

Fostering Collaboration for Open Access Publishing Models: A Study of the Polish Ecosystem in the Area of Open Access Monographs in the Humanities

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Abstract

Monographs have long remained at the margins of the digital and open access (OA) transformation, particularly in Poland and across much of Europe. Unlike journal publishing, the open dissemination of scholarly books has been hindered by factors such as the additional costs of producing professional digital formats (e.g., EPUB) and the enduring perception of printed monographs as more prestigious. This has led many publishers to delay OA release until after embargo periods, limiting accessibility. The implications are particularly significant for the humanities, where monographs are often the primary research output. As a result, humanistic scholarship remains underrepresented in digital databases, reaches narrower audiences, and demonstrates lower impact as measured by dominant bibliometric indicators from major academic platforms. To address these disparities, sustainable OA publishing models tailored to monographs must be developed. This paper presents findings from a mixed-method, participatory study of the Polish publishing landscape, identifying key needs, challenges, and opportunities. The study contributes to ongoing debates on OA policies and practices for monograph publishing by offering in-depth insights from one of Europe's largest academic markets. Its design-driven

and scalable research workflow represents an additional contribution, providing a methodological model that can be adapted to similar research contexts.

Keywords: open access books; open access publishing models; design thinking; scholarly publishing in Poland

1. Introduction

The paper aims to reflect on the state of the open access (OA) publishing ecosystem in the humanities with a specific focus on monographs. Building on the Polish case, the study recognises current needs, identifies challenges, and proposes possible solutions to open access monograph publishing practices. Monographs are the primary publishing form in the humanities. Yet they have lagged behind periodical publications regarding the pace of OA transformation. This worldwide trend also affects visibility in scholarly databases such as Web of Science and Scopus, which serve to create bibliometric indicators (Adema & Rutten 2010; Stone et al., 2021). Although this tendency started to change in the last decade (Adema, 2019; Collins & Milloy, 2012; Crossick, 2016; Ferwerda et al., 2017; Laakso, 2022; Maryl et al., 2021; Penier et al., 2020; Shaw et al., 2023; Snijder, 2013, 2016), the situation is far from being solved and, contrary to journal articles, the content of books is available mostly on-site in libraries. In the Polish humanities, this discrepancy is conspicuous even more due to the well-established diamond OA models in journal publishing. However, this trend is about to change. Latest European and Polish open policies put pressure on Polish presses to deposit electronic versions of monographs in open repositories and shorten their embargo periods (at the moment, it is usually 12 months). In contrast, evaluation systems draw publishers' attention to increasing the visibility of their products (usually measured by the number of citations or downloads tracked by various altmetrics) (Instrukcja. Polityka NCN Dotycząca Otwartego Dostępu Do Publikacji, 2021; Kierunki Rozwoju Otwartego Dostępu Do Publikacji i Wyników Badań Naukowych w Polsce, 2015; Plan S & cOAlition S, n.d.).

Our research objectives stem from the special role of monographs in the humanities, their low visibility in the OA transformation, and their lower recognition compared to journal publishing in terms of citations and impact.

Although it has been noticed on several occasions that open access to monographs is less developed than in the case of journal publishing, there is a lack of in-depth research on the needs and workflows of monograph publishing in various academic communities, local and national. This study addresses this deficiency by providing insights from the Polish publishing ecosystem. The general objective is to deepen the knowledge on the OA publishing ecosystem, specifically focusing on accounting for its current situation, identifying deficiencies and finding solutions to strengthen open models. What are the current practices of Polish academic presses in monograph publishing? What challenges do publishers face when implementing OA? How can they be tackled according to publishers' know-how, capacities, and openness to change? This combination of diagnostic and solution-oriented goals reflects our intention to capture both current practices and potential future directions.

The study discussed in this paper is based on a scalable and transferable methodology designed to both diagnose the problem and identify solutions and actors willing to make the change. It applied a multi-method approach using survey data, interviews and design thinking informed by participatory research methods, such as co-design (Bergold & Thomas, 2012; Meinel & Leifer, 2012). It is an approach previously taken by the members of the Digital Humanities Centre at the Institute of Literary Research of the Polish Academy and other members of the OPERAS consortium (see: Avanço et al., 2021; Błaszczczyńska & Stone, 2023; Giglia, 2019; Maryl et al., 2021; Stone et al., 2021). OPERAS¹ has been established as a non-commercial initiative aimed at transforming European scholarly communication, and therefore it is targeted at researchers, librarians, publishers, and infrastructure providers in over a dozen European countries. This rich and diverse group of stakeholders and the infrastructure's inclusive nature are the key to OPERAS's success (Maryl et al., 2020).

The structure of the paper is as follows. Starting from the specificity of the humanities and the state of OA monograph publishing, we will continue by presenting the research methodology applied to the analysis with a special focus on the design thinking applied. Next, the analysis will be conducted according to the three research questions. Lastly, we will conclude and propose some recommendations for others facing similar issues in their communities.

