

# Open Science Talk No. 50 (2023) Brill and Open Access: a computer-generated transcript <sup>1</sup>

00:10 Per Pippin Aspaas

Open Science Talk, the podcast about Open Science. My name is Per Pippin Aspaas, and today I'm joined by Stephanie Veldman and Arjan van Dijk from Brill Publishing. So first of all, welcome to the podcast, Stephanie. And would you mind introducing yourself?

00:30 Stephanie Veldman

Thank you so much, Per. It's a pleasure to be here. My name is Stephanie Veldman. I am the Head of Open Research at Brill. I come – I've been working in the publishing industry now already for a decade, which feels like quite a long time. And also I think a decade in which Open Access has really taken a big turn. So that has been really inspiring to follow throughout my career. I have – I'm a historian by background, so I'm working to make humanities publishing more open. Open Access is – yeah, it's a really lucky role to be in.

01:07 PPA

And how about you, Arjan? Who are you?

01:11 Arjan van Dijk

So I have joined Brill long ago. I celebrated my 25th anniversary actually a few weeks ago. About two weeks ago. And I am currently the publishing director for the history and social sciences and biology unit at Brill. And aside from that I have my own programme which is mainly focusing on early modern studies, so the the Renaissance, the Reformation, and also Latin American studies. My own background is in German studies, German literature. And what I really like about publishing is of course making knowledge available to a wide community. And Open Access I think is something that really has given that a large boost over the years and it's very nice to see that we can make authors happy by generating such a wide readership for them.

02:05 PPA

Excellent. First to you, Stephanie, could you tell us or our listeners rather: what is Brill? What are your strong points and what kind of entity is Brill Publishing?

02:18 SV

Well, we have been around for quite a long time and next week we are actually celebrating our 340th birthday. And we originated in the city of Leiden, sort of in tandem I would say, we developed with the University of Leiden, and so traditionally always a strong focus as a publishing business on humanities, on Asian studies, on Middle Eastern studies. And actually that was really our specialty. Because we had specialty – the typesetters at the time, really the old school typesetters, we were able to handle these complex exotic forms and typescripts, and we still have that knowhow in house today. But of course 340 years is a long time. So we have also developed since then. We have really grown our publishing business to – we are – traditionally we focused a lot on books and they are still really a big part of our business, about 50%. But we also of course have a lot of journals and we publish now more than 300 journals, and still mainly in the humanities and the social sciences. But

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<sup>1</sup> This is a computer-generated transcript of the podcast episode *Open Science Talk* No. 50 (2023): <https://doi.org/10.7557/19.7130>. The automated transcript has been proof-read by Huw Robert Grange and it is included here for the sake of Universal Design and improved discoverability by full text search engines.

we also recently acquired a life sciences publisher, so we are – we also do some biology. And I think for Brill, what is the – what makes it a great company is that, at the one hand we have these long-running traditions, both our expertise, but also journal or book series that go back for decades that we really have developed together with the community, which is really a privilege to be able to do. But at the same time the field that I work in, Open Access following these developments and trying to translate them to our fields and what do they mean for our fields. Because, of course, humanities and social sciences are unique fields really, with their own publication culture. And so following all these developments and then seeing how to - how can we best translate them to these fields is, I think, where we're at now as a publisher.

**04:25 PPA**

I should have said at the outset, a small disclaimer. So my relation with Brill is actually some concrete examples that – I'm also inside working at the University Library doing support for Open Science and other stuff. I also do some research on my own and I have published with Brill a couple of times, and both times have brought me in contact with Arjan here. Maybe we could have a concrete example from the Journal of Jesuit Studies. I mean, Jesuits have been around for centuries, as has Brill, and now there is a Journal of Jesuit Studies that just turned 10 years, and that's has been a success, hasn't it? Arjan, could you tell something about the Journal of Jesuit Studies?

