

# Numbers that tell a story: Measuring the impact of open access books

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## Abstract

Open access book publishing is gaining momentum, with more than 12,000 titles published worldwide, available from the Directory of Open Access Books. But compared to the overall number of academic books that are produced, this is still a small percentage, representing <1% of total scholarly and professional e-book output worldwide\*. With much research on the benefits to society from open access publication, what can we do to encourage more book authors to choose open access?

Springer Nature is a leading academic book publisher, and one of the largest OA book publishers – to date, we have published more than 600 open access books since launching our OA book programme in 2012. Feedback from our OA book authors shows that metrics are important to them, as the data helps demonstrate the impact of their research to funders, and also supports conversations with their institutions for career progression. However, as highlighted in our white paper ‘[The OA effect: How does open access affect the usage of scholarly books?](#)’\*\*, some authors feel that there is a lack of information around metrics and book performance. This information may be critically important in helping authors consider the benefits of choosing to publish their book open access.

\*Simba’s *Open Access Book Publishing 2016-2020* report

\*\*Springer Nature’s white paper *The OA effect: How does open access affect the usage of scholarly books?*

## Top 5 motivations for publishing an OA book

1. Greater visibility of research
2. Easier access to research
3. For equal access to knowledge
4. Wider / global dissemination / more readers
5. For a greater impact

Based on various surveys of Springer Nature OA book authors

## Metrics used by FWF-funded authors

In addition to preparing the partner impact report for the Austrian Science Fund (FWF), we surveyed eleven of their authors who have published an OA book with Springer Nature. Their top metrics for measuring impact were (in order):

1. Usage / downloads
2. Citations
3. Peer feedback

Metrics not selected by any author:

- Print sales figures
- Impact on public policy
- Funder/institutional feedback

## How is impact measured?

Opinion is divided:

**Authors:** Not all authors we have spoken to in various surveys, interviews and for our white paper *The OA Effect* were interested in assessing the impact of their research. For those that are, both quantitative and qualitative ways are important to them, in order to measure the diverse impact of their research.

**Funders:** Some funders track impact to understand the value of OA – but not all. One author reported that he had assumed that his funder “would be taking care of the impact” but found in practice that they weren’t interested in measuring impact. This was surprising to him “because they pushed for open access to increase readership”.

**Publishers:** It remains imperative for publishers to demonstrate the value of OA books if we want to support researchers in publishing more.

## Measuring performance can help to give an indication of research impact

The download figures are much higher compared to my non-OA work

- Gottfried Schweiger, University of Salzburg

I work with issues that have to do with inequality, so for me publishing a book that wasn't OA on the impact of international development would be quite unethical, because I know that people in Uganda would not be able to read the book. For me it was an absolutely critical component to the ethics of publishing.

- Helen Louise Ackers, University of Salford

I can recommend the book easily, students can simply download it and use it to study. It is much more read than if it wouldn't have been OA.

- FWF-funded author (anonymous)

It is the intrinsic duty of a research funder to enforce the transition to open access and open science politically and financially.

- Dr. Falk Reckling, FWF

We didn't do any analysis on the numbers for a comparative picture. However [...] Springer informed us that the book was heavily downloaded, in fact the largest number in the education sector during that quarter. Asian Development Bank has not been tracking the numbers for OA vs. conventional publications. While this was the first OA book, now ADB adopts OA across the board.

- Shanti Jagannathan, Asian Development Bank

My study can be used easily by students in the Global South. I have been invited for contributing to another book.

- FWF-funded author (anonymous)

We believe in OA publishing: it's convenient to have the books that we write available for free. There is a political drive in Norway towards open access to research.

