THE SCHOLAR-LED.NETWORK-MANIFESTO

Open access scholarly publishing — led by the scholarly community

SCHOLAR-LED ACTORS

The scholar-led.network brings together representatives from a variety of independent, scholar-led Diamond OA publishing initiatives, focusing on journals, books, and online publications (e.g. blogs) in German-speaking countries.

Our vision is framed by the following key principles:

- We operate on a not-for-profit basis and are committed to non-commercial activities in the spirit of Fair Open Access Alliance (FOAA).

- We value open modes of cooperation, collaboration and sharing and thus practice community-led collaboration.

- We advocate for bibliodiversity in scholarly communications, while being rooted predominantly in the Humanities and Social Sciences.

- We seek to enact values and principles of openness as a non-profit-oriented, inclusionary, solidarity-based, sustainable practice.

Our goal is to represent the interests of scholar-led initiatives from German-speaking countries. We work to increase the visibility of diverse independent scholar-led publishing initiatives.

We do Open Access (OA): We realise an Open Access transformation in our respective fields of research, we organise publication processes and quality assurance procedures, and act as multipliers for the idea of fair open access in our respective research communities.

A NEW JOURNAL CRISIS

The importance of Open Access is rapidly gaining traction. National and international research funding organisations mandate and promote OA for their funded publications. Major publishers have also recognised its potential, having turned OA into an increasingly important element of their business models. Astronomical price tags for journal subscriptions are now being replaced by exorbitantly high author-facing OA publication fees (APCs/BPCs). This, in turn, exacerbates existing inequalities while simultaneously increasing exclusions and competition, while strengthening the oligopoly of a handful of large commercial publishers.

Scholar-led initiatives that do not rely on these kinds of exclusionary author-facing publication fees can make the transition to Open Access fairer, while also fostering bibliodiversity. However, the situation of scholar-led projects – both in journal and book publishing – is characterised by (1) insufficient funding, (2) a lack of strategic direction, and (3) deficits in responsibility across disciplines and institutions.

Scholar-led journals and book publications are structurally disadvantaged and inadequately funded despite their important position in the OA ecosystem. Existing funding options in German-speaking countries (mostly through third-party funds and subsidies) are selective, and generally linked to project-based endeavours. On the other hand, long-term cooperative and consortial models often focus on an OA transformation (from toll-based to open access) which excludes scholar-led Diamond OA (models not financed via author-based publication fees). This becomes imminently clear from the example of Projekt DEAL, which effectively favours large publishers and expands their hegemony within Germany's national OA system.

Despite ambitious regional, national and organisational OA quotas, there has been a lack of overarching strategic direction or framework for the sustainable operation of scholar-led Diamond OA that covers all aspects of research production and dissemination. This effectively leads to the continued search for individual solutions that remain decentralised, cost-intensive, project-dependent, and short-lived. Overall, we see a lack of networking and unproductive fragmentation of the publication landscape.

Who advocates for the interests of independent OA? Libraries, academic societies and research institutions tend to feel ill-positioned to take responsibility for advocating on behalf of wider collaboration within the scholar-led Diamond OA landscape beyond their own primary fields of research. Interdisciplinarity of publication projects and innovativeness of publication formats further complicate this lack of sense of responsibility. Furthermore, questions of governance of publication projects such as the relationships between journals, research and infrastructure institutions are often inadequately defined. As a result, scholar-led publication projects are usually funded on a short-term, case-by-case basis, which reduces their longer-term independence and sustainability, which ultimately also impacts their quality.

ADVOCATING FOR FAIR, SUSTAINABLE AND PLURALISTIC PUBLISHING

Scholar-led OA projects are a central component of a global, collaborative and pluralistic publication ecosystem that we consider the responsibility of academic communities around the globe. To strengthen this ecosystem in German-speaking academia, we call on all scholars, research institutions, libraries, research funders, scholarly societies and all parts of the academic community to work together. This work aims towards a more strategically aligned allocation of existing as well as new financial means in a targeted manner so that this area receives the long-term support it deserves.

To achieve strategically aligned allocation of finances, we see a particular need for action in the following fields:

1. NETWORKING, COLLABORATION AND STRATEGIC FRAMEWORKS

We want to work together to find solutions and to develop structures to realise and sustainably establish the multitude of digital and independent publication formats supported by the academic community. To achieve this, we advocate to establish truly open, community-owned socio-technical infrastructures (Star, 1996). This includes supporting and strengthening collectively usable open-source publication systems such as Open Journal Systems (OJS), while also calling for investment to secure and strengthen the employment situation of those developing, maintaining, and providing support for these systems.