**05:14 AD**

Yes, it's a journal I'm really very proud of. And I have to give a lot of credit actually to the editor of the journal, Robert Maryks, with whom I launched the journal – more than 10 years ago we started discussing it, of course, and then it was first published in 2013, immediately as a quarterly. The first year it was a conventional publication. So we sold subscriptions the traditional way. And then Robert Maryks moved to Boston College and Boston College, being a Jesuit school, really believed in making research tools available for free. Because that of course was also the Ignatian teaching, that education should be free. So Boston College said, well, why do we not finance the journal, so that everybody in the world can not only read it for free, but authors publishing in the journal are also not asked to pay. So right after the first year the journal was flipped to Open Access. And it has now been in Open Access for 10 years, because Brill also then converted the first volume to Open Access. And it really has had a very large impact because, as Stephanie earlier said, Brill publishes over 300 journals, and the Journal of Jesuit Studies is actually the third most downloaded Brill journal, something I think I'm very, very proud of. And if it hadn't been in Open Access, of course, research about the Jesuits is still interesting, but I'm sure we would not have been the third most downloaded journal. So it really has meant that anybody in the world with an interest in Jesuit history can access this journal, no matter where they are. So I think it has become very inclusive that way. And it has topics that I think are very interesting, ranging from – think about Jesuits and cartography, Jesuits and gender, Jesuit art, Jesuit libraries, Jesuits and slavery. So it really is very broad. And Jesuits and slavery, of course, is a very interesting topic, and the journal was actually picked up and also linked to by CNN when they had a topic about Georgetown and slavery. Georgetown is, of course also a Jesuit school. And so CNN actually linked to our journal which I'm again sure they would not have done if the journal was not available in Open Access.

**08:08 PPA**

Yeah, and another thing to say about this journal, of course, is the economics behind it. You touched upon it, it was Boston first, who decided to provide the funds for making it Open Access. But then you have switched to a more divided model where several institutions combined funded. It's something that is often called diamond Open Access, where it is free for authors to publish and also free for readers to read. But of course there is a cost somewhere, and this is divided then between different

institutions. Could you tell us something about the the current figures? How much do they have to pay, these sponsors of the journal?

**08:59 AD**

Yes, I'm very happy to. First maybe a bit of background as to why we changed the model. So when Robert Maryks left Boston College, the funding was also tied to the editor being affiliated with the College. So we all of a sudden found ourselves without funding, and of course that was a bit of a nerve-racking moment. So we considered our options, and one of course was to put the journal behind a paywall again. But of course that was not very attractive. So at some point it dawned on me that it would be hard to find a a single sponsor willing to pay. Because the sum Boston College paid us was \$30,000 a year. So a very significant amount. But I thought if we find six sponsors each paying \$5,000, we also reach the same amount. So that was our ambition. And we reached out to a number of universities and we ended up being able to find these six sponsors. And what I really like about it is it also really showcased that the journal was supported by not just one institution, but by six different ones in various countries. So we have – the Ibero is one of the sponsors, so that is a university in Mexico. We have of course universities in the United States sponsoring it. We have university Loyola Andalucía in Spain sponsoring it. We have the Adam Mickiewicz University in Poland sponsoring it. So it really has become a globally supported initiative. And the sponsors have all signed up for a five-year period, and we did that so that we did not have to worry about finances every single year again. And we've just now reached the next five-year period. So I'm currently trying to have the sponsors renew. Some already did, such as Fairfield University. And I think this is a model, to my knowledge at least, that is really unique in the humanities and perhaps even beyond the humanities. And I think we were very early with it and it's really working out well for us.

**11:36 PPA**

Yeah, I did some homework, actually. I tried to see how many peer-reviewed articles the Journal of Jesuit Studies publishes per year, and I did some some calculations. So the last couple of years it has been in the range of 25 or a little bit more per year of peer-reviewed articles, but then also lots of book reviews, which is very important in the humanities. So if we discount the book reviews and say they're all for free, but we take only the peer-reviewed articles, it would still be around €1,000 per article. So if this had been something called the gold Open Access or APC-based model, it would have been €1,000 per article. That's how I calculate it at least. So with figures like this, it sounds like in the humanities you can actually have a top journal that gets a lot of attraction, but it doesn't have to cost more than €1,000 per per article. But if you have had the APC-based model, that each and every author should pay, how would that have worked out? Would every author have been able to pay, do you think, Arjan?

