CASE STUDY

The Association of Learned & Professional Society Publishers

(wileyonlinelibrary.com) doi: 10.1002/leap.1053

Received: 11 August 2016 | Accepted: 15 August 2016

'Being small is not a fault': Making sense of the newer generation of German-language university presses

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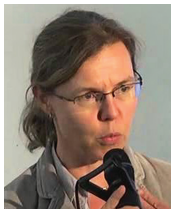

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Key points

- There are 33 university presses in Germany, most of them part of the working group of German-language university presses, *AG Universitätsverlage*.
- Göttingen University Press was formed in the late 1990s as an open access service for the university's scholars.
- A publishing house within the academic network is able to be more responsive to the needs of its institution and scholars than an external publisher solely relying on revenues.
- Taking control of publishing helps academia ensure that results will be disseminated in a way most beneficial to itself and society.

International discussion on university presses appears to be dominated by Anglo-American concepts and concerns, passing over many continental European presses that operate in their national contexts. In our article, we provide a case study of German-language university presses that highlights challenges and opportunities when publishing in languages other than English. A common thread across those university presses is their adoption of open access (OA) publishing. OA has become a necessity for them because the combination of publishing niche scholarship and a potential audience limited by linguistic borders serves to create market conditions that are not viable in a conventional model. Consequently, German university presses have adopted OA publishing earlier than many of their English-speaking counterparts and provide a developed example for some of the ongoing transitions highlighted elsewhere in this journal issue.

In the following reflections, we would like to show why several German-speaking university presses operate – similar to Göttingen University Press – as embedded publishers and direct service units for their universities and its members, mostly run by the university libraries. Being embedded refers to the fact that it is the university or the library deciding how the publishing unit operates (budget, personnel, publishing programme, target group, and so on.) and that the press is under the university's administration rules, which goes beyond reporting to a library director.

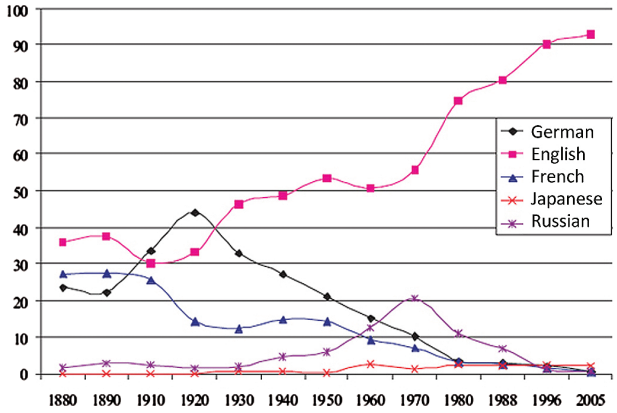

FIGURE 1 Global language ratio for scientific publications 1880–2005, compiled from several sources (see Ammon, 2010, p. 401).

Some presses are tiny and struggling, some of them acknowledged and successful. They focus on books, their publishing projects usually co-financed by authors and editors and disseminated in print through book trade and OA online. Most universities running a press with such a hybrid OA model consider the press an important aspect of their OA policy.

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

English is presently the predominant language for science. However, this is a rather recent development, if we place its beginning at 1665 with the first issue of the *Philosophical Transactions of the Royal Society*. German had long been among the dominant languages, reaching its peak in the 1920s as the most published scientific language in global academia (Fig. 1; see Ammon, 2010). When the national-socialist regime in the 1930s decided to strengthen the German scientific system by denying their internationally renowned performers, such as Emmy Noether, James Franck, or Walter Benjamin, their German identity and thus driving them out of their universities and careers (see e.g. Grüttner & Kinas, 2009), the former scientific lingua franca, German, came to a grinding halt. As scientific publishing is mainly a textual endeavour, such a severe blow on a national language had consequences for the entire publishing system. German turned into an internal language for the German-speaking area, big enough to be economically self-sustaining but too small to maintain its former role in global academia. And while scholars from adjacent language areas had published significantly in German instead of Dutch, Czech, or Danish, after World War II most of them switched to English (see Ammon, 2013, p. 255).