With these calls to action, we want to further stimulate a debate on the current and future role of scholar-led Open Access in the German-speaking countries, in which we can work with stakeholders on an agreement of how shared responsibility for this area should be organised in the future.

We are committed to investing not only in the initial development of hosting services and innovative publication tools and services (Adema et al., 2022) that usually only receive short-term financial support via (consecutive) project structures. We strongly believe the continuing operation of these services through public funding should also be promoted to ensure long-term sustainability. In this context, it is equally important to address how policies and responsibilities with regards to funding can be (re-)organised in a meaningful way, while also fostering more collaborative networking between existing initiatives.

2. SUSTAINABLE FINANCING

As mentioned in the point above on re-organizing funding policies so that long-term collaborative networking is possible, we believe there is a fundamental need for sustainable financing structures for Diamond OA models. We provide expertise in this area and advocate for a distancing from funding models that focus primarily on author-facing fees (APC - and BPC-based models). Instead, we aim to raise awareness for a redistribution of

existing funds towards the financing of Fair OA publications in order to directly support scholars and their publication projects. Consortial not-for-profit approaches such as the library consortium model implemented by the Open Library of Humanities (OLH, 2019) or the models under development in the COPIM project COPIM-Projekt (Gerakopoulou, Penier & Deville, 2021; Eve, 2021; Snyder, Corazza & Deville, 2022).

In this respect, we explicitly support the recommendations of the [Diamond OA study](#), which calls for journals to:

„Collaborate on a funding strategy for OA diamond, Consistently finance the operations of OA diamond journals, Invest in the future of OA diamond." (p.8)

3.   PROMOTION OF BIBLIODIVERSITY

In line with, and building on, the Jussieu Call, we are committed to promoting bibliodiversity in academia.

Shaping quality assurance according to current needs: Scientific publications ought to meet good scientific standards. Particularly in the context of digital publication systems for which scholarly communities are responsible, established forms of research evaluation such as metrics (e.g. via impact factor) and a very narrow understanding of peer review often reach their limits, especially with regards to new digital formats. Declarations and agreements such as DORA (Declaration on Research Assessment) and the very recent ScienceEurope/ EUA [Agreement on Reforming Research Assessment](#) provide promising perspectives to finding solutions for this complex issue. Taking these initiatives as a starting point, we deem it necessary to develop further parameters that account for new publication possibilities and formats and diverse publishing cultures across disciplines, while also guaranteeing high scientific quality standards.

Bibliodiversity: The publication system is still characterised by linguistic and socio-economic homogeneity. To promote bibliodiversity, we deem it important to broaden the scope towards publications written in languages other than English, and to foster wider-spread support for pluri- and multilingualism in scholarly communications. We also call for the promotion of diversity in more general terms in knowledge production and reception, which we conceive as extending towards new forms and technical formats of publication (e.g., thinking output beyond the ´classic´ PDF format, accounting for experimental & multimodal publishing practices, novel ways to foster collaboration, etc.).

Accessibility: In line with the [Budapest](#) and [Berlin Declarations](#) on Open Access as well as with the [Bethesda Statement](#), it is our view that Open Access should not only focus on accessibility in the narrow sense of "free availability." It is our view that accessibility should also aim at removing barriers so that scholarly output can be accessed by all people, whatever their hardware, software, language, location, or ability. This can be achieved by more centrally focusing on an implementation of the [W3C Web Content Accessibility Guidelines](#) for digital content, for example, by providing open and machine-readable file formats. It also includes discoverability by

integrating modern, open metadata standards into the publication process and enabling the open re-use of research publications (reuse, remix).

Research as a public good: We wholeheartedly support the demand to make publicly funded research results openly and freely accessible to the public. With regard to tools and platforms, it is important to support the further development of open-source software in order to make the approach "public money - public good" (Wikimedia) a reality in publicly funded research and publication.

OUR ASPIRATION

We have expertise and ideas! Together with the scholarly community and stakeholders in academic policy, funding organisations, university administrations and libraries, we want to work towards improving the environment for scholar-led initiatives in German-speaking countries.

To this end, we want to initiate a dialogue with funders, policy stakeholders, and university administrations, foster exchange and networking within the scholar-led community, and, together with university libraries, develop solutions to the existing challenges that open publishing is facing with regards to OA infrastructure, its technical implementation, as well as quality standards, editing and layout.

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