**12:52 AD**

No, I don't think so. And that is also what I mean by Open Access really having made the journal more inclusive, because there are of course authors who get research funding, and there are always research funders like the the Dutch scientific organisation who are willing to pay for Open Access. But at the same time we all know there are plenty of researchers who do not have access to these funds and of course are not eager of paying that out of their own pockets because it of course does add up. And I think that is has really made the fields more democratic, more level, because everybody in the world can publish in the journal for free, provided, of course, that the journal meets our standards. And we do have every article rigorously peer-reviewed, just like any other Brill journal. But if the article is accepted, then there are no costs whatsoever to the author. And of course I have other journals in my programme other than the Journal of Jesuit Studies which are not in diamond Open Access. And it would be very nice if everybody had funding and could publish in Open Access,

because we see what that does to the readership. But the reality is that only those articles are published in Open Access that are written by authors who have access to funding or are part of a transformative agreement. So I think this has really been very helpful to authors.

**14:32 PPA**

Thank you. Should we then turn a little bit to Stephanie perhaps for the bigger picture of Open Access with Brill? I know that you have many journals – you said more than 300 journals – so if we stick to the journals first, and then we can move on to books, which is of course an important part, more than 50% I guess of Brill is actually books. But how does this Journal of Jesuit Studies... Is that a typical Brill journal, or are these diamond journals more exceptional so far with Brill?

**15:05 SV**

No I think that Arjan really hit the nail on the head when he said that this is levelling the playing fields. And actually this is also why we at Brill also started with diamond Open Access in the first place, and that Brill back in the day when Open Access first arrived, and when we first implemented the model, we also experimented with APC gold Open Access journals and we quickly found that copy flow completely dried up. So then we realised that of course most of our authors, they don't have – as Arjan just described – they don't have access to this funding, either because, you know, they are in humanities and social sciences. Traditionally there is not a lot of external funding available for publications. Of course the APC model is really a model that is really based on STM publishing culture. And the humanities – it's very different, the funding. Actually, also I would say that the lifetime of an article is very different in – as in the STEM you really want to publish your article as quickly as possible, because in the next six months someone else can publish something new and your research is already dated, whereas in humanities, I mean our articles are cited sometimes after 10 years, right? So that is also really a big, big difference. So when we realised that with this APC experiment that did not work, then we quickly moved to this diamond model and we were lucky to find sponsors like Boston College first. But then this crowdsource model, let's say, of the universities. But also we have other sponsors as well. So now we have about 33 journals, I should say – we actually have three new journals now – which are all diamond Open Access. And I think if we really look at our Open Access journal programme, this is really what works best. And we really only have one or two APC-based model journals, which are in biology, which is the only field where there is some funding available. That being said, as you said, we have 300 journals and 33 is just over 10%. So what about the other 90%? Of course, this is also an ongoing question for us, the question of scale. And I think that is really keeping everyone busy in the Industry. So for us, I mean, what we are also doing in addition to our diamond programme is the read-and-publish deals, or the transformative agreements, which – and you know, I will say immediately that they are not an ideal solution. I mean, they give – as Arjan said here – an opportunity for Open Access to a specific country or a specific university, but you know, that being said, we did figure that for us, if we look at our constituency, this is probably the quickest way for us to really move at scale. Because the others, we could also try more diamonds, but of course you are relying on finding sponsors. So for us, I think this mix now works quite well. About 25% of all of our journal articles are now Open Access. And of course, we hope that this will increase. So we are really focusing on these agreements as well to increase that proportion.

**18:26 PPA**

So the world is moving forward towards Open Access, but of course not everything is Open Access by now. Turning then to books and monographs, in some disciplines this is not a thing at all, whereas in the humanities and law and social sciences in general, it can be very important to have monographs and proper books out. And a couple of years ago, I was writing a book for publication with Brill with my co-author, who was affiliated with the Central European University, László Kontler, and we were

lucky to find the funding to actually make this book available Open Access with you. And the figure there was €10,000, for a book that was more than 400 pages long. So I mean €10,000 and 400 pages. But still, €10,000 is a huge sum, and it was for us as well, I have to say. But we managed to find the funds within our institutions. So this is something not called APC, but BPC: book processing charge. But then I saw on the website that general books would cost about €150 for the hard copy and €150 for the eBook copy. Quick calculation. Again, if you sell for Brill, I mean, if you sell 66 copies, then you have €10,000 in income. Why was that lucrative for you to ask for only €10,000? I mean, from a business perspective, perhaps you would have wanted to have it behind a paywall so that more people than 66 would need to buy it to read it.

