

## Open Science Talk No. 46 (2022) The whys and whats of OPERAS: a computer-generated transcript <sup>1</sup>

00:00:08 Per Pippin Aspaas

Open Science Talk, the podcast about open science. My name is Per Pippin Aspaas and I'm joined by Pierre Mounier, who also participated in another episode recently. Pierre, you are a representative of the EHESS in France and also an important person in several open science projects, not only in France but across Europe, actually. So, I would like to hear from you about something called OPERAS, another one of those acronyms. What is that?

00:00:45 Pierre Mounier

So, OPERAS stands for Open Scholarly Communication in the European Research Area for Social Sciences and Humanities. You can try to link the the letters: it doesn't match, but it's not a problem. So, this is a project that we, with some colleagues started almost 10 years ago as an idea to try to better coordinate the stakeholders and the actors across the European Research area who are doing something, working to support open scholarly communication in the Social Sciences and Humanities. The initial conversation was actually at one Frankfurt Book Fair. You know, at the end of day, after all the formal business meetings, at 5 pm, there is a ring of a bell when it's over and then everyone start drinking good wine and having informal conversations. I think that it was during one of these informal conversations amongst friends, basically colleagues, that we had the idea that the landscape in open scholarly communication in SSH was really fragmented across the different stakeholders. Not only across the different countries, but within the countries between publishers, infrastructures, institutions, libraries, policymakers, funders and so on. So, there is a tendency in this domain from the stakeholders to reinvent the wheel, to develop their own solution in their own corner. So, we identified intuitively that there was a gap for having an organisation that would support and help all the community to coordinate themselves better, to be able to speak with one voice, to share knowledge, technology, know-how, to work collectively together – and that's the idea of OPERAS. So, the thing that we could develop to address this gap was to develop a distributed infrastructure across Europe. Gathering all organisations – as many as possible – and developing collective work together through working groups. In OPERAS we call that special interest groups. We are dedicated to specific topics through projects. So, now we have several European projects together to develop different things – maybe we are going to talk about one of them specifically – and to develop services, because one of the functions, and the mission, of an infrastructure is to provide services to the community. So, we are also developing a portfolio of services that can be developed at a European level – that are relevant at a European level – and as a result of a collective effort.

00:04:06 PPA

How does this relate, then, to something else that some people have heard about, perhaps: EOSC, the European Open Science Cloud. Are you sort of two parallel institutions or is there some sort of mix between these two – I don't mean institutions, I mean projects?

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00:04:25 PM

We are much more modest than EOSC, because EOSC is covering a little bit of everything in terms of digital services for open science. It covers all disciplines, of course. It covers also very technological infrastructures and services. We at OPERAS are developing services for a specific topic, which is open scholarly communication in Humanities and Social Sciences – so, mainly publishing, things like that – and scholarly communication. This is a sub part of EOSC, so of course our aim, our objective is to support the integration of the services that are developed by our members or that we are developing as a distributed infrastructure to support the integration of those services into EOSC – we are a small brick in the great wall of EOSC.

00:05:28 PPA

Right. And what kind of people sign up for OPERAS? It sounds like a bit of a vision that was conceived in a collegial atmosphere. But, who are joining?

00:05:46 PM

So, now we have more than 50 organisations who are members of OPERAS, so legally OPERAS today is an association – it's an International Association under the Belgian law, an AISBL, which we consider as a prefiguration of another legal entity that we are working hard on building, that would be an ERIC – so, the ERIC is the legal status for European research infrastructures. But at the moment we are a membership organisation, so we have more than 50 members, and, what is really interesting – I think we didn't plan for that, but it really came out of the community itself – but amongst our members we have all kinds of stakeholders. So, we have university presses such as UCL Press, for example, which is with one of our members. We have universities and libraries such as the Arctic University of Norway, because you are one of our members. We have research organisations such as CNRS or the Max Weber Foundation for example. We have libraries, we have service providers. So, for example from Serbia we have an organisation which is providing Scientific Information Services – so really technical service providers, we have scholarly societies, etcetera. It's interesting to have a reflection of the diversity of the community within our membership – that's not only interesting, but that's also really essential to OPERAS, because once again, our mission is to help the community coordinate among themselves, taking ground on the diversity of the missions, the skills and the specificities of our different members. That's really important and really hard, because there is a variety of types of organisations across a variety of countries. So, you have a multiplication of diversity and you have to provide coordination mechanisms, coordination support to this diversity. But that's what makes the work in OPERAS really interesting.

00:08:01 PPA

And how does this work, work? I mean, we just came out of a pandemic. There wasn't so much of Frankfurt Book Fair meetings over a glass of wine and so on. So how has this been developed in that kind of circumstances?