- Prof. Aslak Tveit, Simula Research Laboratory

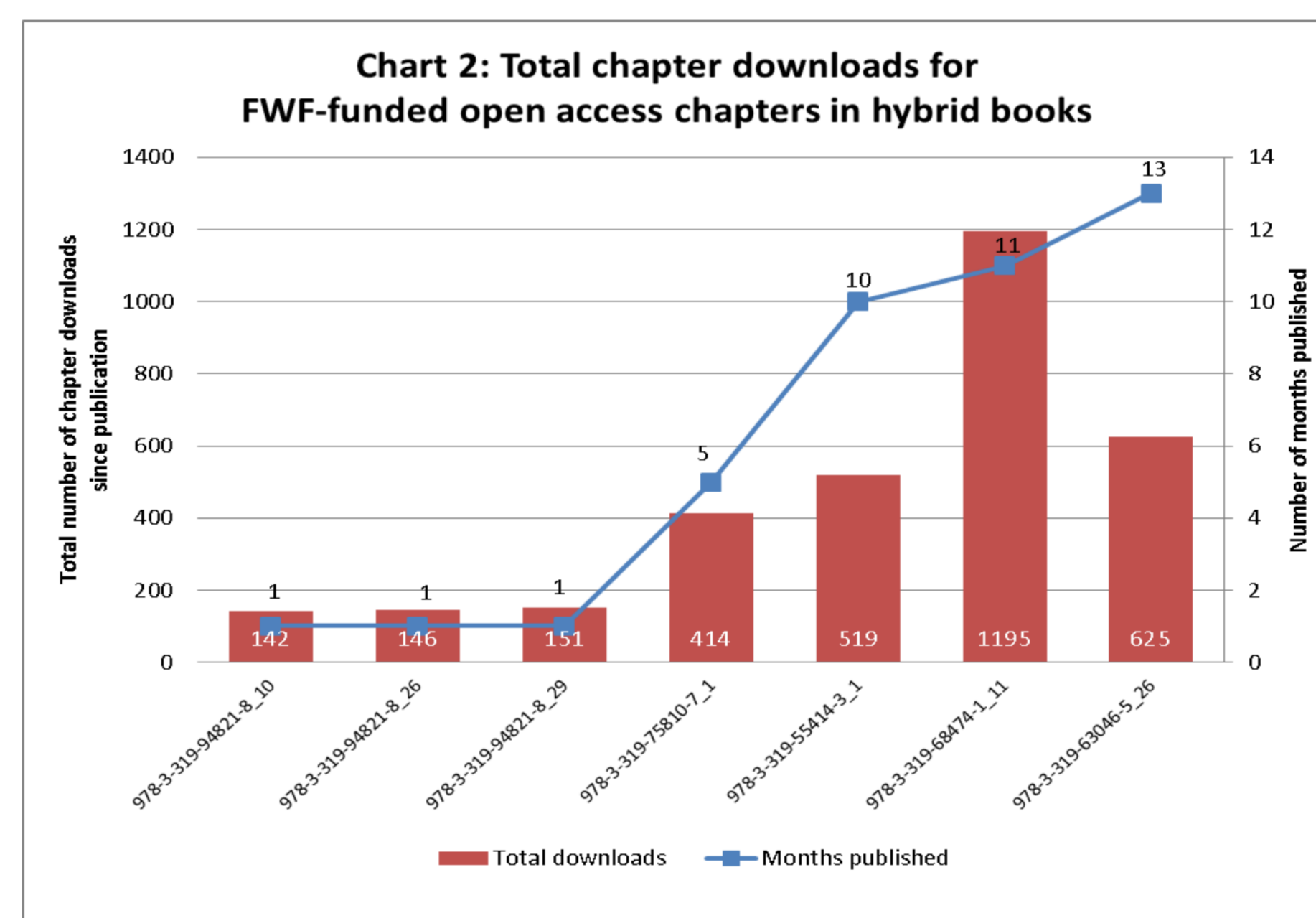
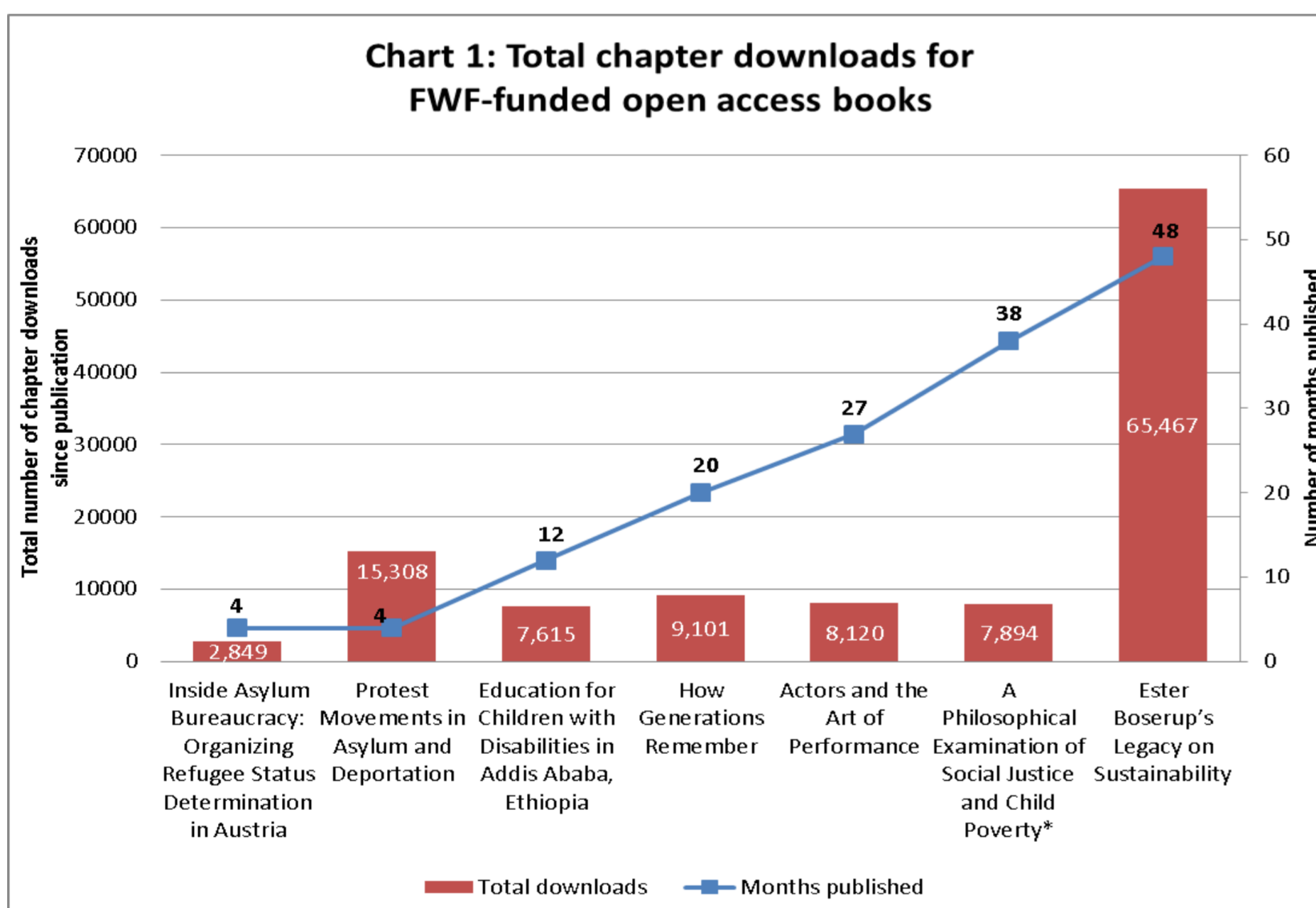
## Partner impact report