2. Context of the Study

The study is set against the ongoing transformation of scholarly communication in the humanities, driven by the rise of the Internet, mobile technologies, and the OA movement (Avanço et al., 2021; Giglia, 2019). The humanities have distinctive publishing needs: they rely heavily on monographs and scholarly editions, place less emphasis on rapid dissemination of results, and demonstrate a strong orientation toward experimentation and innovation (Adema, 2021; Avanço et al., 2021). This need for flexibility arises from the interpretive and diverse character of humanistic inquiry, which resists standardisation and benefits from exploratory modes of publication. Experimental formats—such as multimodal monographs, annotated editions, or interactive digital outputs—not only represent complex arguments more adequately but also engage wider audiences and safeguard the multilingual and locally embedded nature of the field (Adema, 2021; Maryl, 2022). Research conducted within the OPERAS-P project (2020–2021) confirmed that humanities and social sciences scholars are increasingly receptive to innovative formats and recognise the value of OA for enhancing visibility (Avanço et al., 2021). These attitudes have nourished the development of digital humanities (Maryl, 2022). Nonetheless, the transition remains incomplete: publishing practices are still insufficiently digitised, a gap further evidenced by our study of the Polish context.

Few models are sustaining OA publishing, but large differences between journals and books should be emphasised (Adema, 2019; Ferwerda et al., 2017). For instance, a large number of humanistic journals implemented diamond OA models successfully, but similar practices are not typical for the scholarly book market (Bosman et al., 2021; Laakso, 2022). It should also be emphasised that the popularity of diamond OA in journal publishing is often forced by the need to compete with others in terms of impact factors and other indicators (for instance, this is the case in Poland). The absence of APCs (article processing charges) is a particularly appealing aspect for researchers, especially those working with limited financial resources. For books, OA – most often following the green model and not involving book processing charges – is commonly provided by institutional publishers after embargo periods on commercially sold print and electronic editions. According to our interviews and survey results, the diamond OA model is very rare in the Polish scholarly book market. However, some scholarly presses gain public funding for

publishing OA monographs, or they decide to publish them from revenues. We will discuss models from the Polish book publishing ecosystem in more detail in the Analysis section.

Although it is a dynamic process, OA and digital monographs are still often perceived as less prestigious than traditionally printed books (Adema, 2021; Eve, 2014). Novel genres of digital humanities, as well as publishing in OA, are not incentivised by the research assessment system, both in Poland and globally, which diminishes their role and potential (Maryl et al., 2020). As Eve analyses in his monograph on OA in the humanities, prestige is what drives authors' decisions on where to publish (Eve, 2014). Similar conclusions were drawn in the OPERAS-P research regarding the writing practices of SSH researchers (Avanço et al., 2021). It is certainly becoming a case also in the Polish humanities, which is slowly but systematically becoming a subject of bibliometric quantification in the same way STEM (science, technology, engineering and mathematics) disciplines are (Kulczycki et al., 2018, 2019).

Monographs in the humanities are outputs that are gradually assimilated by academic communities; consequently, measuring their impact requires a longer time frame. Usually, obtaining representative numbers regarding monograph reception takes several years. However, even after all these years, collecting reliable impact measures remains nearly impossible, largely due to the poor quality of metadata made available online by publishers (Snijder, 2013). If OA monographs are to become standard in the humanities, factors such as impact measurement and scholarly prestige must also be taken into account. The same consideration should be extended to innovative publication formats.

The advocates usually believe that OA increases visibility and diminishes plagiarism practices, as well as increases the equity of scientific efforts (ALLEA, 2022; Snijder, 2013, 2016), and in the case of the humanities, strengthens one of its characteristics – multilingualism (Leão et al., 2018). To understand the OA publishing ecosystem in the humanities, it is crucial to bear in mind that the humanities are rooted in local communities and languages. Therefore, the internationalisation of humanities outputs depends on the recognition and dissemination of multilingual academic output. Open access as well as digitisation of scholarly communication and research is probably one of the best ways to preserve achievements of this field and,

at the same time, develop and improve them (Leão et al., 2018; Maryl et al., 2020). It also provides a methodological reference for other European projects aiming to assess the impact of OA monographs in SSH disciplines (De Paoli et al., 2024; Forbes et al., 2020). It leads to more interaction between separate academic communities through innovative tools for annotations as well as databases aggregating papers and books in single access-point discovery services (Bertino & Staines, 2019; De Paoli et al., 2024; Forbes et al., 2020). Of course, we can achieve some of those goals with the digitisation of monographs' metadata and without OA to the book's content but it will lead to further domination of large commercial publishers and reduce the importance of smaller presses which have so far played a crucial role in the scholarly-led communication of the humanities (Adema & Stone, 2017; Ferwerda et al., 2023). Without sustainable models for OA, the local, scholarly-led publishing entities will not be able to survive and compete, and so their expertise will be marginalised, moving the best researchers and authors to more visible and therefore highly evaluated publishers (Adema & Stone, 2017).

