



# Northern non-profit book publisher within the global network

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## Abstract

Publications are important for the academic community. They bring credibility, visibility, discoverability and over all; they enable the development of research.

But how to ensure quality? There are many predators in the publishing world: For example, some publishers promise the best practices of quality control and visibility for the research outputs but end up publishing poor quality work without a proper peer review process. What makes them predators are the charges they still insist on collecting.

Openness is one of the current themes that the academic community is using globally to fight back and to maintain credibility: open science, open access, open peer review, open data, open processes, etc. In general, this means that everything related to research and its lifespan should be transparent so that the output and the legitimacy of the process can be verified. There are many advantages to this, and it is definitely a commendable ideal, but it also brings new challenges, in particular to small publishers.

Lapland University Press is a non-profit academic book publisher and we specialize in multidisciplinary publishing. Our thematic focus is on Arctic and Northern matters, which we interpret broadly. Most of our books are available for purchase in print and digitally as open access publications. We are a national and somewhat international publisher with the challenges that are typical to both. How to finance operations? How to direct resources? How to create a credible and trustworthy profile? How to maintain quality?

## Introduction: The significance of publishing in the academic world

Publications are crucial for academic research. Academic discourse would be impossible without written words. Visual essays, videos, and even comics have become new ways to communicate research findings, but written sources – articles in journals or books – are still considered more reliable. The importance of scientific publishing and its traditions are still alive and well.

The first academic journal, according to Karvonen, Kortelainen, and Saarti (2014, p. 33), was *Philosophical Transactions* from 1665. At same time begun the concept of “peer review” which in general means that the validity of the manuscript is verified by one or more fellow researchers (Karvonen, Kortelainen, & Saarti, 2014, p. 33). The practices of academic publishing have changed over time, but the idea behind it is still the same. Science needs peer review for credibility, and it needs readable publications for visibility and discoverability: these basic pillars of academic publishing enable the evolution of research and knowledge.

To understand this article, it is relevant to know the basic (but here heavily simplified) steps of scientific research and publishing. First, a researcher has an idea or a research question. They conduct a study and document it – they write down the aim, the research question; describe the theoretical framework and how the data was collected; how the results were reached and what the conclusions were. The researcher offers the documented work for a publisher who in the best case accepts the article for peer review. Other researchers read the paper, comment on it and check its quality. If the paper is good enough, most likely it is published.

The word “open” can be applied to these different phases, and this is what we are about to describe in this paper. Openness is not a development without its problems, however: when everything is open, how do you finance the processes? How can you maintain credibility when every process is visible?

Lapland University Press (LUP) is a non-profit publisher established in 2005. Our focus is on multidisciplinary academic publications on Arctic and northern culture and research. We publish in the fields of jurisprudence, social sciences, education, and art and design. Our main language is Finnish but quite a few of our book projects are international, carried out and published in English. Lapland University Press publishes both printed works and electronic open access publications in Lauda ([lauda.ulapland.fi](http://lauda.ulapland.fi)), the institutional repository of our host organisation, the University of Lapland. Moreover, we act as a specialist unit at the university, consulting researchers, other staff and students on issues related to publishing. As a small northern publisher, Lapland University Press has struggled with the questions related to openness. Some of them have been solved, some of them not.

## Challenges in academic publishing

The world of academic publishing is not free from problems or abusers. Academic publishing can be a profitable business. For example, in 2014, Elsevier made a profit of more than 1.1 billion euros (FUN Finnish University Libraries’ Network, 2015). Where there is money to be made, there will be attempts to exploit the system. There are many legitimate businesses that profit from scholarly publishing, but also so called predators.

According to librarian and associate professor Jeffrey Beall (2017), predatory publishers sacrifice the ethical standards of scholarly publishing to gain a profit. Beall (2017, p. 276) sees predators as a serious threat to science. They enable methodologically unsound science, even what Beall calls counterfeit science, such as complementary and alternative medicine, to be published. As the aim of predatory publishers is only to make a profit, proper peer review practices are discarded, allowing questionable, unscientific, or even dangerous works through.

It is noteworthy that the Directory of Open Access Journals (2018) does not use the term “predatory”, they prefer the term “questionable publisher”. DOAJ (2018) remarks: “It is important to remember that questionable publishing practices are not restricted to open access publishing alone but, sadly, are seen throughout academic publishing.” Either way, there are publishers that attempt to make a profit without quality control and without carrying responsibility for the consequences that misleading research may cause. Questionable publishers may facilitate plagiarism, the dissemination of non-genuine data, and harming people with false practices (Mehrpour & Khajavi, 2014, p. 273).

