial hesitations about moving open access: "I also suspect that what I really wanted... was an *impossible guarantee* that the journal could accrue all of the benefits of going open access without also bearing the risks of such a move" (Haggerty 2008, emphasis added). As Haggerty goes on to observe, no change in publishing format is risk-free; it requires a calculated risk on the part of the journal. In his words, "I did not tie up every loose end or answer every lingering question before committing to the change, and if I had tried to do so I suspect that the change would never have occurred." While journals are understandably concerned about the financial implications of a move to open access, requiring guarantees in effect means accepting the status quo: change will not occur without a willingness on the part of journals to, in Haggerty's (2008) words, "take the plunge."

That said, the financial implications of such a move clearly need to be taken seriously. As Haggerty (2008) highlights, financial realities often trump ideological commitments, regardless of editors' personal support for open access—something that was strongly evident in my own consultations with journals. In that vein, there are clearly steps that can be taken to reassure journals, bearing in mind the fact that a 'one-size-fits-all' approach is unlikely to be convincing. Editors' responses suggest that while financial concerns are universal, they are inflected by journals' publishing structure and ownership. Thus, while self-published local journals are worried about the sustainability of a cooperative open access publishing model, their reasons typically differ from those of an international association journal, or one that is corporate-owned. Consequently, a cooperative model based on redirecting library subscriptions to journals needs to be able to concretely account for contexts where journals derive significant income from individual subscriptions, or from institutions outside academic settings, or aggregator royalties, and how these shortfalls will be covered. It also needs to be able to account for the impacts of a move to open access on society revenues and memberships. Finally, it needs to account for the differences between journals whose revenues are based primarily or exclusively on subscriptions vs. those where these comprise a small portion of overall revenues.

While a cooperative model might *appear* to involve less financial risk for the latter journals, the reality is far more complicated. When a journal is subsisting on many different sources of revenue, including grants, subscriptions, institutional support and member donations (as many Canadian journals are), and these revenues fluctuate each year, their very precarity makes a move to open access seem like an even riskier proposition. In essence, such journals have so many moving parts to worry about—so many balls they are juggling, if you will—that they are concerned about the ways one change may affect the whole. In such instances, the involvement of funders and institutions is likely to be more persuasive in alleviating editors' concerns than expressions of support from libraries. On the other hand, for journals subsisting exclusively on subscription revenues, guarantees of

long-term library support may be what is needed—after all, most contracts with corporate publishers are for at least a five-year period.

Although these concerns can be addressed in financial modelling, such modelling will only go so far. Ultimately, cooperative scholarly publishing initiatives are trust- and relationship-building exercises, which take time to develop. As Ann Okerson, the national contact person for SCOAP³, a consortium of open access particle physics journals, libraries and funders, notes:

SCOAP³ is a big idea and an innovative one, so everybody we've talked to has had to slow down and think about it... In some cases, the decision process is slow and complex; in others there is discussion about possible long-term effects, and in even more cases, we haven't had time yet to reach the right decision makers in an organization. Doing such a project the first time through is a constant learning experience on the SCOAP³ side (Wojick 2014).

Based on my consultations, I am beginning to understand that building cooperative scholarly publishing initiatives is very much a long-term process. Indeed, a signed expression of interest potentially needs to be thought of as the *outcome* of this process, rather than what *precipitates* it.

As Okerson's comments suggest, reaching the right decision makers is also a challenge, something I experienced in my consultations with editors, many of whom told me that they did not have the power to consider participating in a cooperative initiative. While some such responses had the feel of buck-passing, in many cases, especially in the context of journals owned by their publisher or by an association, editors' capacity to enact change is genuinely limited. Indeed, in several instances, the editor simply put me in contact with the journal's publisher or board of trustees, because this was decision was not something they had any control over. However, regardless of their journal's publishing structure and ownership, it's impossible to imagine a journal proceeding with a move to open access without the clear and unequivocal support of the editorial team. The instances we have of journals that have successfully moved to this model—*Cultural Anthropology* and the *Canadian Journal of Sociology* being prime examples—suggest that strong editorial support is a necessary precursor. Moreover, if a journal's editorial team were

strongly committed to such a move, publishers would clearly be forced to at least consider it.

The problem is that a change in business model requires active lobbying on the part of editors—something that is difficult for many to contemplate, given the circumstances of contemporary academic life. A growing body of work explores the rise of what has been referred to as the ‘neoliberalization’ of the academy¹⁶ (Shore and Wright 1999; Shore 2008) and the feelings of chronic “exhaustion, stress, overload, insomnia, [and] anxiety” (Gill 2010: 232) it has engendered amongst academics. Several editors explicitly mentioned that while they were supportive of the cooperative model they just didn’t have the time or energy for a more activist stance. This came across particularly strongly in the individual meetings I had with editors and editorial staff, where most discussed at length the relative invisibility of their editorial labour and the lack of institutional recognition and support they received. In such circumstances, an initiative that requires them to actively lobby an association or publisher in order to join, and, many suspected, would place greater editorial demands on them after they got on board, was too much to contemplate. This sentiment was most clearly articulated in an email I received from one exhausted editor:

Politically, I’d definitely support something that circumvents the stranglehold that big publishers have on academic publishing and the enormous subscriptions they charge, while we provide them with beautifully edited content for free... [But] To be frank, I would not have time to do this work. Last year alone, I edited 120 articles at great cost to my own writing and mental health ;). I would imagine that my fellow editors would probably feel the same (corporate-published journal, *Libraria*).

