

Austrian Transition to Open Access (AT2OA)

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Abstract:

In 2016 the expert group called “Open Access Network Austria” (OANA) published 16 recommendations on how Austria should support a transition to open access (OA). The overarching recommendation is that “By 2025, a large part of all scholarly publication activity in Austria should be Open Access. In other words, the final versions of most scholarly publications (in particular all refereed journal articles and conference proceedings) resulting from the support of public resources must be freely accessible on the Internet without delay (Gold Open Access).”

These recommendations generated discussions across the sector and questions were raised over costs. In order to address these questions and to explore wider implications, the Austrian university libraries submitted a joint application to the Ministry of Science, Research & Economics and managed to secure funding for a project entitled “Austrian Transition to Open Access” (AT2OA).

The goal of the AT2OA project, launched in 2017, is to support the large-scale transformation of scholarly publications from Closed to OA, and to implement measures supporting this initiative. The project aims to increase Austria’s OA publication output by

restructuring license agreements with publishers and by providing targeted support for researchers' publication activities. It will also establish new venues for OA publishing.

Currently there are seven transition agreements (see <https://konsortien.at/openaccess-en.asp>) in place within the framework of the Austrian Academic Library Consortium (KEMÖ).

During the talk we will discuss lessons learned and present the first results of our analyses.

Keywords: Open Access, Transition, Gold Open Access, Open Access Agreements, Offsetting Deals, Alternative Open Access Publishing Business Models, Open Science Infrastructures and Services (OSIS)

1 INTRODUCTION

Austria has been at the forefront of the open access (OA) movement in Europe, and its institutions have taken significant steps towards making the country's research output available to anyone with internet access. The drive for change has been led by major funding bodies, such as the Austrian Science Fund (FWF)¹ and members and staff of the Austrian Academic Library Consortium (KEMÖ)², which brings together the country's higher education and research institutions and negotiates licences on behalf of its members. The consortium consists of 18 public and 8 private universities, 18 universities of applied sciences and 14 other institutions.

Within this context, in 2015 the Open Access Network Austria (OANA) published an influential strategy paper which recommended that "by 2025, a large part of all scholarly publication activity in Austria should be Open Access"³. This recommendation led to the launch of a sector-wide project, entitled "Austrian Transition to Open Access" (AT2OA)⁴. The goal of this project is to support the large-scale transformation of scholarly publications from Closed to OA, and to implement measures supporting this initiative. The project aims to increase Austria's OA publication output by restructuring license agreements with publishers and by providing targeted support for researchers' publication activities. It will also establish new venues for OA publishing. The project consists of four subprojects, which look at the following topics: (1) Impact analysis of the transition to OA, (2) Funding for transitional OA business models, (3) Publication funds and (4) Support for OA publications and alternative OA publication models.

Networking and knowledge transfer activities are also taking place throughout the duration of the project. The project runs from 1st of January 2017 to 31st of December 2020.

This report focuses on the second and the fourth subprojects; however, all sections will be presented briefly below to put the report into context.

As part of the first subproject, we examine if Austria can achieve a complete transformation from the existing subscription (Closed Access) model to OA without additional costs. In addition, we look at how the transition to OA may impact information resources budgets, and which institutions would face additional costs, or a reduction in expenditure, as a result of a complete transition to OA in comparison to the current licensing model. Furthermore, a concept for the monitoring of OA publication outputs based on international good practice models is currently being developed.

In the second subproject the consortium OA agreements negotiated within the KEMÖ framework will be evaluated. In recent years the focus has been put on concluding agreements with publishers where the transition from the subscription model to OA is as close to cost-neutral as possible. Thus far, the following three models have either been tested or developed:

- Offsetting Deals
- Read & Publish Deals
- “Switch” model

It is envisaged that such transformative agreements will be supported by central means, taking into consideration the findings of the analysis of subproject 1. Building on experience gleaned from pilot projects, the existing models will be evaluated during the course of the project. The sustainability of these agreements will be given particular attention in the analysis.