The role of the State in Poland is primarily regulatory rather than facilitative. Policy documents such as the *Kierunki rozwoju otwartego dostępu do publikacji i wyników badań naukowych w Polsce* (2015) and the Polish National Science Centre's OA policy (2021) set expectations for making outputs openly available, while national evaluation criteria indirectly shape publishers' strategies by rewarding publications with certain presses. However, there are no dedicated funding streams or coordinated mechanisms to bring stakeholders together to develop a roadmap for OA monographs.

The diagnosis presented above is nothing new to the field. It has already been noticed by various local communities, and several solutions for small presses have already been proposed and implemented. According to the 2017 analysis by Adema and Stone, it seems like the presses are aware of it and have already tackled their problems with new fully digital open access models (Adema & Stone, 2017, Adema et al., 2017). Most of those solutions are based on collaborative models. One of the examples is Open Book Collective (OBC), a UK-based organisation of OA publishers, libraries, and publishing service providers sharing resources (infrastructure, funding) and enabling OA publishing without charging authors.² Another one is Opening the Future,³ a collaborative model based on members' (libraries') subscriptions. Both will be discussed in more detail in the Analysis section.

3. Methodology

To answer research questions, the study implemented a multi-method approach: a survey study, semi-structured interviews with selected stakeholders, and a design thinking workshop, which provided in-depth insight into publishers' needs, expectations and ways of thinking about solutions, and finally, desk research. The study was informed by the participatory research approach that argues in favour of the possibility, the significance, and the usefulness of involving research partners in the knowledge-production process (Bergold & Thomas, 2012). OPERAS members have exercised participatory research on several occasions; the development of the GoTriple platform is one of the most pertinent examples with its co-design method implemented in the process (De Paoli et al., 2024). Due to choosing the design thinking method to engage the stakeholders, the study was heavily influenced by the user-centred design approach and its theoretical and practical application depicted by the five-stage process and the Double Diamond framework.⁴ The method as well as its application in this study will be presented in section 3.3. Findings from the three research stages were complemented by desk research, resulting in a comparative analysis of various sustainability and business models outside Poland's publishing ecosystem.

The participants were selected according to qualitative criteria (openness to OA practices and willingness to collaborate in the workshop). Therefore, the study's results are not representative of the scholarly publishing market in Poland. However, they show specific trends within this ecosystem and mark possible future developments that are likely to be extended to the wider community of academic publishers.

3.1. Survey

The survey study (run in May-October 2022) was the first stage of the research, and it provided a broad picture of the state of digital transformation in the Polish publishing ecosystem.⁵ The survey targeted Polish publishers and editors, mostly from the humanities field. It aimed at diagnosing the state of OA practices and crucial technological needs, as well as shortcomings in collecting and analysing metadata (such as keywords and references). The goal was to identify the needs of scholarly publishers in the area of digital services and

tools used in the publishing process, from content editing to dissemination of publications. The questions focused on collecting information about particular technologies – software and applications – that are currently used and mapping the state of OA and digital publishing in Poland. The survey was sent to 126 scholarly publishing houses in Poland, commercial and institutional, out of which 34 responded. Among the preselected entities, 30% were university presses (32) and Polish Academy of Sciences institutes' presses (5). Others were commercial scholarly publishers or not-for-profit presses specialising in the humanities and social sciences. The survey shouldn't be considered representative, however, high responsiveness was not the goal. We used a tool typical for quantitative research, but our research questions and goals are more typical for qualitative approaches: naming the biggest challenges, pointing out technological shortcomings, and formulating the first research hypotheses regarding the publishing ecosystem in Polish humanities and social sciences.

3.2. Interviews

The second stage of the research was semi-structured interviews with selected stakeholders regarding technological needs and solutions, publishing process, as well as concepts and ideas for further development of OA models in Poland (Ciesielska & Jemielniak, 2018; Denzin & Lincoln, 2008). The interviewees were selected from among the respondents of the survey, following their answers – only entities that publish in OA were invited to the interview. In November-December 2022, we conducted 4 interviews with employees of scientific publishing houses in Poland.⁶ To obtain a broad context, we also talked to the editor-in-chief of “Wolne Lektury” – a non-governmental website that provides e-books already in the public domain⁷ and with a member and spokesperson of Open Book Publishers – an association of OA publishers based in the UK.⁸

3.3. Design Thinking as a Research Approach and a Tool

The last stage of the study was driven by design thinking approach. The research team organised a two-day design thinking workshop, which was facilitated by two professionals who were briefed on the research objectives

and initial findings beforehand. It was conducted online in March 2023, and it engaged 23 participants from 13 entities: university presses and libraries, research institutes' publishing departments, a commercial publisher, an infrastructure provider and members of the research team. Below, we present the framework and theoretical premises behind the design thinking process utilised for our study.

