Open access at a crossroads: library publishing and bibliodiversity

The open access movement has gained momentum since the Budapest Open Access Initiative (BOAI) first launched twenty years ago. Notably, there has been a drastic increase in the number of open access articles. Concerns have been raised about equality and diversity issues, however, for researchers without an affiliation (e.g. independent, unemployed and retired researchers) and researchers on the 'scientific periphery' who are excluded from the gold open access model. This article argues that the gold open access model is destructive to the knowledge production ecosystem by addressing the importance of bibliodiversity and the ways in which library publishing can contribute to sustainable and equitable knowledge production.

Keywords
bibliodiversity; institutional repositories; library publishing; open access

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Bibliodiversity

'Bibliodiversity is a complex, self-sustaining system of storytelling, writing, publishing and the other kinds of production of oral and written literature. The writers and producers are comparable to the inhabitants of an ecosystem. Bibliodiversity contributes to a thriving life of culture and a healthy eco-social system'.[1]

'Without bibliodiversity, we risk overlooking important scientific discoveries and innovations that may save humanity one day'

Bibliodiversity is an important concern for knowledge production for its emphasis on the critical diversity of authors and scholarly works representing cultures, languages, genres and all kinds of scholarly and scientific endeavours. Without bibliodiversity, we risk overlooking important scientific discoveries and innovations that may save humanity one day. Without bibliodiversity, we are restricting our imaginations and limiting ourselves to the understanding constructed by a minority of prestigious publications and publishers. For instance, consider the mRNA vaccines which have been instrumental in combating the Covid-19 pandemic. Katalina Karikó's work on mRNA, now recognized as a game-changer, was rejected for publication in *Science* and *Nature*. In fact, Dr Karikó's academic career was not one of a high-flying scientist: with little success in grant funding and publications, she was demoted by the University of Pennsylvania and eventually

moved to industry. Dr David Langer, who has worked with Dr Karikó, commented, 'When your idea is against the conventional wisdom that makes sense to the star chamber, it is very hard to break out'.[2]

Bibliodiversity calls for an inclusive and diverse scholarly communication landscape. The predominance of a few commercial publishers and the gold open access model, however, is diametrically opposed to bibliodiversity and counters the core values of the open access movement. This article examines the current open access movement at a crossroads, in particular the fact that the gold open access model is destructive to bibliodiversity, followed by a discussion of the ways by which library publishing can contribute to sustainable and equitable knowledge production.

'the gold open access model is destructive to bibliodiversity'

Open access at a crossroads

Since the publication of the Budapest Open Access Initiative (BOAI) (Note 1), the number of open access articles has increased drastically over the last two decades (Note 2). Yet, the growth has not been celebrated as a success. For many, the predominance of commercial publishers and gold open access articles[3] does not bode well for a truly open access movement because, firstly, transformative agreements do not resolve the serial crisis concerning the limits and allocation of library budgets. In reality, these agreements consolidate the market share of some commercial publishers, while small publishers, including scholar-led and learned society publications, can become unviable as they lose subscriptions due to academic libraries prioritizing open access publications in response to funding mandates. Small and local publishers are sometimes described as 'collateral damage' in the open access movement.

Secondly, access to scholarly literature is largely contingent on the availability of a commercial research infrastructure – not the 'public internet' as envisaged in the BOAI. The intellectual property rights of manuscripts can still be retained by commercial publishers, meaning that scholarly works may not be downloaded, copied or distributed freely. Meanwhile, some publishers are expanding their influence on knowledge production by broadening the scope of their products in the entire research life cycle, while using digital tracking and spyware to collect data about research activities.[4] Scholarly publishing is largely market-driven rather than scholar-led.

'Scholarly publishing is largely market-driven rather than scholar-led'

Thirdly, the gold open access model entails that authors without funding cannot make their work openly accessible, including authors who are independent, retired, on precarious contracts, or are affiliated with research institutions that do not have transformative agreements in place. A recent study shows that nearly 70% of DOAJ (Directory of Open Access Journals) articles were published in gold open access journals in 2020, but that authors from low-income countries only accounted for just over 1% of these articles.[5] The gold open access model disadvantages researchers outside of high-income countries, whilst privileging those employed in prestigious institutions, especially if associated with a STEM (science, technology, engineering and mathematics) discipline.[6]

Gold open access: driving the destruction of bibliodiversity

The gold open access model can be detrimental to bibliodiversity, that is, the critical diversity of authors and scholarly works, due to the dominance of Western-centric indexing services as arbitrators of legitimate knowledge[7] combined with the narrow definition of research excellence and quality propounded by traditional commercial publishers and established university presses. The introduction of article processing charges (APCs) and book processing charges (BPCs) privileges research and publications by researchers in high-income and Western countries and hence perpetuates the monoculture of knowledge production. Correspondingly, studies have shown that editorial and peer review processes in publications, as well as grant applications, can be biased towards 'hot' topics and reserved

about methodologies and methods.[8] Traditional prestigious publications and publishers, the beneficiaries of the gold open access model, are less likely to take risks and publish 'cold' topics or innovative methods because these articles may not attract attention and citations. Emerging, fringe and seemingly 'cold' topics are then driven to the sidelines. Will non-mainstream publications survive through the cold winter of the gold phase of the open access movement with diminishing bibliodiversity?

