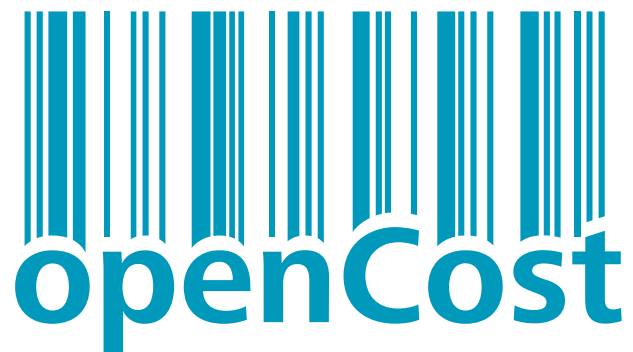


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The Road to Publication Cost Transparency

Proceedings of the Expert Workshop
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Analysis of Open Access publication costs at Austrian Universities

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Abstract

After a short overview of Austrian Transition to Open Access Two (AT2OA2), a national project supporting Open Access, this contribution will focus on the status quo regarding Open Access Cost Monitoring at Austrian Universities as well as on approaches to improve documentation and transparency regarding publication costs. The following aspects will be addressed: capturing and displaying (Open Access) publication costs in accounting and other systems, fostering collaboration across the institution, raising awareness for publication costs at the management level, designing workflows to gather and monitor all kinds of publication costs (centrally and locally funded cost, transformative agreements etc.), as well as improving the reporting of (Open Access) publication costs in statistics.

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6.1 Introduction

Austrian Transition to Open Access Two (AT2OA2, 2021–2024) [95] is a project funded by the Austrian Federal Ministry of Education, Science and Research with the purpose of advancing the transformation from closed access to Open Access. Among other things, the preceding project AT2OA (2017–2020) supported the establishment of Open Access publication funds at Austrian universities. While formulating model funding conditions [96] within the AT2OA project it became obvious that there would be ineligible publishing costs that would continue to be financed through other sources and therefore be “invisible” from a library perspective. At about the same time, concepts such as APCs in the wild [97] or Total Cost of Publication [78] gained attention, followed by the vision of an information budget [12] as well as to the establishment of new service providers that offer solutions for central invoicing workflows and improved cost transparency.

During 2017/18 some of the universities involved in AT2OA started investigating publication costs across the institution with the aim of overseeing and monitoring these expenditures. Within AT2OA a “Recommendation for booking Open Access publication costs” was published in July 2020 [98].

At that time, funding for AT2OA2 had already been approved. As in the preceding project, all public universities in Austria, the Research Institute of Molecular Pathology and the Institute of Science and Technology Austria are project partners in AT2OA2, which facilitates joint action by the autonomous institutions with regard to Open Access. AT2OA2 includes the following five subprojects:

- More Transformative Agreements for Austria (SP1)
- Austrian Datahub for Open Access Negotiations and Monitoring (SP2)
- Analysis of Publication Costs at Austrian Universities (SP3)
- Predatory Publishing (SP4)
- Visibility of Open Access Publications (SP5)

6.1.1 Subproject 1 — More Transformative Agreements for Austria

The goal of SP1 is to increase the number of Open Access publishing agreements of Austrian institutions with scholarly publishers. The predecessor project AT2OA

already contributed substantially to the funding of Open Access publishing agreements with Springer, Wiley and Elsevier. The measures taken from AT2OA are continued in the current project with the aim of concluding more such agreements. The project team has defined new guidelines for Open Access publishing agreements [99] relating to Open Access in general, funding mechanisms, invoicing, author identification, article-related information and publishing mechanisms for articles, reporting and statistics. According to the guidelines, an agreement with a scholarly publisher must (among other criteria) include a commitment to Open Access, transparency of publisher services and costs, and concepts for a transformation towards Open Access as well as automated workflows.

6.1.2 Subproject 2 — Austrian Datahub for Open Access Negotiations and Monitoring

Based on the recommendations developed in AT2OA, a national data hub is being established in Austria. The Austrian Datahub for Open Access Negotiations and Monitoring will process publication data from various sources in order to be able to use them for national Open Access monitoring to support negotiations with scholarly publishers. Publication metadata is provided in high quality in the current research information systems (CRIS) that are set up at the institutional level. However, information on Open Access publication conditions, such as APCs, access and licensing and embargo dates, is missing in most cases. In the data hub information from CRIS is combined with information from external database providers, service providers and publishers. All participating institutions will be able to benefit from the subsequent use of the enriched data. Upon completion of the project, the data hub will have been established and transferred into regular operation. The project group intends to collaborate with international projects and similar activities.