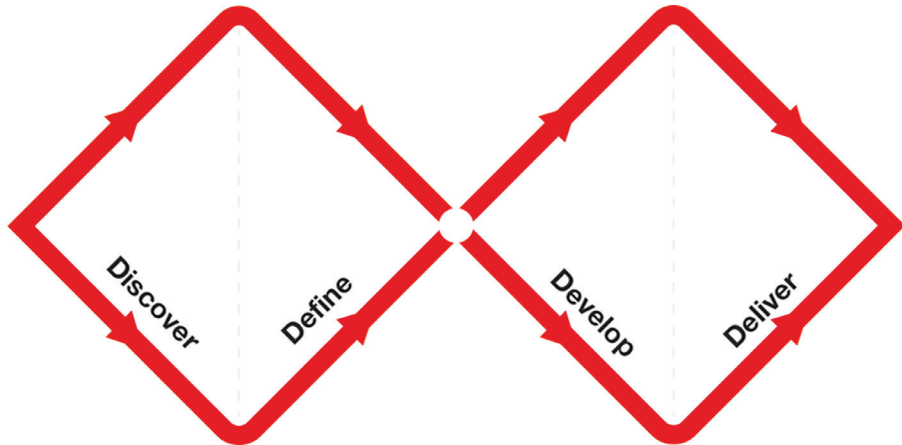
Design thinking is an analytical and creative process usually applied for prototyping or creating new products or solutions (Bender-Salazar, 2023; Kimbell, 2011; Meinel & Leifer, 2012; Razzouk & Shute, 2012). While there isn't one universally agreed-upon definition, design thinking generally involves a dynamic and iterative process. It's considered a learnable skill, enabling individuals to approach problems creatively (Leung & Qiu, 2017). With its emphasis on understanding stakeholder needs and generating innovative solutions, it provides a structured framework to synthesise prior research findings and develop concrete action proposals (Pressman, 2018). On the one hand, it is used to engage publishers in prototyping solutions to their problems and challenges, and on the other hand, it provides insights into how they tackle problems and think about solutions. Several models and frameworks exist to describe the design thinking process. One common approach is a five-stage process that includes empathise, define, ideate, prototype, and test (Lewrick et al., 2018). Another popular model is the Double Diamond, developed by the British Design Council⁹ (Caulliraux et al., 2020; Johnson, 2023; Kochanowska et al., 2022).

The five-stage process of Design Thinking, often cited as a micro-cycle, is described as iterative and human-centred, with the ultimate goal being the development of a solution. The initial phase of empathising involves immersion in the unique circumstances of the problem. It requires gathering information from multiple perspectives, seeking to deeply understand the user's needs, goals and motivations. The next phase, define, is about synthesising the information gathered during the empathise stage, filtering, selecting and structuring ideas to clearly articulate the problem and define a specific design brief. This step narrows the scope and provides direction for the following stages. The ideate phase focuses on generating a multitude of potential solutions and exploring different design concepts. This is a divergent thinking phase, encouraging the exploration of a wide range of possibilities. The prototype phase is a transition from abstract ideas to tangible forms. This step involves creating quick and testable versions of potential solutions, which are

then shared with users for feedback and further refinement. Finally, the test phase is where these prototypes are evaluated, with user feedback informing further improvements. This iterative process leads to a suitable, refined solution (Dam, 2025).

The five-stage process can be effectively combined with the Double Diamond model, which provides a broader framework for the design process. The Double Diamond is a visual representation of the design process, emphasising the duality of divergent and convergent thinking. It is made up of four phases: Discover, Define (first diamond), Develop and Deliver (second diamond) (Figure 1).

Fig. 1: The Double Diamond by the Design Council (CC BY).



The first phase in the Double Diamond model, Discover, corresponds to the initial part of the empathise stage in the five-stage model. It's a divergent thinking phase, aimed at gathering broad insights and identifying user needs. Following that, the Define phase in the Double Diamond aligns with the define stage in the five-stage process, focusing on converging and filtering the insights to create a clear and actionable problem statement. The second diamond begins with the Develop phase, which connects with the ideate and prototype phases of the five-stage model. This phase involves the generation of multiple solutions and the testing and refinement of these ideas, using prototyping and feedback. Finally, the Deliver phase corresponds to

the test phase in the five-stage model, and it focuses on further refinement of the chosen solutions, as well as their implementation. The Double Diamond model underscores the iterative nature of the design process, highlighting the importance of moving through divergent and convergent thinking. It also emphasises the need for empathy and user-centred design, providing a universal language for navigating the intricate journey from concept to creation, as well as facilitating better communication and collaboration among multi-disciplinary teams (Johnson, 2023; Kochanowska et al., 2022).