The third subproject will promote the establishment and expansion of local OA publication funds and provide financial support. These funds are necessary for the implementation of OA policies and for the targeted support of OA publications since they have a consolidating role at the institutions and can help facilitate the transformation process towards OA. The overall aim is to ensure the sustainability of these funds, to increase transparency, and to strategically harmonize key aspects of the funding guidelines.

The fourth subproject investigates ways to counterbalance the market dominance of publishers, and plans to initiate alternative publication models at the universities. Support will be provided for such initiatives. These may take various forms, such as:

- Stimulus for university- and Austria-wide OA initiatives by university presses and publishing houses associated with universities
- Promotion of OA monographs and their quality control
- Supporting the launch of new OA journals by University Presses, or the conversion of existing ones
- Support for alternative and innovative OA publication models and repositories
- Financial support for the universities’ activities related to the promotion of non-commercial Open Science infrastructures and services (OSIS), like DOAJ⁵, OLH⁶, ArXiv⁷.

2 TRANSITION TO OPEN ACCESS

As mentioned above, this presentation will focus on funding transitional OA business models, where Austria, together with countries such as the Netherlands and the UK, has taken on a leading role in negotiating new types of agreements.

While Ralf Schimmer et al.’s white paper⁸ demonstrated that there is sufficient money available in the overall research publishing system to enable a sustainable transformation, the change at the level of the individual institutions may trigger financial difficulties. Funding from the AT2OA project should alleviate some of these financial concerns and make new contracts possible.

Thus far two types of transitional contracts have been negotiated: “Offsetting deals” and “Read and Publish deals”. In addition, the SCOAP3⁹ project has succeeded in implementing a global “switch” from closed access to OA in the field of high energy physics but as these types of deals are only relevant for some niche areas they won’t be discussed in detail.

2.1 Offsetting deals

These agreements combine subscription fees and the costs of OA publishing. In most cases, the hybrid OA publication costs (APCs) are deducted from the subscription fees. However, the opposite scenario exists as well, where the payment of the subscription fees leads to a significant reduction in the APCs. Regardless of the method of offsetting, the standard APC has to be reduced by at least 80%.

The first contract in the world to combine OA and subscription fee was an agreement between the Austrian consortium and the Institute of Physics (IOP)¹⁰ in 2014. The background to this agreement is that KEMÖ, together with the FWF, started discussions with IOP to explore how the APC payments the FWF had been making on behalf of its grant holders in hybrid journals could influence future agreements. As a result of these discussions, IOP agreed to deduct the amounts paid for APCs by FWF during the previous year from the following year's subscription fees.

These types of agreements aim to reduce the overall costs on a local level and do not aim to achieve global reductions where countries investing in OA receive only minimal discounts. Since then the contract has been renewed and extended to include APCs paid by individual institutions. A similar contract has been in place with Taylor & Francis since 2015¹¹. Furthermore, Sage offers a highly discounted APC to authors affiliated with institutions participating in a consortium agreement, which has been in place since 2016.

The figure below illustrates the relationship between APCs and subscriptions fees paid to a publisher under various offsetting scenarios.