6.1.3 Subproject 3 — Survey and analysis of publication costs at Austrian universities

In SP3, analyses of publication costs at the project partner institutions are carried out and practical guidelines are developed on how university libraries, accounting & controlling departments, quality management and research information systems can be better coordinated in order to be able to clearly identify and allocate publication costs. The project group is working on better cooperation, knowledge

exchange and coordination of the units involved within the organizations in order to be able to clearly identify and allocate publication costs. SP3 is also working on how to display publication costs in statistics and how to best track and deal with third-party publication costs.

6.1.4 Subproject 4 — Predatory Publishing

The main goal of SP4 is to raise awareness about predatory publishing and other predatory phenomena, build an information infrastructure for university stakeholders (such as university management, library management, academic staff and students) and train staff members at the partner institutions for individual consultations of researchers. While there have been institutional activities up and running for quite some time, predatory publishing and predatory conferences are examined within SP4 in a national context for the first time. The project group conducted a survey on the services and support offered around predatory publishing at the project partners' institutions. Members of the project group also actively contacted Austrian scholars who (unknowingly) appear on editorial boards of suspicious journals. As predatory phenomena are not just a national problem the group also focuses on connecting and exchanging knowledge with other communities outside the country. Insights will be presented at various conferences, and a blog was initiated that addresses key questions about predatory publishing and predatory conferences [100].

6.1.5 Subproject 5 – Visibility of Open Access Publications

Subproject 5 deals with the central question of whether Open Access promotes not only better availability of scholarly literature but also an increase in visibility. Insights are gained based on the data collection of the previous project AT2OA (extended by current volumes) with the help of alternative metrics (Altmetrics). Altmetric [101] (part of the Digital Science group) accompanies the project with a Scientific Advisor. The project team intends to look into whether the Open Access status correlates with increased online attention in Altmetric, whether there are differences between individual expressions of Open Access in relation to Altmetrics, if disciplinary and temporal differences can be identified, whether a normalization of Altmetrics (comparable to citation metrics) succeeds in increasing interpretation and meaningfulness for the insights gained and what other means could be used (apart from Altmetrics) to measure visibility. At the end of SP5 the project team will have published a final report on the project, the

publication datasets for project members will be enriched with Altmetrics data, there will be lessons learned (probably even workflows and best practices) for data enrichment, and the project group will have made recommendations for responsible use of Altmetrics.

6.2 Challenges

While publication funds to cover costs for Open Access articles and books have been and continue to be established at many higher education and research institutions [102], APCs in the wild have increasingly moved into the focus [12, 79, 98, 103–105]. These costs, covered decentrally (on the level of different departments, individual researchers etc.), often make up for a considerable proportion of all Open Access payments across an institution. They may result from authors not being aware of funding opportunities such as transformative agreements and institutional publication funds; from authors, publications or charges not eligible for centralized funding as well as from innovative forms of publication funding including membership models. Print subsidies, color charges, pages charges and other types of costs not related to Open Access contribute to a fuller picture of publication costs. Expenditures on Open Access deals with publishers are also part of the idea of a Total Cost of Publication [78], but it is difficult to separate them into fees for publishing and fees for reading. In consequence, it is very challenging to attribute a concrete amount of money to each single Open Access publication. The concept of an information budget [84] aims at reconciling these different kinds of costs by calculating a total amount of expenditure for information supply. However, such an information budget is extremely hard to delimit and still needs to be defined in detail. As a first step, AT2OA2 engages in the field of publication costs, with an emphasis on Open Access costs.

Considering the difficulties libraries – as one of the key players in the transition to Open Access – face in determining what should be counted as publication costs and in assigning costs to publications and vice versa, it is not surprising that other organizational units such as accounting departments find it hard to capture and correctly assign such costs. One of the main tasks the project partners have set for themselves is to deepen the exchange of information across academic institutions and to inform administrative departments on how to identify and handle publication costs. Obviously this task requires much effort and engagement from a wide range of stakeholders and is still to be completed.