In our workshop, the two design thinking frameworks were applied in a complementary way. The five-stage process offered a detailed, iterative structure for engaging with stakeholders' needs and developing potential solutions, while the Double Diamond model provided a higher-level framing that highlighted the alternation between divergent and convergent phases of work. Together, they ensured that participants could explore a broad spectrum of ideas and then refine them into actionable proposals. This interplay between the two models was particularly effective in balancing creativity with feasibility, as it allowed the group to move fluidly between open exploration and structured decision-making, ultimately leading to the formulation of collaborative solutions grounded in both innovation and practical constraints.

4. Analysis

The findings are presented according to the three research goals we formulated. Firstly, we describe the OA publishing ecosystem in the Polish humanities. Secondly, we diagnose the deficiencies and thirdly identify solutions, focusing on collaborative models.

4.1. Recognising Open Access Monographs' Publishing in the Polish Humanities and its Challenges

The number or percentage of OA monographs published in Poland is difficult to estimate, given that no comprehensive data is collected. According to our survey, 25 out of 34 presses (22 of them specialised in the humanities) published at least one book in OA in 2021. Worth mentioning is a huge

gulf between the numbers provided by university presses and those reported by other entities, such as commercial publishers or research institutes of the Polish Academy of Sciences, among others. Universities in general are ahead of the others in the number of books (in print, electronic or OA) published: in 2021, the University of Warsaw published 266, the University of Łódź 252, and the Jagiellonian University 200. In the case of the University of Łódź, 252 refers to the total number of titles published in 2021, while a special institutional project enabled 400 books to be made openly available, including both newly released monographs and digitised volumes from the backlist. Though unprecedented for Poland, it shows that for a significant institution, it is possible to conduct a large-scale project aimed at opening their publications. Among commercial publishers, the biggest numbers were 140 and 105 provided by Cracow-based publishers. Concerning OA books, the publishers mentioned both new monographs published after the embargo period and freshly digitised books that had previously been distributed in print. Usually, the number of OA books for 2021 was a lot smaller. Even at the Warsaw University, the number was 49, whereas in smaller presses, public and commercial, it was usually between 2 and 10. Only one of our interviewees declared they publish OA from their own income, albeit after the embargo period. The primary format of the electronic version is usually PDF, given that little additional editing effort is needed. Rarely do scholarly presses publish e-book formats (ePUB, mobi), which are more time-consuming (but they can be implemented if that supports a sales strategy of a publisher).

Gold OA, which remains relatively uncommon within the Polish academic publishing landscape, is typically funded through individual research grants or, less frequently, institutional resources. According to our interviewees, one of the key factors limiting its uptake is the incentive structure embedded in the national research evaluation system. When researchers have access to publication funding, they tend to allocate it to prestigious foreign publishers that are also more highly rewarded in the evaluation process. For instance, a monograph published with one of the 36 top-ranked foreign presses is awarded 200 points, whereas publications with approximately 700 other presses – including all Polish publishers – receive only 80 points. This system discourages authors from choosing domestic publishers and may partly account for the limited prevalence of gold OA in Poland. Commercial Polish publishers report that they are unable to compete with foreign presses, neither in terms of evaluation rankings nor in attracting grant funding to cover book processing charges.

In university presses the majority of books are published under a 12-month obligatory embargo on OA due to universities' open mandates (which is compatible with a recommendation from the 2015 ministerial document on OA) (Kierunki Rozwoju Otwartego Dostępu Do Publikacji i Wyników Badań Naukowych w Polsce, 2015), but as one of the participants noticed, there is a tendency in some institutions to shorten this period to 6 months. In such cases, OA is a natural stage in the monograph's life cycle, but it is not the core of a publisher's strategy. It is enforced by top-down regulations and does not necessarily lead to exploring a sustainability model for OA publishing. However, some university presses start to publish OA without any embargos:

I think about 50% still have such an embargo of six months to sell either the paper version or the electronic version. On the other hand, a very large number of books have recently been transferred directly to open access. This is also related to the rector's order from that year, which states that the basic version of a monograph is the electronic version, meaning that we are moving away from the paper version to the electronic version.¹⁰ [university press]

Based on this statement, we can presume that at some point there might be a turn towards diamond OA with no embargos and fees for authors or readers, at least at the biggest and wealthiest universities in Poland. This slow evolution leads to reflections on sustaining this publishing model and even developing it:

We are among the first to enter electronic distribution. We have had a very good experience, and it works a little bit like simply letting books into circulation, and the rest no longer occupies our attention as much as traditional distribution. So that from our side is a very good model. We also see an increase in the visibility of information about our books. [university press]

The interviews revealed that for many publishers, OA and visibility among respected academic audiences are becoming more important than sales income. This shift is especially apparent among public academic presses, which are increasingly open about the fact that their income is so moderate it no longer justifies the low visibility and weak metrics associated with closed publishing models. One of the participants noticed that publishing books immediately in OA increases the metrics:

We see this very big difference between books in open access, which we index very well, where citations in Google Scholar accrue without a problem, and books that we keep in closed access for a while and where this interaction on the web is not seen at all, or is very, very small. [university press]