00:08:24 PM

In fact, of course, we were impacted a little bit by the epidemic, but we had in-presence conferences before – there were, for example, two conferences in Athens that were really important to have people engaging with each other and working more collaboratively, getting to know each other better – but, from the very beginning we used Zoom calls and online conferences, so we organised one of our conferences completely online and it worked well. It was a lot of work, but it worked. So, the important point for us is to set up, let's say, a network of groups, smaller groups working together, which are coordinated between themselves. OK, now I go into the detail. So, the basic layer of OPERAS are the special interest groups that I've mentioned earlier. We have different special interest

groups which are dedicated to specific topics – we have one on business model, one on open access books, one on standards, one on best practise, one on advocacy, one on multilingualism, et cetera. So you see, those are also topics which are really important for the Humanities and Social Sciences, and the scholarly communication. Every member of OPERAS can join any group – so the members can participate freely in the work of the different groups, and then the groups are expected to identify together the state of art in their domain on their topic and the gaps in the landscape. They wrote and they published two versions of a White Paper for identifying the gaps regarding their topic. And from there we can set up projects to address the gap and develop services. So, basically, that's how it works in OPERAS. But we also set up a Political Governance Framework that ensures that the diversity of points of view of the community is well represented in the governance of OPERAS. So, when you take all the members participating in the different special interest groups all together, it creates what we call the Assembly of the Commons, and I insist on this title because it has a political meaning. This is the assembly of all those who have a common interest for the common good and we convene the Assembly of the Commons twice a year to discuss common topics that are interesting for them. Then you have other governing bodies inside OPERAS. So, we have a special advisory, a Scientific Advisory Committee with researchers. We have an executive assembly with 10 organisations who represent not only their organisation but also their country, and we take more commitments to support the development of OPERAS. So we have now 10 countries represented in the Executive Assembly, and of course they consult all the time with the larger OPERAS community. Then we have a General Assembly where we invite our supporting members and the ministries of the countries to also have a look at what we are doing, our budget, our activities, our strategic plan and so on. So, to sum up: what we tried to set up was a multi-stakeholder governance framework where all the parties are representing and represented and active and participating to developing together a common framework. So that's the way we try to achieve our mission, which is once again to coordinate the community, given the diversity of the stakeholders. So, I don't know if it will work eventually, but at least that's what we try to do.

00:12:45 PPA

You mentioned the word “common good” that this large number of people and special interest groups should work together for, a common good. What is that?

00:12:59 PM

So, the “common good” in my opinion is knowledge. Their common good. What do we have in common? What is the good that we have in common that we should take care of? We are working in a domain which is knowledge production. So, our community produces knowledge. So, for OPERAS – in Humanities and Social Sciences – it's knowledge about society, culture and humans. So, this knowledge is our common good in the sense that we should collectively take care of it – and taking care of it means a lot of things: it means to preserve it, of course, but it also means to make the best of it, to exploit it and to share it and to disseminate it to whoever needs this knowledge – to conduct their life, to be more human, to improve their life, basically. I hope this is the answer to your question. Our common good is knowledge about society and culture and humans. And as an infrastructure, our role and as an umbrella organisation with a lot of members, our common role is to take care of that, to develop a lot of services and exploit this knowledge, to take care of the knowledge and to make the best use of it.

00:14:32 PPA

Yeah. I guess opening up knowledge as much as possible would then be important in this context, wouldn't it? Do you have people there who would tend not to? Who would like more exclusivity and so on? Or are you all on the same page?

**00:14:55 PM**

That's a good question. I will answer your question with one of our Participation Rules that we ask our future members to sign, to subscribe to, if they want to become a member. So if an organisation, let's say a publisher, wants to become an OPERAS member, we have one requirement, which is not that this publisher has all his catalogue open access, all his or her content open access. The requirement is that this publisher has the intention to open up the content and to go onto the road to have open access. Why do I say that? It's because a lot of stakeholders, such as publishers – in the humanities, particularly – are reluctant to adopt Open Access, not because on the, let's say, ideological point of view, they are against open access, some are, but most of them are reluctant because they feel threatened by Open Access. Our role is not to gather inside OPERAS only those who succeeded in adopting open access and leave aside others on the road, because they are struggling in terms of business model or economic model or technical difficulties, or whatever, for example. Our role is to help them transition towards Open Access. So hence this specific requirement. You are not obliged, to be fully open access to become an OPERAS member, but it makes sense to become an OPERAS member if you have the intention to transition towards Open Access, and then we will help you. That's the basics.

**00:16:57 PPA**

Yeah, that's interesting. What I would like to hear towards the end: is there a contact point? I mean, if I were listening to this podcast as an individual researcher and I don't feel I have a like a network around me, but I feel this is interesting. How should I contact the project, to become a part of it?

**00:17:20 PM**

It depends what you are most comfortable with, it depends on your country. If you are Norwegian for example, there is already a Norwegian member which is the Arctic University of Norway – so, maybe you should contact some people in this university to start talking with them – with you, basically – about becoming an OPERAS member and how it can be interesting, what is your experience being an OPERAS member. You may contact Aysa Ekanger, for example, who could provide an insight from the inside, about the experience of being an OPERAS member. You can also contact the coordinators of OPERAS. We have two coordinators, I'm one of them. You can contact me, that's really easy, or Suzanne Dumouchel, who is my co-coordinator at the level of the organisation. But we also have other members – you can contact our core members who are a member of the Executive Assembly, who can help you having this conversation, and we have a Community Manager. Her name is Carla Avanzo. She works in France, but she would be happy as well to answer your questions and to start the conversation with you.

**00:18:47 PPA**

Pierre Mounier, thank you so much for explaining OPERAS to our listeners.

**00:18:54 PM**

Thank you to you.

**00:18:59 PPA**

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