During this time, despite the obvious need for specialized scholarly presses, it was not the universities themselves that undertook scholarly publishing. Daniel Coit Gilman (head librarian of the Johns Hopkins University Baltimore and founder of the John Hopkins University Press) stated in 1878: 'It is one of the noblest duties of a university to advance knowledge and to diffuse it not merely among those who can attend the daily lectures – but far and wide'. In Germany, this 'noble duty' had been delegated to a well-functioning expert system outside of the control of academia. Renowned commercial publishing houses, such as C. H. Beck, Mohr, Herder, or Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, had started their enterprises as their respective university's printers with exclusive print rights and evolved into indispensable partners in the value chain of scholarly communication. Germany has one of the highest ratios of scholarly presses to active scholars in the world – around 600 publishers offer their services to academia, the vast majority with highly specialized programmes, resulting in 92% of them being small enterprises with less than 12 staff (see http://www.boersenverein.de/de/293243).

In theory, therefore, the existing infrastructure should offer sufficient publishing opportunities for all German-writing scholars. However, print declines and budget cuts for libraries have hit the German scientific presses hard, leaving the vast majority of book publishers dependent on subsidies organized by authors and editors. This is especially true for the monograph – the conceptual laboratory for Humanities and Social Sciences – and the 'long-form argument' for peer-to-peer communication within small target groups. In Anglo-American countries, the university presses have served those scholarly needs since the Enlightenment era, their publishing profile often based on thematic specialization and selectivity to control the ratio of internal to external authors and editors. The German case is different: there is no single dedicated university press in operation older than 1969 (the Universitätsverlag der Technischen Universität, Berlin). Currently, there are 33 university presses, with 25 of them being a member of the working group of German-language university presses *AG Universitätsverlage* (http://blog.bibliothek.kit.edu/ag_univerlage/), all of the latter with an OA policy and none of them with a dedicated aim to keep the ratio of internal to external authors and editors low. On the contrary, these presses seem to be in place to mainly serve their own institutions.

THE FOUNDING WAVES OF GERMAN UNIVERSITY PRESSES

To understand the current situation, let us look at a few cases of new press launches, reorganization, and closure of existing presses (Pampel, 2006; Halle, 2013; K. Braun, Oldenburg, personal communication, June 2016).

In 1954, the socioeconomic developments in Eastern Germany lead to the renaming of the former 'Staatliches Bauhaus Weimar' that had built on the work of pioneers such as Henry van der Velde and Walter Gropius to the 'University of Architecture and Civil Engineering'. The reorganization included the founding of a press for the modernized university to allow efficient research dissemination in architecture, engineering, and history of architecture, thus contributing to the upcoming socialist society. However, discipline-specific licensing requirements and

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expensive production to meet the target audience's expectations had limited the press' capacity to develop newer business models or fully adopt OA. As a consequence of budget cuts for Thuringia's Higher Education system, the university's subsidies for the press were no longer authorized and the oldest German university press closed down in 2014.

After World War II, several reforms of the Western German Higher Education system took place and led to a wave of new universities (e.g. Bochum in 1962, Ulm in 1967, and Bremen in 1971). The Carl von Ossietzky University of Oldenburg was formed in 1973. By 1979, several publishing activities within the young university and from associated scientific societies formed the basis of the BIS-Verlag, Oldenburg University's publishing house. From the start, it was an integral part of the university's Library and Information System (BIS). The then director, Hermann Havekost, stated in 1984 that the Library and Information System had to efficiently support researchers throughout the entire value chain of science, namely from reading to writing (see Havekost, 1984, p. 280). To date, BIS-Verlag has published around 2,350 publications, including monographs, proceedings, book series, journals, and digital publications. Since the establishment of OA, BIS-Verlag has embraced parallel, free, and immediate online publication of its print products, unless authors and editors explicitly reject OA.

Kassel University Press (KUP), founded in 1997 as a joint venture of a commercial publisher and the university, is an example of how in the mid-1990s universities started to embrace new distribution modes for electronic information while facing ever-tightening economic challenges such as rising journal subscription prices. These circumstances led research institutions to think of alternative value chains for scientific information and take over responsibility to support researchers not just in their role as readers and consumers but in their role as authors and producers. Consequently, in 1999, the university took over the shares of its commercial partner and placed the university press within the university library, making use of existing infrastructures and synergies. KUP offers its publications as free online versions within the IP range of the university, has a large share of the publishing programme in OA, and does not restrict its services to internal authors and editors.

Several other university libraries with a preference for OA followed, in line with policies such as the one from the German Science Council 'Wissenschaftsrat' in 2001, which recommended that universities should start their own publishing infrastructures (see Pampel, 2006, p. 29). Universities that embraced this suggestion include KUP 1997, Universitätsverlag Potsdam 1998, Hamburg University Press 2002, Universitätsverlag Karlsruhe 2003, Universitätsverlag Göttingen 2003, Universitätsverlag der TU Berlin 2004, and Universitätsverlag Ilmenau 2005.