Therefore, improving the metrics of their products has become essential for editorial teams. They needed to better understand the concepts of metadata depositing and interoperability. Some editors improve technical skills and also advocate in their institutions for registering a DOI and signing agreements with commercial databases, such as EBSCO or Scopus (more adequate for humanistic outputs than Web of Science). In many cases, firstly, they learned to appreciate those factors in journal publishing, also thanks to implementing the Open Journals System (OJS) software:¹¹

We have several journals that are closing issues at the very beginning of this period. Also, something that seemed completely impossible a few years ago is suddenly functioning. (...) They [journal editors] also use an option that allows us to publish articles “online first” as we like to call it. That is, at the point when an article is closed, it already has in fact a validated “online first” DOI number, (...) It can already collect citations for itself with this DOI number in the scientific world. (...) So the lifespan of the article is strongly extended here. [university press]

The same publisher, whose comment is mentioned above, is now implementing Open Monograph Press (OMP), an open-source management software for book publishing similar to OJS. Another participant openly declared they are interested in such technological solutions but would need support to implement them:

My dream is to have just such a system, and I hope that once implemented, you [meaning OPERAS-PL – the Polish National Node of OPERAS] will help build this alliance. [university press]

According to our research, such software is not yet widespread in Poland. During the editing process, publishers still mostly rely on communication with authors via email. For promotion and distribution (which OMP covers through providing a customised platform for readers) they use institutional repositories and run their websites. Since OMP or any other similar

product is not used, publishers and editors, sometimes supported by university library units, must work on preparing metadata in various formats and indexing in databases such as Google Scholar, Scopus or EBSCO on their own or with the help of library units. In those cases, university presses seem to be in a better position compared to commercial publishers, since for public entities in Poland, visibility and high impact levels have become crucial lately due to the 2018 law introducing new evaluation criteria for publicly funded scholarly institutions.¹² Private entities that do not rely on expert support of information science departments, if they wish to remain competitive, need to build their own technical capacity in this area. Otherwise, they will have problems staying on the ministerial list of scored publishers and offering authors attractive contracts.

4.2. Diagnosing Deficiencies on the Road to Open Access Book Publishing

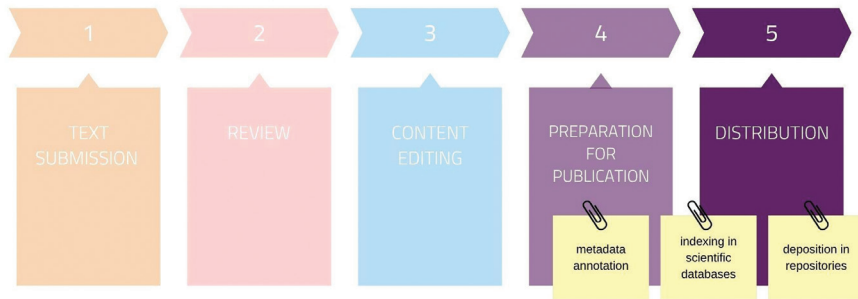
Primary information on publishers' and presses' needs and challenges in OA monograph publishing collected in the first two stages was a starting point for preparing scenarios for the design thinking workshop conducted by external experts. The workshop aimed to investigate the book publishing process in more detail to identify deficiencies and areas for accelerating changes. To provide a structured framework for the discussion on challenges and possible solutions, the publishing process was mapped and six main stages of the process were defined: text submission, review, content editing, preparation for publication and distribution (Figure 2).

The process for electronic publishing remains very traditional and runs a parallel course to the usual steps of processing books for print. The main differences and most challenging tasks from the publishers' perspective concern the last stages (4 and 5). During preparation for publication (4), the question of metadata becomes crucial: it is customary for publishers to add metadata to a publication (or have it added by external support bodies such as a university library) as soon as the final version is created, i.e. at the end of the technical processing stage. However, experts working with databases point out that weaving this task as early as possible could effectively streamline the process and improve the quality of the final deposited metadata (Rosiński, 2024). The final stage of distribution (5) usually lies entirely with the editors of the publishing house or the university bodies that support it. The

Fig. 2: Mapping the process of publishing monographs in open access with emphasis on the last stages. Author: Marta Świetlik.



Publishing process



basic form of distribution, obligatory for most institutional publishers, is to deposit the publication in a university repository. Then there is also the issue of the publisher or delegated university staff (librarians, open access specialists, promotion and distribution departments, etc.) having the metadata indexed in various databases. During the Discover phase of the workshop, we focused on the last two stages: preparation for publication and distribution. Participants pointed to several issues that constituted a challenge:

- Paper/screen dilemma

Workshop participants noted that many authors still believe in a printed book as a tangible and visually appealing evidence of their work. Publishers often share this viewpoint because selling physical copies remains their primary source of revenue, despite the enhanced traceability and measurability of usage in digital formats.

