

## Against the Grain

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### Stop, Look, Listen – OA Books Funding: The Next Phase

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# Stop, Look, Listen — OA Books Funding: The Next Phase

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Open Access (OA) for Books still accounts for only a very small fraction of the overall OA market, yet as I see it one that is growing pretty rapidly. In view of current market trends and the continuing evolution of what is often termed the monograph crisis the small market share is surprising and can only be explained by book publishers arriving late to the Open Access party.

From both publishers' and librarians' perspectives, the small number of books published in OA to date is somewhat surprising: calculating the publication of a book with its revenues and costs and consequently offering it Open Access based on these calculations is far less risky than implementing the same model for journals. Sure, double-dipping is an issue with books, but thanks to recent developments it would appear to be one that is far more controllable than for journals.

So why is OA for books happening so late and so slowly? It would seem that one issue has been largely overlooked when analyzing the differences between journals and books — simply because there has been no solution to hand: compared with the highly consolidated journals space, the book market is still extremely fragmented, especially within the Humanities and Social Sciences, where most of the output and hence the OA activity has taken place so far. Most current initiatives — **Luminos**, **Open Library of Humanities** and also **Knowledge Unlatched** — deal mainly with HSS content.

While the spending of a library's (STM) journals budget focuses on a handful of publishers and even less trade partners, the structure of the book market is the polar opposite, involving a myriad of publishers, vendors and business models. And this holds true even after more than a decade of large and mid-sized publishers working on journalizing their book offerings, meaning big deals and dramatically increased output volume under one specific model.

Now why should that be a problem for implementing Open Access for books? The answer is simply that a few large players make it easier to standardize a model than when a great number of players are involved — especially when they are so diverse regarding size, philosophy and/or product range. For OA books to achieve breadth and volume, a platform approach is needed — much like **AirBnB** or **Uber** — in order to create transparency amongst the services offered and to ease the complexities of transactions among a large number of players.

Since its inception in 2012, **Knowledge Unlatched (KU)** has set out to support the development of OA books, journals and initiatives through intermediation. With the

establishment of a virtual market place — this year's pledging round comprising 14 products all related to Open Access — **KU** has enjoyed strong support from both publishers and libraries worldwide. But one key component is still missing, and the team has been working on this for over two years now. Even though I don't like the term, the fact remains that what the market really needs in order to complement existing library-funded OA models is the aggregation of single title funding or book processing charges (BPCs).

If we take another look at the journals market it becomes immediately apparent that, alongside a relatively small number of really important players, another element has also helped OA to grow significantly: it is, despite all its flaws, a relatively easy, unit-based business and pricing model which can be mixed and matched in a number of ways. Books unfortunately do not allow for the same degree of simplicity, as publishers apply far more services to the diverse set of research output sent to them for publication in the form of manuscripts. Increased complexity does not however automatically equate to lack of comparability.

With **KU Open Funding**, **Knowledge Unlatched** has created a database that is easy to use by both librarians and especially researchers in order to compare publishing programs from around the world and match them with their needs based on a set of 20 categories. In cooperation with publishers, **KU** has collected dozens of criteria within each category which can easily be filtered and provide an immediate overview of which publisher's program best fits with the criteria selected, e.g., the licensing standard, program fit, language of publication and of course price point. Authors can then make their choice based on the results and contact the publisher directly from the database.

Peer review and all subsequent processes related to the preparation of the manuscript remain an activity between the author and the publisher. Not until it comes to the publication of the book does **KU** become involved again in order to handle the invoicing to the publisher and the collection of funds from the library in the respective local currency.

**KU Open Funding** builds on the experiences already made by many libraries around the world, namely that researchers publishing in Open Access for the first time usually turn initially to their librarian for information and

support. While the librarian can certainly advise the researcher in a personal conversation — as is common practice just now — he or she can also invite the researcher to the **KU** Open

Funding database to allow them to search for themselves. Researchers can also create a personal account in the database and will be asked to link themselves to their research institution in order to simplify steps later in the process.

Within **KU Open Funding** the researcher is free to link to the publisher of choice for his or her monograph publication and can do so with as many publishers as desired. The assumption behind this is that many publishers already offer OA

options, but that only few authors know much about the specifics.

In order to handle a significant increase in Open Access books funded by institutions, libraries will be in need of logistical support, and this is the second core functionality of the new database. Thanks to **KU Open Funding**, libraries can monitor requests of their researchers to publishers and can see which monographs they have agreed to fund and in which stage of publication these currently are. This allows for easy budget control and reporting within the institution.

In the opinion of many observers Open Access books face very different challenges than the dominant journals format. There is some truth in this, but at the same time it is very much a consequence of the different market structures for journals and books — and by no means written in stone. In order to make Open Access attractive for all academics, easy-to-use and scalable business models must be available for both journals and books. Transparent models and marketplaces, where both researchers and librarians can find such services, are much needed in the book space, and **KU Open Funding** attempts to address this need. Already in the implementation phase with publishers, initial experience has highlighted how critical it is to strike the balance between standardization of a young and hence fast-developing field and the necessity to cater for different business models for publishers. As one of the first digitally-born disciplines Open Access is ideally suited to support this quest with a powerful, yet open database which invites participation by all publishers. And at the same time it might yet help to develop a particular quality in academic publishing, which is by no means a given at the current time — choice to authors. 🍷