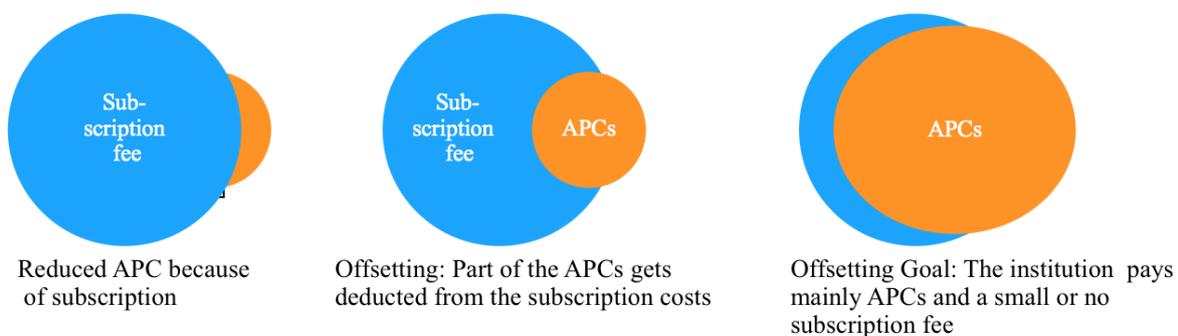


Figure 1: Offsetting models

2.1.1 Conclusions about “Offsetting”

Offsetting agreements take into account existing payments made by participating institutions. Therefore one positive aspect is that only very limited additional money is required to implement these deals. On the other hand, the institution and/or the authors still must be prepared to pay an APC to a hybrid publisher. We maintain that more has to be done by publishers to avoid double dipping. Another concern is that the percentage of OA articles increases rather slowly. Reasons for this are diverse, however, according to our experience, it may stem from the fact that some publishers expect authors to know that their institution has a transitional agreement with the publisher. Unfortunately, authors are more often than not unaware of these arrangements or they simply forget about them. Additionally, authors may have reservations about “author pays” models or about hybrid OA in general. Even more so if they are unaware of the fact that these kinds of deals avoid double dipping to a great extent.

2.2 Read and Publish Agreements

Read and publish’ agreements share some common features, for example a single fee is negotiated with a publisher to access subscription journals (usually the entire journal portfolio), as well as publishing certain types of articles OA without additional costs to authors. As a result, the publishing component and subscription fees may be negotiated together to support the transformation to OA. It should be noted that these kind of deals should only be concluded as pilots, for a limited time, more precisely for the duration of the transition period.

Their advantage is that they have a better rate of uptake by authors, given that from their perspective, publishing is free of charge. At the same time, costs are less transparent and they are most of the times not eligible for reimbursement by funding agencies. Furthermore, the publisher's workflows have different levels of complexity¹². Some examples:

2.3 Emerald¹³

There is a national consortium agreement in place (2017–2019), offering a set number of OA vouchers that can be used by corresponding authors affiliated with any research institution in Austria to publish original research articles.

Workflow: Authors need to check their institution's status and indicate their eligibility at the submission stage. If their article is accepted, they are asked if they want to make their work available under a Creative Commons license. There is no input from the research institution or the consortium in the process. Emerald keeps a record of the number of vouchers used and reports to the Austrian Academic Library Consortium head office on a quarterly basis.

2.4 Springer Compact¹⁴

The consortium is entitled to a set number of OA articles in Springer's Open Choice journals, which are allocated on a first-come, first-served basis to corresponding authors at participating institutions. The default is to publish eligible articles OA; however, authors can opt out and put their article behind a paywall. Original Papers, Review Papers, Brief Communications, and Continuing Education papers all qualify for OA publication under this scheme.

2.5 Wiley¹⁵

Corresponding authors affiliated with the research institution can publish accepted research and review papers OA as part of a consortium agreement at no additional cost to authors.

2.5.1 Conclusions about the "Read and Publish" model

Given that the costs of OA publishing are paid in advance together with the subscription or reading fees, authors can more easily engage with this model and therefore the share of OA articles is higher than what we usually see with offsetting agreements. Nevertheless, authors' participation rate depends a great deal on the workflows implemented by the publishers. If authors receive confusing information during the submission process it will have a direct impact on the success of otherwise innovative agreements and the uptake will remain low.

The advantage for libraries is that the publishing and subscription costs are known for the duration of the agreement. However, the pricing is still often based on historic subscriptions and a transition to a new pricing model based on publication output cannot be easily achieved for a number of reasons. On the one hand, some publishers may be reluctant to move to such a model due to the uncertainties it may bring. On the other hand, research intensive institutions could easily end up having to pay considerably more in a truly pay-as-you publish model than what their current subscription fees would cover.

3 THE ROLE OF GOLD OA PUBLISHERS

While so far we have only looked at agreements where there is a subscription element included, the project also acknowledges the importance of fully OA publishers such as PLOS, Hindawi or Frontiers. Each university participating in the AT2OA project received funding to establish a publication fund to support publishing in fully OA journals. There is an ongoing discussion around funding criteria and their most suitable application in participating institutions. We believe that journals from fully OA publishers and other alternative funding models should play an important role in any transition strategy to avoid further market concentration.