THE CASE OF UNIVERSITÄTSVERLAG GÖTTINGEN

In 1737, Georg II, 'Elector of Hanover and King of Great Britain and Ireland', established the University of Göttingen to propagate the new European ideas of academic freedom and enlightenment. Today, Göttingen is one of the highest-ranked German universities, with over 26,300 students, 15,000 employees, and 478 professors at thirteen faculties. Former university members include Carl Friedrich Gauß, Heinrich Heine, Max Planck, Emmy Noether, Ji Xianlin, Edith Stein, Jürgen Habermas, and Maria Goeppert-Mayer. With the establishment of the university in 1735, the renowned printer Abraham Vandenhoeck was invited to start a press. Vandenhoeck knew about his value to the university and negotiated such beneficial conditions that the provost of that time, Gerlach Adolph Baron Münchhausen, ordered them to be kept confidential. And even if the university would have liked to exercise more control over Vandenhoeck's publishing programme, the printer was independent (see Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1960), not least because he had to sustain his business by himself. The company, Vandenhoeck and Ruprecht (V&R), is among the oldest independent scholarly presses in the world, strong in philosophy and theology, and an indispensable publisher for the Göttingen Academy of Sciences.

What, then, drove the Göttingen university library director Elmar Mittler, the university's economic computer sciences department, and two commercial service providers in the late 1990s to plan a Göttingen University Press based on electronic publishing, OA, and envisaged to provide a direct service to faculty? The library director shared the vision with other contemporaries that in the digital age each scientific result deserved to be published and that distinguishing its quality should be organized through platform functionalities and not around selectivity and artificial shortage of access (see e.g. Mittler, 2003, p. 118). PhD theses seemed to be a good way to make the case. In Germany, publishing one's dissertation is mandatory when achieving a doctoral degree. Most dissertations are highly specialized and have low economic potential due to their limited readership. Therefore, acquiring a doctoral degree required young researchers either to subsidize their publication at a commercial publisher or to commission up to 150 printed copies disseminated within a networked library exchange system. However, with more universities coming into operation, resulting in a less elitist higher education system and more doctoral students, the existing system started to create severe scaling and spatial challenges for libraries.

With the advent of digital technologies and networks, the old system was challenged. Would it not be more efficient to learn from the physics preprint movement and instead of shipping printed copies, replace it with shipping digital copies? In the early 2000s, this idea was supported by several projects and standardization activities aimed at creating a network of digital documents. All over the world, university libraries started to put infrastructures in place for authors to upload and archive digital research results that allowed easy access and usually open retrieval. Based on those new technologies and infrastructures, university libraries were able to 'insource' publishing to some extent. That insourcing process required a broader look at publishing than focussing on access to information, as demonstrated

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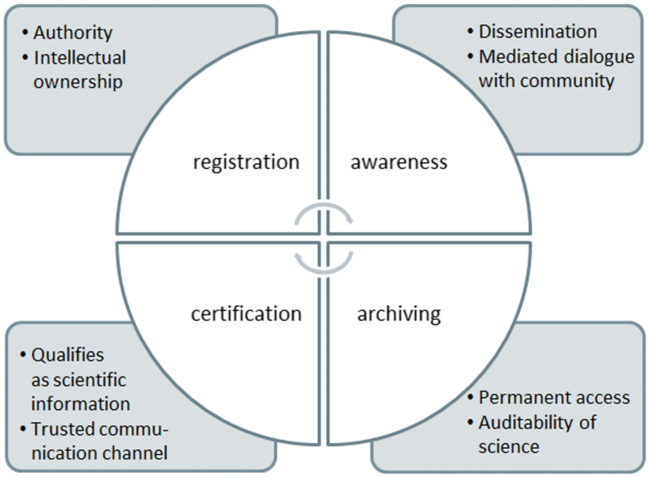

FIGURE 2 The four functions of publishing (adapted from Roosendaal & Geurts, 1998).

by Roosendaal and Geurts' model of the four functions of scientific publishing (Fig. 2).