6.3 Project aims

According to the AT2OA2 project proposal submitted in September 2019, SP3 is committed to

- supporting institutional reporting systems by making the data reusable for statistics, annual reports and the like
- increasing knowledge regarding Open Access publication costs: who pays for what?
- creating synergy effects in the relevant administrative processes and work-flows

and addresses the following questions:

- How much money is paid at an institution for publishing?
- How much do publishers charge for publishing?
- Which funder or institution has covered the publication costs?

A particularly important objective of SP3 is to help create a reliable and comprehensive data basis for publication costs, especially for Open Access publications. As a consequence, (ideally) all publication costs covered by institutions on central and decentral levels should become visible and transparent. Detailed and complete data on what institutions and their researchers are charged by publishers will improve the position of institutions in negotiations. Beyond that, SP3 would like to contribute to a better display of (Open Access) publication costs in statistics such as the Austrian Library Statistics [106] and all sorts of reporting tools.

All these endeavors include and require fostering cooperation among all involved units within the institution. The approach to work together with other administrative as well as research departments characterizes the collaborative nature of SP3 and distinguishes it from other initiatives that aim to improve structures and systems within libraries. Enhanced cooperation should in turn create synergy effects within the administrative processes, further improving cost efficiency in the transition to Open Access.

6.4 Activities to date

Between May 2021 and November 2022, eight meetings of SP3 were held to establish a common understanding of the problem, identify potential solutions, define deliverables in detail and start working on concrete tasks.

As a starting point SP3 conducted a survey in summer 2021 among the participating institutions to collect information on the status quo regarding cost monitoring and transparency. The next subchapter will elaborate on the most important outcomes of this survey.

In early 2022 SP3 invited the project partners to collect the cost data available for their institutions and to share their knowledge and experiences. We found that there is a wide range of ambition and understanding at the various institutions for the relevance as well as for the challenges of our topic.

In June 2022 SP3 organized an international workshop on cost monitoring with Irene Barbers (Forschungszentrum Jülich)², Lisa Lovén (National Library of Sweden), Susanne Luger (University of Linz), Timo Vilén (National Library of Finland)³ and Mathew Willmott (California Digital Library) sharing their insights, experiences and approaches on cost monitoring.

Thanks to an invitation to the openCost workshop in October 2022, SP3 gained insight into ongoing efforts concerning cost capture, documentation and monitoring in Germany and beyond. While the openCost project complements the SP3 approach of bringing together people involved in the topic with their emphasis on metadata and technical interfaces, it was also particularly interesting to learn about the Transform2Open project⁴. During the presentations it turned out that we share a substantial number of approaches and ideas on the topic, and we are hoping to continue the inspiring and fruitful exchange initiated in Hamburg.

6.5 Survey on Open Access Cost Monitoring

From July to September 2021, SP3 conducted an internal survey with 24 questions in order to get an overview of how publication costs are dealt with at the partner institutions. Representatives of 16 Austrian research institutions answered the survey.

²see also her contribution in [chapter 10](#)

³see also his contribution in [chapter 7](#)

⁴see also [chapter 8](#)

Some of the results:

- Two thirds of the institutions either use SAP (dedicated cost types Open Access or Publications) or Excel lists in order to collect centrally as well as decentrally incurred publication costs. Two institutions managed Open Access costs via a central office. One third of the participants indicated that their institutions did not collect publication costs.
- Half of the participants indicated that their institutions had central monitoring for publication costs.
- Two thirds of all institutions had already set up one or more SAP cost types for Open Access publication costs.
- At most institutions, lump-sum costs from Open Access agreements were not allocated to individual publications (one participant noted that “a coordinated approach would be desirable”).
- A *wish list* of what should have improved after the completion of SP3 includes
 - uniform standards/recommendations/guidelines/proposals for transparency of publication costs
 - suggestions for displaying (Open Access) publication costs in SAP, e. g. via dedicated cost types or improved accounting texts
 - overview and regular monitoring of all publication costs at the institution
 - increased professionalism and know-how in data collection & monitoring
 - automation of workflows wherever possible
- Data in connection with publications from third-party funded projects is mostly not available to libraries (only two participants indicated they had access) but only to accounting departments and/or research support offices.
- With regard to these costs, the survey participants would hope for
 - improved query via their CRIS system
 - central query options in SAP
 - full list of publication costs from global budget and third-party funded projects

The survey results show that the status quo concerning publication cost transparency and workflows differs a lot among the project partners due to individual, historically grown structures and responsibilities. The results also indicate that awareness for the issue of Open Access cost monitoring is still to be raised at the management level.