The dominance of gold open access journals is a hindrance to multilingualism in scholarly communication because researchers are discouraged from publishing in local languages or local journals, especially when research systems prioritize publications in high-impact journals – the majority of which are English-language journals indexed on Scopus or Web of Science. The Helsinki Initiative on Multilingualism in Scholarly Communication[9] is a call for language diversity in knowledge production and scholarly communication. However, such initiatives can be undermined by the gold open access model in which local publications are often overshadowed by open access publications afforded by APCs or BPCs.

'The dominance of gold open access journals is a hindrance to multilingualism in scholarly communication'

Furthermore, an unintended consequence of the gold open access model is that researchers who cannot afford APCs or BPCs may be deemed less impactful because their works are marginalized or buried, resulting in epistemic injustice in knowledge production.[10] The gold open access model exacerbates epistemic injustice because research in privileged institutions and countries is perceived as more authoritative and legitimate, while local knowledge and research by marginalized researchers and indigenous communities are less likely to be published, less read and may be deemed lesser quality.

The green route via institutional repository

The green open access model has somehow been sidelined in the open access movement. This may be due to the perception that making the version of record openly available is the ultimate goal of open access. However, this may be an oversight as green open access with no embargo period, especially with the facilitation of institutional repositories, can support bibliodiversity and sustainable knowledge production and scholarly communication.

'The disappearance of small publishers is dangerous for the ecosystems of knowledge production'

The green open access model can also support smaller publishers. Learned societies and small publishers cannot easily switch to an open infrastructure due to the lack of capital, resources and expertise. Rather, with the support of a stable subscription fee and membership income, they can allow green open access with no embargo period. Institutional repositories can play an important role in preserving and disseminating the publications, while the Subscribe to Open (S2O) model can be adopted to make the version of record publicly accessible. Without the green open access option, these publishers may struggle to survive. The disappearance of small publishers is dangerous for the ecosystems of knowledge production because they often serve as the breeding ground for new ideas and approaches, as well as spaces for less dogmatic, less conservative and less conventional research areas and 'cold' topics. Their publications also cater for readers of special interests in emerging fields and support works of local interest.

To a certain extent, supporting small publishers is like supporting your local bookstores rather than the monopolistic online retail store. The green open access option is viable for small publishers, and institutional repositories provide safe spaces for preservation and persistent identifiers for dissemination and distribution. The green open access model is also important for preserving bibliodiversity – for the very fact that scholar-led publications tend to allow for experimental ideas and marginalized voices without the fear of not attracting citations or losing prestige. Why the green open access model is not prioritized or pursued for all its benefits is an interesting question.

Library publishing

Library publishing is defined by the Library Publishing Coalition as 'the set of activities led by college and university libraries to support the creation, dissemination, and curation of scholarly, creative, and/or educational works' and characterized by 'a preference for open access dissemination and willingness to embrace informal and experimental forms of scholarly communication and to challenge the status quo'.[11] In other words, library publishing is an umbrella term that encompasses many forms of publishing, including journals, books, textbooks and open educational resources.[12]

Institutional repositories and data archives are one form of 'publishing' that is closest to the traditional functions of an academic library: they preserve and disseminate research outputs, but they do not produce new content. They play a key role in supporting green open access. Library publishers use a range of open source and proprietary publishing platforms such as open journal systems (OJS), Janeway, Manifold and Digital Commons to publish books, textbooks and journals on an open access basis. Educopia's Next Generation Library Publishing Project (NGLP) is currently researching 'community governed, open solutions that rival best-of-breed commercial tools and advance scholarly communication in important ways'.[13] Furthermore, library publishing supports bibliodiversity by preserving and disseminating the scholarly output of their communities and by filling gaps in the current scholarly publishing system.[14]

Library publishing programmes are expanding rapidly across the world, underpinned by expert communities of practice which are supported by a range of organizations such as the Library Publishing Coalition. The International Federation of Library Association's (IFLA) Library Publishing Special Interest Group (SIG) and Educopia have produced key resources on values,[15] workflows,[16] maps and directories.[17] More recently, the Library Association of Ireland has established a Library Publishing Group which is a strategic affiliate of both the Library Publishing Coalition and IFLA's Library Publishing SIG. Examples of library publishing programmes include TU Dublin (Technological University Dublin) and the University of Pittsburgh.[18] There are currently 145 academic and research library publishing programmes listed in the Library Publishing Coalition's Library Publishing Directory (2022). It is important to note that the majority of library-published books and journals are indexed on the DOAJ and DOAB (Directory of Open Access Books) platforms respectively, which have stringent indexing requirements in relation to peer review, ethics and governance. Library-published journals are also aligned with the values of equality, diversity and inclusion, and many also support the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).[19]