In many respects, such comments speak to the ways in which scholarly publishing is indelibly tied to other aspects of the academy, and the difficulties of trying to transform the former without addressing the conditions of the latter. As Jackson and Anderson (2014: 247) note, it’s not ultimately possible “to tackle publishing in isolation from other dramatic transformations of the present moment.” The conditions of both will need to be

¹⁶ Whelan, Walker and Moore (2013) have recently framed this transformation through the provocative metaphor of ‘zombification’.

addressed in tandem in order to develop models of open access don't merely reproduce existing researcher-library-publisher relations (see Eve 2013 for further discussion).

Unfortunately, prevailing models of open access, and the relations between researcher and publisher they are understood to entail (namely, the author-pays model) seem to be actively undermining perceptions of the cooperative model. The idea that there is only one financial model of open access, namely, the APC model, was widespread amongst editors and proved challenging to combat—to the extent that some editors appeared to reject the cooperative approach without due consideration, based on their assumptions about what it entailed. Editors' responses therefore suggest that Fuchs and Sandoval's (2013) concerns about the growing hegemony of the APC-based model of open access are warranted. It may be that education about the differences between models of open access is needed before cooperative initiatives can consider approaching journals about their potential involvement. Thus, wider publicity about 'alternative'¹⁷ open access approaches seems like a necessary first step, although relationship-building with editors, especially in face-to-face settings, will have a valuable role to play in combatting misperceptions.

¹⁷ I recognize the irony that these approaches are seen as 'alternative' when they represent the majority of open access journals.

Conclusion

Clearly, open access is on the radar of many journals in the social sciences and humanities—including in fields like anthropology and those published in national contexts like Canada, where the principle of open access has been formally endorsed by core funding agencies. This came across strongly in my consultations with journal editors, who confirmed that open access is an approach many journals are discussing and considering. Equally evident is the need for models of open access that move beyond ‘author-pays’ approaches, which many journal editors were wary of on both pragmatic and intellectual grounds.

Despite these findings, which were consistent across both settings, more work is clearly needed to convince journals of the viability of a cooperative scholarly publishing model. While this seems to be partly due to preconceptions about how business models of open access operate, there are aspects of the cooperative model itself that editors remain leery of. In particular, such a model needs to prove itself in *practice* as well as in *projection*.¹⁸ It also needs to be able to account for the varying revenue needs and sources of journals based on their publishing structure and ownership. As my consultations have shown, redirecting library subscriptions means different things to different journals. Indeed, focusing on journals’ *expenses* as well as their *revenues* may ultimately produce deeper insights into how cooperative models might best be implemented,¹⁹ and suggest the need

¹⁸ I am grateful to John Willinsky for this wording.

¹⁹ I am grateful to one of the editors I consulted for this insight.

for commitments from other kinds of stakeholders beyond the library-journal nexus, especially funders themselves.

Although the financial nuts and bolts of the cooperative model are important to address, this cannot replace the relationship building that is an essential component of developing a cooperative. To contort an old adage, cooperative scholarly publishing initiatives are not built in a day. Ultimately, a foundation of time and trust is required, so that when journals are ready to “take the plunge”, they feel they have a safety net to support them.

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Appendix A

Note: These are the general templates I used to email editors for each initiative. However, they were modified based on my prior contact (if any) with the journal editor. Also, the templates iteratively evolved during the course of my consultations based on the kind of feedback I was receiving. Thus, the later emails I sent make it clearer that the cooperative model was an alternative to both subscription models *and* author-pays models of open access.

Libraria email template

Dear [editor name],

I'm emailing you in your capacity as the editor of [journal name].

I'm a social anthropologist affiliated with the Department of Anthropology at the University of British Columbia currently undertaking a Master of Publishing at Simon Fraser University to explore alternative forms of scholarly publishing to the prevailing subscription-based models. In that capacity, I'm working with LIBRARIA—an international collective of anthropology and archaeology journals/societies (inc. *Cultural Anthropology*, *Critique of Anthropology*, *Social Anthropology*) that are exploring the viability of a cooperative model of open access publishing where the subscription fees libraries currently pay are redirected and used to 'flip' member journals to open access. It's possible you may have already heard about LIBRARIA through other avenues, but more information about the initiative is available here: <http://libraria.cc/welcome-to-libraria>.

I'm approaching you both on behalf of LIBRARIA to see if [journal name] is interested in hearing more about the initiative and potentially coming on board. If so, perhaps we could set up a Skype or phone meeting to discuss things further.

Cheers and regards,

Kirsten.

Canadian cooperative template

Dear [editor name],

I am emailing you in your role as the editor of [journal name]. I'm a social anthropologist affiliated with the Department of Anthropology at UBC and a former journal editor—a role that led to my decision to enroll in a Master of Publishing at SFU last year in order to explore new models of scholarly publishing. In that capacity, I've been hired by John Willinsky from the Public Knowledge Project at Simon Fraser University, which has developed a financial model to help move Canadian subscription journals to open access. This model, in which libraries will replace journal's subscription revenues with equivalent support for open access publishing, has been developed over the last two years as part of a MacArthur-funded study on cooperative publishing models.

I'm emailing to see if you might be interested in hearing more about the cooperative publishing model. In particular, I'd be keen to get your impressions of it and the various obstacles that inhibit your ability and willingness to participate in an initiative of this type.

To that end, would you be willing to have a half-hour Skype or phone conversation about the initiative at a time/day that's convenient for you?

Cheers and regards,

Kirsten.