Registration includes aspects of intellectual property, ownership, and authority; *certification* allows information to be eligible as scientific information through selection and review; *awareness* draws on dissemination; and *archiving* is a prerequisite for the progress of science based on referencing. It should be noted that the functions 'awareness' and 'certification' lead to a derived function of publishing – probably the most crucial for many researchers – and that is 'rewarding', such as offering tenure and promotion. In the case of the printed book, all these functions, including 'rewarding', have to be met and are often intertwined with the publisher's reputation. In the conventional publishing paradigm, libraries had to focus on their role of an indirect intermediary in dissemination and archiving, usually without being involved with researchers in their role as authors or editors.

When university libraries started to get involved in actual publishing, that is, running repositories for PhD theses, they took over responsibilities previously outsourced to an external expert system. By offering infrastructures for self-organized publishing, their role became direct. In Göttingen, it became evident that the library would not be able to fill that new role sufficiently if the publishing activities did not reflect the 'certification' function of publishing. Therefore, the group initiating the university press conceptualized new infrastructures, competencies, and processes going beyond mere document storage. These ideas were sketched shortly before the Budapest Open Access Initiative (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Budapest_Open_Access_Initiative) launched its statement that 'kicked off' the term OA and the OA movement. The first book of the newly found Göttingen University Press appeared in the market shortly before the 'Berlin Declaration on Open Access to Knowledge in the Sciences and Humanities' (https://openaccess.mpg.de/Berlin-Declaration) was issued:

> In accordance with the spirit of the Declaration of the Budapest Open Access Initiative, the ECHO Charter and the Bethesda Statement on Open Access Publishing, we have drafted the Berlin Declaration to promote the Internet as a functional instrument for a global scientific knowledge base and human reflection and to specify measures which research policy makers, research institutions, funding agencies, libraries, archives and museums need to consider.

Hybrid OA in practice

In the Berlin Declaration, we see a strong OA commitment for the Humanities, Arts, and Social Sciences disciplines. Thus, Göttingen University Press has deliberately been set up to offer beneficial OA publishing opportunities to book-oriented disciplines and their corresponding faculties. These disciplines rely on the book, the long-form argument in its physical form. Therefore, the press has always produced books as free online versions together with printed copies disseminated through the regular book trade. We consider this to be a hybrid OA model in which a free online version is accompanied by a toll-access printed version with distinctive functionalities.

Business model

For cost and processing reasons, the simplest OA solution is in place: online provision of print PDFs on the university's repository with only marginal additional effort to create and disseminate the OA version. Our books are produced in customized initial digital print-runs, usually around 20–50 copies, with payment made by the authors and editors (see https://www.univerlag.uni-goettingen.de/info/publishing-prices for author/editor contribution examples). Projects that promise to refinance themselves through print sales come with lower or no author co-financing. This co-financing does not include the usual overhead costs of an

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independent university press – after all, the press and authors/editors belong to the same institution. First-copy costs have to be covered in a set ratio by:

- authors/editors (publication charges to cover author support for manuscript preparation, formal quality assurance, artwork production, online deployment, title registration, and marketing plus costs for author copies),
- the press (e.g. the library with personnel costs and general services such as accounting or logistics), and
- the university as the overarching institution (overhead).

According to our estimation, the university indirectly subsidizes each book project by around €3,500 (full annual cost of press plus 60% overhead divided by annual number of titles). Our press covers all direct costs for production and dissemination, including direct personnel costs. Author consultancy, peer review, strategic development, and publishing experiments, as well as teaching, presenting, or writing on the press' activities, do not have to be covered by revenues as they are considered to be part of the library's OA service portfolio for the university. Several departments usually belonging to a press are part of, or blend into, the general library infrastructure (HR management, Housing, IT services, and Equipment).

Pricing model

Based on repeated decisions of the editorial board, retail prices of the press have remained modest (usually around 20% below average monograph price of comparable quality in a given discipline) to avoid dissemination being reduced due to overpricing or cannibalism among versions. Although the press could outsource handling of long-tail sales to specialized vendors in order to cut down on personnel costs and stock expenses, we have calculated that this would result in a price rise of around 40–50%, which does not make sense in the wake of a free online version. After the first print-run copies are solely financed by sales revenues. Retail prices are based on a mixed calculation of first-copy costs, expected costs for reprinting, and all handling costs plus general overhead surcharge.