20:12 SV

Yeah, that's a very good question. Well, you know, I think with books, well of course with books, first of all, it's always quite difficult to predict how much it will sell. You never know. I mean, you can take an educated guess, but you never know. Also, the way that we sell books is really – it's actually quite complex as probably – I mean, you know, you would say, oh, it's quite easy. You know we have this book, a library picks it and buys it. But actually the the world of buying academic books is quite complex. There are libraries who buy, you know, individual books by traders that we also work with, booksellers in countries. Or they maybe buy our eBook collection, or they, you know, there are all these new models now out there. Also I think there is, for us – and this is also really why we also got started with Open Access is that demand really came bottom-up from authors. And of course it's logical that authors want to have their book available in Open Access, that they want to reach that wider readership. And also for us, I think, you know, attracting that readership and then attracting more people to Brill and to, you know, your publications. That's of course also a big win, I think.

21:34 AD

Also the – so the book was published in my programme. Of course there is a lot of pressure on publishers, also from governments and from funders to publish in Open Access. And we try to comply, we need to comply, we see that this is, you know, what the world is moving to. So if we have an opportunity to publish in Open Access, we embrace it. It really is Brill's policy to do as much as possible in Open Access, as long as we can do this in a sustainable matter. I mean we still, you know, have our salaries, of course, that need to be paid. But if that is possible, we really want to embrace it. And the benefit, of course, for a publisher of publishing something in Open Access is that there is less risk, because each publisher with each book always has to ask themselves, well, is this a book that will sell? And you can never predict it. You can get a lot of experience, but in the end you never know in advance. And if you do have an Open Access model, that risk of course is taken away. So you already know that at least you will, you know, you will do well. And don't forget, at Brill we still publish both the eBook and the print version. And the print version is still commercially sold. And, while it is true that of course more and more libraries want eBooks, at least in my field at Brill and history and also book history, libraries still really like paper. And so in addition to the Open Access revenue, there will still be traditional income from simply the print book sales.

23:23 PPA

And the times, they are surely changing. And some figures again. I read on the the official Brill page that you publish about 1,400 books per year on an average year, which is quite a lot, of course. And last year a little bit more than 150 of these books were actually Open Access. So I guess the same kind of figure as with journals, roughly 10% or a little bit more. Where do you hope the future will go in terms of books? Would you like to see diamond Open Access books? Would that at all work? Or would you like to see this BPC model in the future? This is a question for you, Arjan.

24:12 AD

That's a difficult one. The BPC model again will of course exclude certain authors and that is a big disadvantage. So in that sense, I think the diamond Open Access model is absolutely more inclusive and democratic. That would be my preference. But it's also not easy, because you need to find sponsors. And as Stephanie also said earlier, in the humanities there's not that much money, and I think we were so successful with the Journal of Jesuit Studies because of its topic. So Jesuit universities really see it as their mission to make research available for free, and that ideological mission is not everywhere available, of course. So finding sponsors is difficult for various reasons. There needs to be money, there needs to be a belief that this is a useful way for an institute to spend money. So I think it's not – well, it's easy to answer that my preference is diamond, but the question is how realistic that would be.

25:34 PPA

How about you, Stephanie? Do you see diamond, or perhaps any other mechanism that would work for for books?