- Collaboration with authors

Publishers face challenges with authors who are reluctant to embrace OA and lack knowledge about metadata requirements. This issue is exacerbated by older authors' low digital literacy and resistance to new systems, complicating digital collaboration and standardisation.

- Financial shortages

Publishers are concerned about the high costs associated with publication, which in Poland are rarely covered from author grants.

- Standards and legal issues

The absence of regulations concerning online dissemination poses significant challenges for publishers. Licensing and contracts with authors publishing in OA are the most pressing problem. There is a need for a centralised authority to resolve legal-formal issues and provide guidance on licensing agreements.

- Visibility and metadata requirements

Visibility of the publication becomes the biggest need and challenge for publishers, which they define as even more important than sales income. The multitude of databases and formats creates a labour-intensive process for managing metadata, impacting daily operations. Multi-author monographs and updating older publications for OA further complicate this task.

- Technical capacity

Maintaining high-quality systems for publication deposition and retrieval is a significant cost for publishers. Additionally, a shortage of qualified staff and ineffective digital tools contribute to operational inefficiencies and scepticism about technological solutions. There are problems with technical capacity. Small entities in particular have low access to software and servers, as well as technical support. Implementing a dedicated piece of publishing management software is often too big of a challenge. Since their technical capacities are strongly dependent on the few people they hire, and considering their low technical and financial capacity, it is difficult for them to keep up with metadata curation, which is not an integral part of the editing process, but something perceived as an “extra” duty. As a result, in case of gold OA, they register DOIs in time, and in case of books published in green OA after the embargo period, there is not even a workflow in place.

In mapping the challenges, we found that some of the problems mentioned above depend on external factors, while some of them can be overcome through cooperation (Table 1).

Table 1: *Comparison of problem areas according to the possibility of their solution through cooperation models. Author: Marta Świetlik.*

Dependent upon external factors	Surmountable by cooperation
Paper-screen dilemma	Standards and legal issues
Authors	Visibility and metadata
Financial issues	Technical capacity

While publishers have limited influence over the perception and pace of change within the book publishing sector, as well as over the policies guiding authors' publication strategies, their technical capacity and legal expertise, when leveraged through collaborative efforts, have the potential to yield effective, community-serving solutions. The collaborative solutions we outline below exemplify such efforts by addressing key challenges associated with open access publishing.

4.3. Introducing Collaborative Models as a Solution

Collaborative models may allow for the creation of joint funding sources, which help cover the costs associated with metadata development, format preparation and distribution while reducing the financial burden on individual publishers. Collaboration allows the development of unified metadata standards or even a common database, which can reduce the labour involved in entering information into different forms while improving data consistency and accessibility. Common agreements on licensing standards can make it easier for publishers and authors to make decisions on OA publishing. Creating central support resources can make it easier for publishers not only to maintain their infrastructure but also to offer a more coordinated approach to solving technical problems. Implementing a single platform that also makes it easier for authors to provide metadata and manage their publications can minimise the difficulties associated with their lack of digital knowledge and skills. It can also support the creation of common educational programs to help understand and embrace the idea of OA.

Three solutions proposed during the Develop phase of the workshop emphasised the need for collaboration and knowledge exchange: 1) one database aggregating metadata of monographs, 2) a common instance of publishing

management platform shared by several presses, 3) a set of guidelines and good practices on metadata curation for Polish and Slavic languages.

4.3.1. Data Aggregator

A single entry point platform for aggregating monograph metadata was proposed as a solution to the dispersion of information regarding humanistic monographs' impact and citation measures. Aggregating existing humanistic output was mentioned as a first step to enhance the visibility of monographs. Participants of the workshop formulated ideas such as "Society of Good Data" – a collaborative initiative aimed at sharing good practices, technologies and know-how related to metadata curation. These solutions were considered a first step to increase visibility of humanistic monographs published in Poland and help editing teams with metadata curation and promotion of their outputs. Similar solutions exist in other European countries, e.g. in Austria, there is a common e-book library funded by the Austrian funding agency for science (Der Wissenschaftsfonds FWF).

4.3.2. Common Platform for Editors

Another initial idea was to set up Open Monograph Press on one server and configure the system to address common needs and based on common pre-discussed standards. The system (or separate instances for each entity) would be sustained collectively by a coalition of publishers and technically maintained by a selected infrastructure provider. Since one of the workshop participants was an infrastructure provider, the idea was supported and developed according to the existing technical capacity of this participating institution. One notable advantage of this solution is the facilitation of immediate metadata sharing. By utilising OMP's metadata mapping capabilities, the process of aligning metadata with the diverse formats required by various discovery services and databases can be effectively automated.

4.3.3. Common Standards and Good Practices

Apart from hard infrastructure solutions, developing software and improving technical skills, the participants showed a great need for standardisation and

knowledge exchange. They often described their struggle as a never-ending quest for good practices. Therefore, an idea of a simple blog, mailing list or regular meetups was picked up instantly. One of the results of the workshop was a follow-up meeting organised by the research team two months later during a book fair in Warsaw (OPERAS PL, 2023).

