As part of the projects conducted for the COPIM Work Package 2 (Revenue Infrastructures and Management Platform) and OPERAS-P Work Package 6 (Innovation), we are continuing a series of European-based workshops, aiming at gaining a better understanding of the national-specific issues surrounding collective funding for OA books from a library perspective. The second online workshop took place on August 13th. This time we took a peek beyond the usual Western-centric horizon and travelled (even if only virtually) east, beyond the German border.

On a hot Thursday morning we gathered in front of our screens, with representatives coming from institutions from all over Poland: Gdansk, Cracow, Lodz, Katowice, Torun, Poznan and Warsaw were represented. With thirteen participants and numerous mugs of coffee we embarked on a discussion about possible ways of getting Polish libraries engaged in collaborative funding models for OA books.

**We have not heard about you!**

There were significant differences in responses we received from our previous workshops and the one based in Poland, notably when it came to familiarity with existing OA books initiatives. It seems that OA books are not really on the radar of the HEIs in Poland or at least they are not among priorities for librarians and researchers alike at the moment. While some participants were aware of the Knowledge Unlatched model and were even evaluating its suitability for their institutions, other models, such as OpenEdition, Open Book Publishers or Open Library of Humanities remained unknown to them.

The reason for that, other than the frequently debated lack of funds, might also lay in the Polish academic system, severely contaminated by so called “punktoza” (loosely translated as the “points disease”). The academic system relies on points allocated for scientific publications, which then count towards performance reviews of researchers. The official list of points, curated by the Ministry of Science and Higher Education, favours journal articles over books and assigns high scores for publications with well-known legacy publishers. The incentives for Polish researchers to publish a monograph with a publisher not included in the official list are therefore very low. The list constitutes what counts as a “valuable” scientific publication; on the researchers’ side not many can afford to rebel against it, on the less-known publishers’ side not many can afford the time and effort needed to get included in the Ministry’s selection. Under these circumstances institutions have little room to invest into OA experiments.

**Law and order**

The engagement with the existing OA books initiatives, although scarce in Poland at the moment, does not however mean that there is no interest in new models. Participants were curious to discuss
alternatives in the Polish context and the practical part of the workshop proved that they had a lot of sharp, yet constructive feedback to offer. They pointed out several road blockers that should be taken into consideration when developing a model for OA books that could potentially work in the Polish reality.

Polish public procurement law does not make it easy for libraries to invest part of their budgets in experimental OA projects. The strict rules as to how the public money should be spent and on what prove to be difficult to navigate. Confronted with tight budgets and the necessity to justify all spendings in detail, librarians are particularly careful when making their choices. Among criteria that they employ when deciding for or against investing in a new project, its transparency was raised as one of the most important factors. The non-commercial character of the initiative also scored high on the scale of pros, while the questions of control over infrastructure played less important roles for the participants.

The question of local benefits kept coming back as an important discussion theme. Participants highlighted the importance of being able to see tangible, measurable benefits on the institution level, as this is what ultimately could convince the decision-makers to invest into a new project. Among measurable benefits the statistics of usage of funded OA books were listed as useful, together with the number of affiliated authors’ books published with the supported publishers.

English only?

The question of bibliodiversity was a subject of heated debates during the workshop. While no-one contested the status quo of English being the lingua franca of academia, participants highlighted the importance of publications in Polish, especially on subjects of linguistics and Polish literature: topics where monographs, rather than articles are the most common and desirable forms of publication. It became clear that any OA books initiatives that were to attract Polish libraries would need to take into consideration the question of multilingualism. It was suggested that OA books in national languages could possibly constitute a special collection to be collectively funded by libraries from countries where local languages play an important part in the academic discourse.

Thank you to all the participants and their feedback: it was a great opportunity to see how OA books related questions are treated in Central/Eastern Europe.

Our next workshop will not be geared towards one specific country, but towards the whole region: we will talk to OA specialists from the Nordic countries in order to understand their take on the question of collective funding models for OA books and the role that libraries can play in them. Stay tuned!
Photo of the Warsaw University Library by Katarzyna Matylla, CC BY-SA 3.0