In the publishing process, publishers are not the only party that can use questionable practices. “Fake peer reviewers” are also a known phenomenon and they hit the headlines every now and then (see e.g. Patel, 2014; Grove, 2016). The pressure to publish is huge, and sometimes the ambition can make some researchers to try to fool the system. They give suggestions to their publisher about potential peer reviewers for their work – but the suggestion can be a friend who has agreed to give high recommendations, or the person is the researcher themselves with a fake identity.

However, the changing market forms the most substantial challenge for academic book publishers. The global market is full of publishers, big and small, producing fiction and non-fiction, on a national or international level. In 2016 alone, 3841 different book titles were published in Finland, including 1667 non-fiction titles (Finnish Book Publishers Association, n.d.). In such a small market, this is a great amount, and competition between publishers is evident. In Finland, most scholarly publishers are societies, associations, and other non-profit organizations – so often resources are scarce for just running the basic operations, not to mention for marketing or distribution.

With these challenges, it is crucial that academic communities take steps towards maintaining the integrity of science. We focus on that next.

## Open science – the biggest current trend

Whom do you trust? Someone who you know only by name, or someone who is open about their life and about themselves? Most likely the latter one.

When things become open, they become visible and transparent – they also become exposed to public views and reviews. This might be intimidating for some, but recently this has been the solution to fight back the trust issues science has faced. Being open means that there is nothing to hide, no secrets, no questionable conduct. Open science is an umbrella term that has changed the course of academic culture to this direction. It brings along many subforms of openness: open data, open peer review, open access publications etc. All these make it easier to verify the research process and to reuse the outcomes.

Openness in science is a principle that extends to the whole research cycle (see Bueno de la Fuente, n.d.) and beyond. If we believe Wikipedia (2018), “Open science is the movement to make scientific research, data and dissemination accessible to all levels of an inquiring society, amateur or professional. It encompasses practices such as publishing open research, campaigning for open access, encouraging scientists to practice open notebook science, and generally making it easier to publish and communicate scientific knowledge.” The shift from print to digital information and communication has rapidly changed academic culture and opened up new possibilities (Mönkkönen & Neuvonen, 2018). In Finland, the Ministry of Education and Culture promoted open science through the Open Science and Research Initiative for the years 2014–2017. The objective was to ensure that the possibilities of open science would be widely utilised in society (Open Science and Research, n.d.).

## **Open access**

The basic idea of open access is giving free access to content for everyone despite e.g. one's status, location, or employer. According to the European Union Framework Programme for Research and Innovation, Horizon 2020, "Open Access (OA) refers to the practice of providing online access to scientific information that is free of charge to the end-user and reusable. 'Scientific' refers to all academic disciplines. In the context of research and innovation, 'scientific information' can mean either peer-reviewed scientific research articles (published in scholarly journals) or research data (data underlying publications, curated data and/or raw data)" (European Commission. Directorate-General for Research & Innovation, 2017, p. 3). More in-depth requirements have originally been proposed by three initiatives: Budapest (2002), Bethesda (2003), and Berlin (2003).

The youngest of the three classic initiatives, the Berlin Declaration, states that open access contributions must be made freely and irrevocably available for copying, using, distributing, transmitting and displaying publicly, including making derivative works, in any digital medium, for any responsible purpose. The Declaration also requires the work to be published in an appropriate electronic format in an online repository maintained by a well-established organisation, for example a government agency, an academic institution or a scholarly society (Berlin Declaration on Open Access to Knowledge in the Sciences and Humanities, 2003). According to The Budapest Open Access Initiative, the result of the principles of open access is that research is accelerated, education is enriched, learning is shared, and the foundation is laid for "uniting humanity in a common intellectual conversation and quest for knowledge" (Chan et al., 2002).

## **Open data**

According to Open Knowledge International (n.d.) the key features of open data are: 1) The data is available as a whole, preferably on the internet in a convenient and modifiable form at no more than a reasonable reproduction cost. 2) The data is provided under terms that permit reuse and redistribution; the data is machine-readable. 3) Everyone can use, reuse and redistribute it with no limits on e.g. commercial use. This reflects the definition of open access discussed earlier.

There are many types of open data. It can be related to culture (cultural works and artefacts), science (data produced in research), finance (e.g. data on financial markets), statistics, the weather (information used to e.g. predict the weather) and the environment (e.g. the level of pollutants) (Open Knowledge International, n.d.). Open data should be on non-personal, so that the privacy of individual persons is protected (Open Data Handbook, n.d.).