4 HOW TO ACHIEVE THE TRANSITION

Without a doubt, the biggest question we are facing is *how* to achieve the transition to OA in Austria. The project partners are well aware of the fact that Austria's share of scholarly publications is not the largest in the world. This, however, does not hold us back from continuing with our endeavors. We see this project as part of the international efforts working towards transition as described in the OA2020 initiative¹⁶. Only when more and more libraries in the world negotiate OA as part of their publishing deals can the transition really take off. Nevertheless, the transformation is already happening, albeit at a slow pace. As the IST Austria publication profile demonstrates in the figure below, the non-OA output is losing ground to various forms of OA:

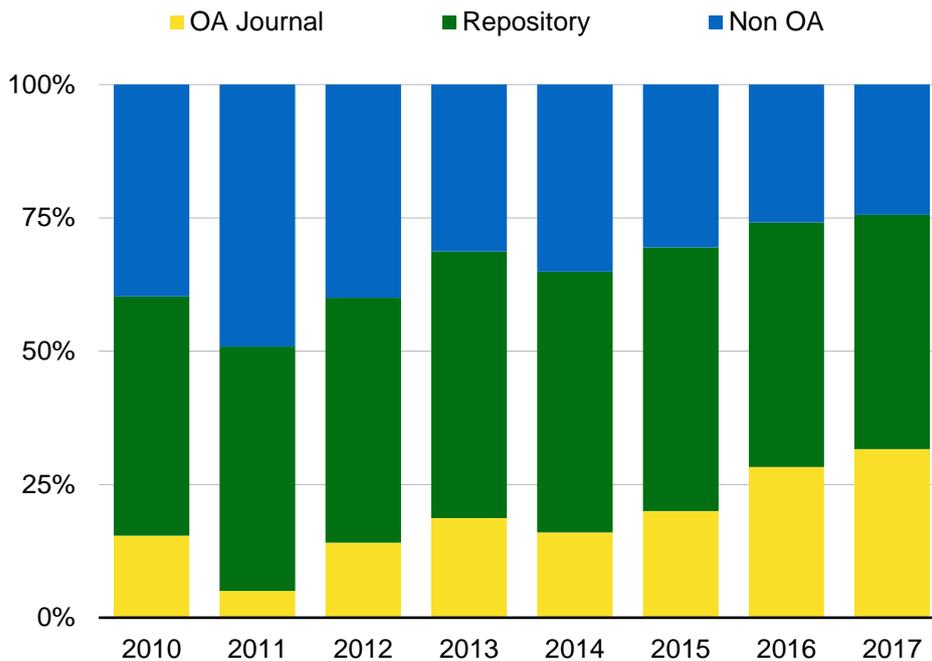


Figure 2: IST Austria OA Publication profile 2010-2017

5 OUTLOOK: MEASUREMENT OF SUCCESS

One might wonder how far we have come with the transition to OA. The only honest answer we can give at this moment in time is that we are not entirely sure. It goes without saying that we review publishing data for all our agreements and local publishing outputs; however, at the moment we are not in a position to capture data for the entire publishing ecosystem in a reliable fashion.

This does not mean that we are not working on a solution which will eventually lead to the creation of comparable data. The AT2OA working group “Open Access Monitoring” has been tasked with developing a transparent and verifiable way to monitor progress. In April 2018 a workshop was held in Vienna, where delegates from Europe¹⁷ presented their different approaches. One of the biggest problems we have encountered is the different definitions of OA used by the various stakeholders. Gold OA in particular is defined in a number of different ways. In order to address this issue, we have developed the “Classification of Open Access Tuples”¹⁸.

The project AT2OA will continue until the end of 2020. We aim to foster an exchange of ideas with the goal to find the best methods to establish OA as the standard in scientific communication in Austria and beyond.

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