Researchers and editors can collaborate in the creation, peer review, and publication of scholarly books, while publishers increasingly assume the role of service providers, offering tools for formatting, distribution, and promotion. This collaborative process is often mediated through online platforms that support interaction between authors, reviewers, and other stakeholders. Such platforms also open avenues for innovative and experimental publishing practices, including the integration of open data and interactive content.¹³

5. Conclusions

This paper has explored the evolving landscape of OA publishing in the humanities, with a particular emphasis on monographs – a format that remains underrepresented in both digital transformation and bibliometric frameworks. Despite the central role that monographs play in humanities scholarship, they have largely been underrepresented in impact metrics, due to low levels of digitisation, openness and limited visibility of associated metadata, particularly citations. Building on the Polish context, where the contrast between well-established diamond OA journal models and the limited OA to monographs is high, this study has aimed to identify the specific needs, challenges, and opportunities facing academic publishers. Drawing on a variety of methods informed by participatory research design – survey, interviews, and design thinking methodology – the paper has offered a diagnosis of the current state and outlined pathways toward more sustainable and collaborative OA monograph publishing models.

This study demonstrates the effectiveness of a participatory, design-informed approach for mapping current publishing practices and collecting needs that are crucial for the development and implementation of tailored, scalable solutions. The findings indicate that, despite persistent challenges, particularly related to funding, technical capacity, and stakeholder coordination,

there is a growing willingness among publishers and institutions to pursue transformative open access practices. Judging from the outcomes of participatory research, it is clear that identifying sustainable models for OA monographs requires close collaboration not only among publishers but also with infrastructure providers, policymakers, and libraries – key actors within the evolving OA ecosystem. These collaborations can take various forms, from self-publishing initiatives, joint dissemination events, to partnerships with external service providers. In many cases, publishers cooperate to reduce costs by sharing resources, technical infrastructure, or jointly funding projects.

The insights are intended to support both national and international efforts to broaden access to humanities scholarship, enhance the global visibility and impact of monographs, and contribute to wider European efforts to reshape scholarly communication infrastructures and address disparities in OA implementation across disciplines and publishing formats. Moreover, building on the design-driven and scalable workflow tested in this study, future investigations could apply this methodological model to other national or disciplinary contexts, enabling comparative analyses of OA monograph publishing practices. Further studies could also examine how participatory, multi-method approaches influence stakeholder engagement and foster collaborative innovation in scholarly communication more broadly.

Research Data

The article utilised data from various sources. Research tools, such as interview scenario and research workflow were published in Open Access on Zenodo:

“Finding a sustainable open access model for Polish academic publishers – pilot research workflow”, <https://zenodo.org/records/14224943>.

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Notes

¹ OPERAS is a European research infrastructure for the social sciences and humanities (SSH). See several publications about the consortium: <https://www.operas-eu.org/about/bookshelf/>.

² <https://openbookcollective.org/> (access: 14.05.2025).

³ <https://www.openingthefuture.net/model/> (access 14.05.2015).

⁴ <https://www.designcouncil.org.uk/our-resources/framework-for-innovation/> (access: 7.05.2025).

⁵ The survey was conducted by Dariah.Lab in cooperation with the OPERAS-PL team in May-July 2022. The contact list was created by the researchers themselves, since there is no centralised database of Polish scholarly publishers, containing contact information. There is a ministerial list of entities included in the Polish evaluation system, but no further information apart from the publishing house name and the score is available.

⁶ We do not reveal their names due to sensitive data protection.

⁷ <https://wolnelektury.pl/> (access: 29.04.2025).

⁸ <https://www.openbookpublishers.com/> (access: 29.04.2025).

⁹ <https://www.designcouncil.org.uk/> (access: 29.04.2025).

¹⁰ All quotes are translated with DeepL and proofread by authors.

¹¹ OJS is one of the platforms for managing the editing process in journals produced by Public Knowledge Project.

¹² <https://isap.sejm.gov.pl/isap.nsf/DocDetails.xsp?id=WDU20180001668>.

¹³ Moving toward such a collaborative model is the Open Book Collective (OBC), a charitable organization that brings together publishers, publishing service providers and academic libraries. Its goal is to secure the diversity and financial future of open access book production and distribution. OBC operates on a distributive model that relies on small annual contributions collected from a network of research institutions around the world. This creates a solid financial base that allows for very efficient funding of open access books. In this model, no single institution incurs an excessive cost, and publishers and publishing service providers share revenues and resources among themselves. In practice, OBC members, including libraries, publishers and publishing service providers, work in a consortium. Together, they collect public funds from a wide range of institutions around the world, allowing for efficient funding of open access books. This makes research more accessible to the scientific and educational communities around the world.