Library publishing for bibliodiversity in the knowledge production ecosystem

Traditional commercial publishers and university presses tend to specialize in certain subject areas for their targeted markets and distribution networks.[20] It is understandable that commercial publishers aim to make profits. Naturally, they publish journals and monographs that sell or attract subscriptions and citations. This means that the works of established researchers and hot topics are more likely to be accepted, while works that are experimental can be left out. On the contrary, smaller, non-profit and/or library publishers are more likely to take on controversial topics and perspectives, as well as emerging scholars who may be sidelined due to unconscious biases based on their affiliations and personal characteristics such as, for example, ethnicity, race, gender identity, sex and country of origin. The scholar-led journal, *African Health Sciences*, published by the African Health Journals Partnership Project that is funded by the US National Institutes of Health, for example, was established to publish and disseminate health research of specific interest to their local communities that is often not deemed important by prestigious journals published in Western countries. (Note 3) In the realm of library publishing, The University of Cape Town is a library-based publisher of open monographs and textbooks,[21] one of four academic libraries that offer the hosting of open access journals.[22]

Library publishing plays an important role in maintaining bibliodiversity by providing venues for research and scholarship overlooked by traditional publishers, especially works in the humanities and humanistic social sciences. These works are essential for a healthy ecosystem of knowledge production as they counter the monoculture fostered by traditional publishers. The lack of scholar-led and library publishing venues can stifle creativity and lead to a decline in bibliodiversity in our research diet. The diamond open access model favoured by library publishers is the most desired in the open access movement. The new Action Plan for Open Access, published in 2022 by Science Europe, adds further impetus to this.[23]

'The lack of scholar-led and library publishing venues can stifle creativity and lead to a decline in bibliodiversity'

Challenges of library publishing

In practice, library publishing faces challenges in funding, scale and training. Library publishing requires funding for its operations, including infrastructure, training, legal and marketing support. However, as Demmy Verbeke discussed at the UKSG Conference in 2022,[24] current expenses on subscriptions and transformative agreements can be repurposed to develop a scholar-led publishing and research infrastructure. With Laura Mesotten, he also reported the development of a publishing programme and the Leuven University Press with less than 1% of the library budget. Switching to library publishing or scholar-led publishing can possibly save money in the long run. A 2.5% commitment has been called for to facilitate the transition to common digital infrastructure[25] in academic libraries in the United States to foster collective action on open access, including the hosting of institutional repositories and journals.

The scale and scalability of library publishing for any institution will be subject to the resources available, as well as their mission and values. When the objective of library publishing is to support bibliodiversity – that is, to publish materials that would have been left out by mainstream publishers – it is not necessary for library publishing to scale. In fact, 'scaling small' can be a way to establish a trusting relationship with contributors.[26] And whilst most professional librarians do not have experience in publishing, academic modules in scholarly communication, open scholarship and in library publishing can fill in the gap by introducing relevant topics including editorial strategy, peer review, production workflows, copyright, discoverability, sustainability, accessibility and preservation.[27]

'The most significant challenge many open access alternatives, including library publishing, face … is acceptance and recognition by research assessments'

The most significant challenge many open access alternatives, including library publishing, face, however, is acceptance and recognition by research assessments. Currently, the criteria of research assessments over-emphasize the prestige of journals or publishers: researchers are deterred from publishing in channels that are not indexed on Scopus or similar services. There are also problems with credibility and trust and, in particular, perception issues related to predatory and vanity publishing.[28] Consequently, researchers are reluctant to publish their work in new online journals or open monographs because of their doubts about the editorial, peer review and production processes, on the one hand, and the research assessment criteria for recruitment, tenure and promotion, on the other. These tensions are of utmost concern for the development of open research in achieving bibliodiversity.

'Bibliodiversity is important for access and preservation of knowledge'

Conclusions

Bibliodiversity is important for access and preservation of knowledge. The knowledge production ecosystem needs publications of critical and diverse contributions that may not be suited for traditional, especially commercial, publishers. As the limitations and potential damages of the gold open access model have become apparent, the next phase of the open access movement demands a structural change in the academic publishing and scholarly communication landscape. Recommendations have been made to develop

collective open publishing platforms;[29] there are also successful developments of open research infrastructure in Africa and Latin America. While these developments are essential to counter the dominance of big commercial publishers, this article argues that library publishing can also play an important role in maintaining the bibliodiversity of the knowledge production ecosystem.

Notes

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Abbreviations and Acronyms
A list of the abbreviations and acronyms used in this and other *Insights* articles can be accessed here – click on the URL below and then select the 'full list of industry A&As' link: http://www.uksg.org/publications#aa.

Competing Interests
The authors have declared no competing interests.

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