A wide range of answers was given to the question of how AT2OA2 could improve the situation. This feedback was then used to revise and further develop the project deliverables.

6.6 SP3 Deliverables and status quo

SP3 has defined five topics as the main priorities to work on and deliver results by the end of 2024:

6.6.1 SP 3.1 Setting up SAP cost types

Partner institutions within AT2OA2 have reached a common understanding to use SAP as the backbone and primary resource for cost data analysis. A project group within the preceding project AT2OA already published recommendations for setting up cost types in SAP [98]. The working group in AT2OA2 has built on these recommendations and has revised them in order to meet current needs and emphasize advantages of an improved cost monitoring. The document includes arguments for the establishment of Open Access cost types, taking into account the varied Open Access business models. The recommendations address rectorates (university management), controlling and accounting departments as well as libraries. The current recommendations, which include the challenge of monitoring third-party publication costs and also put a strong focus on the management aspect (the need to control publication costs) are to be finalized by the end of 2022 and will be published on the AT2OA2 website and on Zenodo.

6.6.2 SP 3.2 Developing training materials

The working group aims at defining guidelines and arguments for a standardization of accounting texts on the basis of existing documents at individual institutions and the recommendations published within SP 3.1 ([subsection 6.6.1](#)). This is meant to support colleagues at accounting, finance and controlling departments, but also decentralized units such as institutes, chairs, centers and clinics in processing and allocating Open Access invoices correctly. The working group currently discusses whether it is reasonable and desirable to approach publishers to deliver

uniform and standardized invoices for Open Access publication costs. The training material should be finished by summer 2023.

6.6.3 SP 3.3 Modeling workflow descriptions

The project team is developing descriptions of prototypical workflows and flow-charts for collecting and analyzing publication costs for Hybrid Open Access, Gold Open Access as well as other publication costs covered both by institutional funds and third-party funding. Different aspects such as the diversity of business models (publishing agreements, individual funding, deposits, caps, etc.), extra charges such as color charges, page charges, submission fees, etc. and crowd-funding models will be taken into consideration. The aim of the working group is to improve documentation and knowledge management, but also to support colleagues who are new to the topic of publication cost monitoring.

6.6.4 SP 3.4 Preparing costs for statistics and reporting

There are no uniform and comprehensive standards yet on how to report (Open Access) publication costs for library statistics and institutional reporting. The project group has already started working on a standardized representation of publication costs for the delivery of key indicators. As a first step, a proposal on how to improve the display of expenditures for Open Access in the Austrian and German library statistics will be completed in early 2023. The key figures to be standardized will include library expenditures for all forms of media, electronic media and Open Access publications. The proposal will suggest to differentiate between APC/BPC payments and funding for Open Access infrastructures, read and publish agreements (including transformative agreements) and Open Access costs within an institution's own research infrastructure. The project group intends to collaborate with experts in Germany, as the library statistics for both countries are based on the same scheme.

6.6.5 SP 3.5 Handling of publication costs from third-party funded projects

Publication costs from third-party funding are a particular challenge and therefore require special attention and handling. The number of funders can be manifold at institutions, and so are the different funding policies. The Austrian Science Fund will outsource the complex process of reviewing publications and journals for compliance with the FWF's Open Access Policy as well as the reimbursement

of publication costs to higher education and research institutions in Austria as of 2024. SP3 will therefore in particular look into the aspect of how third-party funding in connection with publication costs can be dealt with reasonably and efficiently. The project group has already contacted the Austrian Science Fund to receive detailed information on the parameters of this outsourcing, including the topic of cost monitoring. It will also inform and collaborate with institutional management, colleagues from accounting, finance and controlling departments as well as colleagues who support researchers in externally funded projects. By the end of the project, a concept shall be provided on how to best handle publication costs from third-party funders.

6.7 Conclusion

Publication costs are rapidly gaining importance at higher education and research institutions. These costs are complex and dynamic, and they require know-how and new forms of collaboration across stakeholders on an institutional, national and international level.

This is why – beyond working on the project deliverables mentioned above as well as offering a forum for sharing experiences, approaches and best practices mainly among librarians – SP3 explicitly attempts to go beyond its own community.

Networking is central at this stage, just as working on guidelines, standards, schemas and workflows is. SP3 is looking forward to further advancing the transparency of publication costs locally as well as together with the growing number of initiatives dealing with this important aspect of the transition to Open Access.

6.8 Acknowledgements

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