Lapland University Press has yet to develop an open data plan, so we do not have a clear solution to give to authors who are willing to open their research data. We are not in any way against open data, on the contrary, this issue just has not come up with any of our authors yet. In Finland, there are national research data repositories, for example the Finnish Social Science Data Archive (FSD). FSD also has guidelines on managing research data, informing participants, anonymization etc. (Finnish Social Science Data Archive, n.d.). Together with Lapland University Consortium Library, Lapland University Press will guide the author in finding a suitable solution for depositing, managing and using open data.

## **Open peer review - Open processes**

Peer review is the one of the most time-consuming phases in academic publishing, but also the most important in assuring quality and reliability. Open peer review is an interesting new development. Traditional peer review has been criticized for e.g. unreliability, inconsistency and social biases, and open peer review is one of the innovations suggested to fight these problems (Ross-Hellauer, 2017). Open peer review

does not yet have a standardized definition or implementation. Tony Ross-Hellauer (2017) suggests that the ambiguity of the term enables different communities to construct their own open peer review system that reflects their needs and preferences. Ross-Hellauer's (2017) own definition includes making reviewer and author identities known, encouraging interaction between the author and reviewer, and publishing review reports that show the feedback received by the author.

Open peer review is not without problems, though. Does knowing the name, gender or nationality of the author affect the reviewer's opinion? Some studies point to gender not influencing acceptance rates or quality ratings in peer review (e.g. Borsuk et al., 2009; Marsh, Bornmann, Mutz, Daniel & O'Mara, 2009). However, there is also evidence to the opposite direction: for instance, gender may have an effect on how scientific achievements are assessed. In an experiment by Michał Krawczyk and Magdalena Smyk (2016), female authors appeared to be evaluated as less competent than males: the subjects believed less often that the papers written by them had been published. In another study, evidence was found of bias in the open peer review of research meeting abstracts. Authors from the United States, other English-speaking countries and prestigious academic institutions were favoured, when scientific merit and the quality of the research alone should have been the basis of the review (Ross et al., 2006). Bias is something that needs to be taken into consideration as a possible risk of open peer reviewing.

Traditionally in Finland, peer review has been *double blind*: neither the author nor the reviewer knows each other's identities, which seems especially convenient in a small language area. However, two associations in Finland just got funding to conduct a study for clearing out possibilities and effects of different open peer review models (Society for Cultural Studies in Finland, 2018). This indicates that the culture is about to change in one way or another.

Lapland University Press has not taken up open peer review as of yet. In small research areas like tourism studies or indigenous studies, especially in Finnish, the probability of recognizing the author is too high and this could affect the tone of the reviews. However, we have a clear description of our review process on our website (Lapland University Press, n.d.). This is a small step toward openness: to show the process and its phases openly so that every project has the same premise, every author knows what they are getting into, and the process is transparent to all. This follows the national guidelines set by the Federation of Finnish Learned Societies (2015) whose goal is to improve the quality of academic publishing in Finland by standardizing quality control and procedures to meet international standards.

As another small step towards openness, we also send thank-you letters to peer reviewers where we describe the publishing process, explain the decisions, and encourage them to explore our other publications – maybe even offer a manuscript to us.

## **Open access publications**

The Horizon 2020 programme requires ensuring that if results are published in a scientific publication, it must be available as open access (Directorate-General for Research and Innovation, European Commission, 2014, p. 26). Some organisations in Finland have taken open access publishing as a requirement in line with the goals of the EU: The Academy of Finland, a major funder of science in the country, requires the projects they fund to commit to open access publishing (Academy of Finland, 2018). Universities in Finland have open access repositories at their disposal. These are just a few catalysts that will accelerate the growth of open access publishing.

Any written text on the Internet is not an open access publication. Simply uploading a PDF file on an organization's webpage does not make it an open access publication. A few of the most important requirements

are that the publishing platform must provide a permanent and identifying link (DOI, URN, Handle) for the publication and enable search engines to harvest the content (Tiedonkeruun käsikirja, 2018).

Lapland University Press has the privilege to work with the University of Lapland and the Lapland University Consortium Library. Both stakeholders have been crucial to us when it comes to open access publishing. The Lauda repository is a valid platform that fulfils all the requirements set for open access publications. All of our open access publications can be found on Lauda: downloadable, free for all, with a permanent link (URN). The content can be harvested from Lauda, so that scientific and commercial search engines can find our titles. This helps a small norther publisher to get visibility, to answer the requirements of our authors, and to distribute our publications globally and effectively. Compared to just sending out printed publications to customers via mail, this is an enormous possibility – and a relief. Open access publications are the biggest advantage that a small academic publisher can have. This benefits not just us, but also our authors and their careers – and makes us a more attractive publishing companion internationally.