Editorial board and quality control

Conventional book publishers continue to back up their low regard of institution-based OA publishing with its assumed inherent lack of quality control. For the success of our university press, it was therefore crucial to implement strong means of quality control in order to foster acceptance for the press as well as the underlying OA publishing model. To give Göttingen researchers the possibility to steer the press according to their community standards and requirements, each faculty has his or her representative on the press' editorial board. The board acts as the steering committee and supervises the programmatic orientation and quality assurance. In order to balance the need for awareness and certification function, we publish in three categories, 'Varia' for university publications outside of the scholarly programme, such as exhibition catalogues or collection guides; 'Universitätsdrucke', with formal quality control from staff; and 'Universitätsverlag', with formal quality control plus peer review by the editorial board and additional external reviewers if needed. The editorial board regularly discusses whether such an 'internal' reviewing system is sufficient or whether an external reviewing system would raise quality and prevent vanity publishing. So far, the existing procedure keeps on being approved. Being active researchers themselves, editorial board members feel eligible to act as reviewers for the press. They also argue that as researchers for any given evaluation, they are bound by research integrity standards anyway, meaning that they would judge the work of their immediate colleagues just as critically as the work of outsiders and that problematic scholarly cliques favouring each other could happen despite any institutional affiliation. Like other OA-oriented university presses, we are a member of OAPEN (www.oapen.org) as well as OASPA (http://oaspa.org/). For both institutions, quality control based on integrity is a prerequisite.

Licensing and rights

To ease the start of the press, immediate OA was not mandatory for all publications. However, only a small fraction of our authors decided against OA, usually with verifiable reasons. The press adopted a science-friendly exploitation rights scheme from the start – only as much rights transfer as needed and as little as possible no matter whether that would result in the potential loss of economic exploitation of unknown usage scenarios. We are aware that university presses forced to operate economically independent of their mother institution have to stockpile as many rights as possible to prepare themselves for an uncertain economic future. Göttingen chose a trade-off deliberately with the belief that a genuine science-friendly OA press would not be able to generate enough income to solely survive on revenues. Authors and editors transfer non-exclusive rights for the electronic version, resulting in Creative Commons licences for end users. This 'licence to publisher' gives the press some converting and dissemination rights, but only those that allow the press long-term availability and long-term archiving. To maintain the press' branding with high-quality print products, the press asks for exclusive rights for the print version and at the same time guarantees a generous reprint policy in all author/editor agreements.

IS THERE A LESSON TO BE LEARNED FROM THE GERMAN-LANGUAGE UNIVERSITY PRESSES?

The majority of university presses in the German-speaking area are members of *AG Universitätsverlage*, and practices in this group might offer inspiration to new Anglo-American presses, such as UCL, Westminster, or Amherst, for their potential future. The working group does not have a legal status but simply consists of

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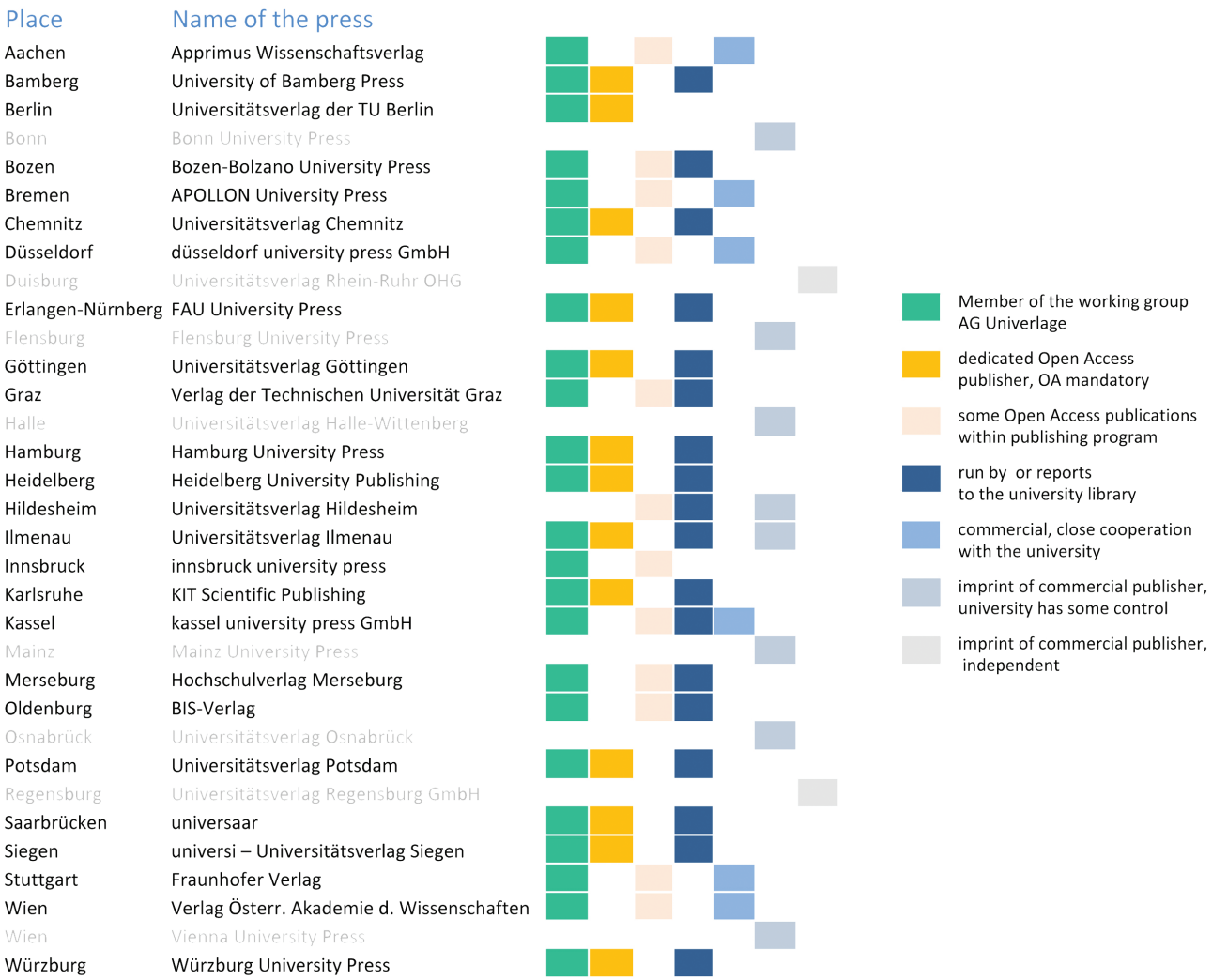