25:42 SV

Yeah, I think it's a very good question. You know, I think the beauty of books in a way is that it really does allow for all these approaches to sit next to each other, right? Because when I talk to research funders, or even actually institutions, universities, what they usually say is, yeah, OK, the BPC model is not equitable, but we want direct control. That you know what we fund, that that is Open Access, you know, and we don't quite understand how that works with diamond, so you know, OK, BPC is not ideal, but for the time being – and I think also for us that is – in a way, as a publisher, on the one hand you try to translate certain developments, but also you follow certain developments. So we follow this model because it's there and also, of course, because we don't want to lose the authors. And these are, let's say the ERC – the European Research Council – these are really prestigious projects. We work together with quite a few and we are really very proud of that as well. And so of course we want to accommodate that Open Access policy. So then it naturally – we publish a book in Open Access for a BPC. And also, as you say, in your case sometimes there's budget available. I think for authors it's also a relatively easy way if there is a budget. So that's the BPC story. At the same time it's, I think, clear that there is also now a lot of movement in that space. There's a lot of movement in the book space. There are also – again, that's what's nice about Open Access books is that it's very diverse – the landscape, there are smaller publishers that are really born Open Access, there are university presses, there are a lot of new models now. For instance, this model where you maybe flip your backlist and then use that to fund front list Open Access books. Of course, that's something that we are also at Brill exploring, that we are interested in. How can we, you know, leverage this model? But then for our own situation, because, again, I think it's about translating these models to, you know, our own practices and see – and our own scale as well. I think also with these models in particular what you see is that they are adopted by smaller presses so far, and of course for us the the scale is a little bit different. So then we would have to really see, how does that work? Another thing that we do is, we also offer to convert previously published material. So sometimes you know authors, they have budgets left over, or suddenly, you know, their book has been published already for a couple of years and then they think, hey, wait, I would really like for that piece of work to still be Open Access. So then we discount of course the BPC, because of course we already have a part, quite a part of that income. So we discount it based on the number of years basically that it was published, and then convert that book to Open Access. And I quite like that, and I think maybe there is also something there where we can maybe work together with universities on a bigger scale, you know, to use that model. But then also to fund the front lists. But yeah, there's a lot going on. And I get very excited by it. I mean, as you say, it's 10% now for Brill. I'm sure that will grow. On the other hand, I

think the beauty of books again is that they sit on their own. So, you know, with journals it's of course more complex, because you have a whole journal that you ideally want to be Open Access. But for a book, you know, a book is ideally Open Access. But then if there's a book that's not Open Access, OK, maybe we can live with that, right? So I think that's also reassuring in a way.

**29:19 PPA**

Interesting to hear. You know, with books, there are several stakeholders. We already mentioned some of them. I mean, the European Research Council projects that they fund, everything has to be Open Access there. But I know in the humanities there are some authors that actually live off their writings, particularly in the English language perhaps. So do you, Arjan, do you sometimes experience authors that would not want Open Access at all for their book, because they live off their revenue of sales. Is that – would that be a factor, do you think? Or would that be just very, very few exceptions?

**30:00 AD**

Not for Brill to be honest, because I think those authors who can live off their writing, they publish more – not as heavily academic books as we do. Our books are very scholarly. They have at least a third of the page as footnotes. So I love our books. I think we publish really interesting books, but they are not for a wide readership. They really are academic books and are used by other academics, by other students. But it's not the kind of book you will see in your local bookshop. And so the authors who are fortunate enough to live off their research, they write a bit more popular and they will choose a press like Penguin or what have you. So I think the authors we have are paid for by their academic salary. They will not get rich on the Brill book. So I think the prime interest our authors have is that the book is out, that it will be read by as many people as possible. It should be cited by as many people as possible. And of course, having a wider availability will stimulate citations. But they do not publish with us because they think, oh this is going to buy me a second house. Of course, when I have the Brill table at the conference, we hear quite often that our books are expensive and I understand that. But it is nice when I can then answer, well actually you can download this book for free on our website. So it makes my job a little bit easier as a publisher as well.

**31:55 PPA**

How about you, Stephanie? Any last thoughts?

**32:01 SV**

Yeah, I agree with Arjan. I think, you know, Open Access for a publisher like Brill, it's very, very exciting really, because it does expand the readership, also in countries, you know, in unexpected areas. So, you know, that it really opens up our scholarship to the wider world. And I think that's really beneficial for, you know, for everyone, also for our authors and fosters collaboration as well.

**32:31 PPA**

Thank you very much, Stephanie and Arjan, for coming to the podcast.

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