## Open access business models

Openness brings challenges to publishers, especially with new unresolved financial structures. When everything is open and free, how do you finance the process? Graphic design, coordinating the peer review, editing, publishing, marketing etc. require assets. These basic stages are still needed, even after the shift from print to electronic publishing. There are comprehensive lists of different business models (see e.g. Swan & Chan, 2012; Open Access Directory, 2017), and it would not be practical go through them all here, since the variations are practically endless. Advertising, institutional funding, hybrid publishing or fees collected from the authors are some solutions.

As mentioned earlier, most Finnish scholarly journals are run by small scholarly societies, and rely on subscriptions, membership fees and state subsidies as sources of income (Ilva, 2017). For them, one of the main obstacles to switching to open access publishing is the risk of losing sales revenue and membership fees (Ilva & Lilja, 2014, p. 3).

To help these small publishers, The Federation of Finnish Learned Societies is offering its members a platform for open access publications, Journal.fi. The service is free for societies that agree to publish their journals openly with a maximum embargo of one year (The Federation of Finnish Learned Societies, 2018). Furthermore, together with the National Library of Finland, The Federation of Finnish Learned Societies has developed a consortium-based model for helping to fund Finnish open access journals: the organisations that benefit from open access publishing, for example universities, would also take part in funding it (Koikkalainen, 2016). The implementation of this model is being negotiated at the moment (Ilva, 2018).

In a similar development for book publishers, in 2016–2017, the Finnish Literature Society and Helsinki University Library established a pilot project called the Aleksandria library consortium (Finnish Literature Society, n.d.). Seven libraries in Finland agreed to fund 10 academic books, which the Finnish Literature Society agreed to publish under a Creative Commons license, provide with a permanent identifier (Cross-Ref DOI), upload to the Societys' publication platform in PDF and EPUB-format, and upload to OAPEN Library and the Directory of Open Access Books (DOAB).

Lapland University Press gets part of its funding from the host organization, the University of Lapland. We are a major image factor for the University of Lapland. We do business by selling printed titles, and we have so far been able to balance revenue with publications that are open in Lauda and by selling printed copies. Authors can contribute by bringing funding, graphic design expertise, etc. which we do not require but very much welcome. Without this help, we publish printed copies in the simplest (and

most likely cheapest) form available to keep the costs to a minimum. The sales of printed books, especially non-fiction, have decreased nationally for several years (see the statistics of the Finnish Book Publishers Association, n.d.). Most likely, open access publishing has had an even greater effect on the sales of academic publishers, and sales revenue alone will not take small Finnish publishers very far. We have some big questions to solve in the near future.

## Conclusion

At the beginning of this paper, we posed the questions: When everything is open, how do you finance the processes? How can you maintain credibility when every process is visible?

To the first question: The future of small Finnish publishers likely rely on the national projects carried out now or in the future. Small academic publishers need help and support from networks and funders. Journal.fi and the Aleksandria Library Consortium are promising steps, but the current development still leaves non-profit societies in a frightening situation. The need to make publications open is evident, but changing the publishing culture and the financial structures is challenging. We can only speak on behalf of Lapland University Press, and how we are going to solve this question.

We are still a small publisher, with a personnel of two, and our geographical location does bring challenges – how to get researchers to offer us manuscripts and to get readers. The Internet and open access publications are our best tools for visibility. We can be found despite our remote location, authors can cooperate with us via digital means of communication, and search engines harvest our publications so that they can be found. Our advantage is that we are not obligated to make a profit; we are only interested in enabling quality academic publishing.

We publish open access academic peer reviewed publications as much as our resources allow, even without embargoes if agreed with the authors or editors. Along with academic publications, we publish some popular non-fiction titles. We print small editions for sale of almost all of our titles, which brings us a bit of a revenue. We still rely heavily on funding from the University of Lapland. Just the sales alone will not cover all of our costs. For now, we have not even considered article processing charges paid for by the author, because we see it as a disadvantage – it would not encourage authors to contact us. The Finnish government is tightening university funding, and time will tell how that will affect our strategy.

The question of maintaining credibility actually holds the answer within itself. Visibility is the most effective way of showing the quality of a process. We have gained the trust of authors and peer reviewers by providing them with insight on what kind of decisions we have made and on what grounds. From our experience, even admitting mistakes openly can create more trust than the efforts of trying to hide them.

Open science and open access, from our point of view, bring more advantages than disadvantages for small publishers – but openness requires that the stakeholder network is solid. Adopting the principles of open access can be difficult, and economically exhausting, especially for a small publisher – but we believe that openness nevertheless benefits us.

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