FIGURE 3 Overview of German university presses.

press representatives willing to cooperate based on common values and rationales (see http://blog.bibliothek.kit.edu/ag_univerlage/?page_id=912). Member presses are under the control of the university, sometimes organized as a service unit, sometimes organized as an embedded commercial unit with its own legal status (see Fig. 3). The average press in the working group started with the advent of the Internet, publishes around 44 titles per year in a hybrid model combining small print-runs in high-quality print-on-demand with free online versions, and does that with 1.8 Full Time Equivalent (FTE) staff, often supported by other service units from the university or library in charge of the press. The average press has some control over its income and covers some of its costs, ranging between the requirement to cover printing costs to fully covering all personnel and overheads. All member presses publish OA; 54% make it mandatory for authors and editors. The average press defines itself as serving the public and therefore enjoys fiscal privilege (58% of member presses do not pay income tax).

There are specific opportunities if university publishing expertise is not delegated to a circumscribed entity outside of the network – the organization model of most conventional university presses – but operated as a specialized node within the network. If the press is set up to be one aspect of an overarching OA policy for the institution, authors and editors benefit from a publishing agency that can 'change hats' whenever needed and consults them on publishing strategies. An embedded publishing unit within a larger unit can benefit from existing structures such as human resources, accounting, logistics, or IT services, often provided without or at a low charge. We are aware that fully independent scholarly publishers find fault with such indirect subsidization, but it should be noted that a publishing system depending on economic success will inevitably bias the scholarly discourse with the resulting bottleneck of scarce publishing opportunities. Either it has to favour those who have managed to be recognized already in their field or to discriminate publications with small readerships because they have a small language area background, high level of specialization, or come

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from emerging fields such as Digital Humanities. Due to the fact that embedded publishers are an intrinsic part of their institution anyway, they can 'instrumentalize' themselves as possible development partners for more liquid formats, new authoring tools, innovative publishing combinations, or dissemination for those new publications that, for instance, innovative Digital Humanities scholars would especially benefit from.

In our view, there is no need to grieve over German losing its position among the dominant languages of scholarly communication. The challenge of having to operate in difficult times has unintentionally provided us with the privilege of pioneering new approaches to institution-based OA publishing. We hope German-language university presses may offer a useful guide to a new generation of English-language presses. These embedded university presses do not act as second-rate publishing infrastructures competing with independent scholarly publishers. They stand for reclaiming and practicing the noble duty Gilman formulated: that academia must make sure its results will be disseminated in a way most beneficial for its own contexts and for society at large.

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