- In 2018 we piloted a new “partner impact report” for OA books funded by the Austrian Science Fund (FWF) and published by Springer Nature.
- The FWF is Austria’s central funding organisation for basic research and their mission is to strengthen science and the humanities in Austria. We selected them for this pilot report as they are a major funder of OA books.
- The aim of this project was to gauge interest from a funder’s perspective: are funders interested in assessing the impact of research they fund? What do they find helpful to do this?
- The report included the following criteria and findings.

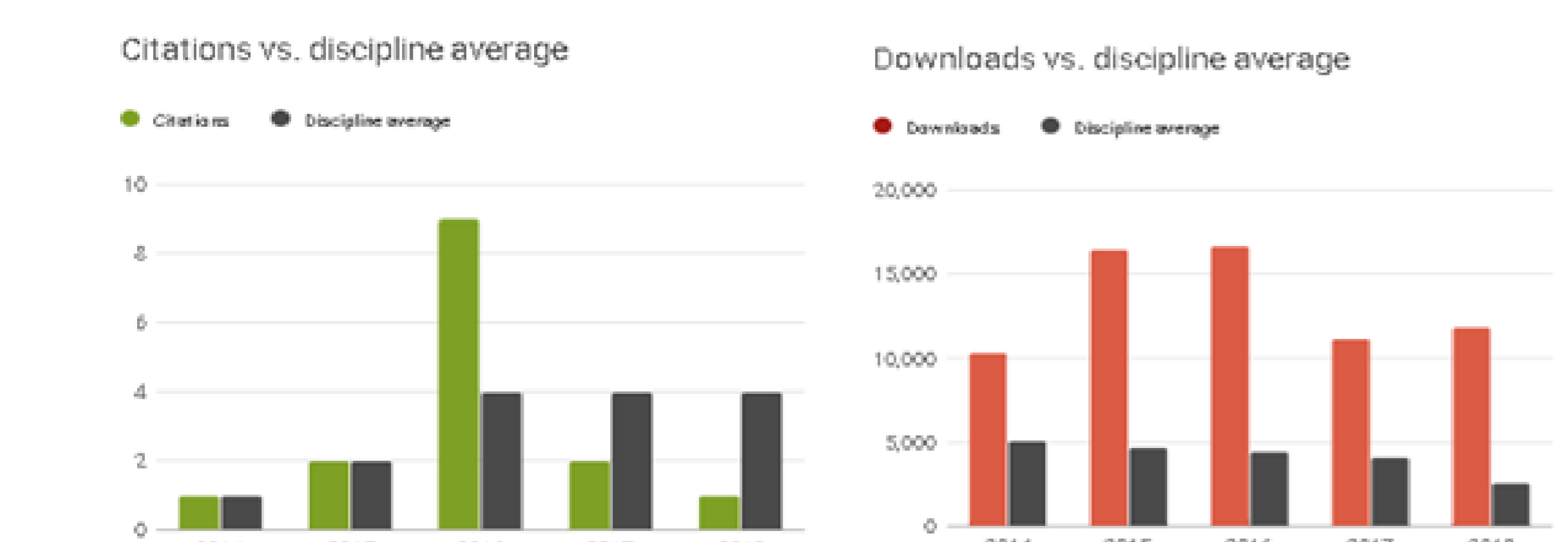
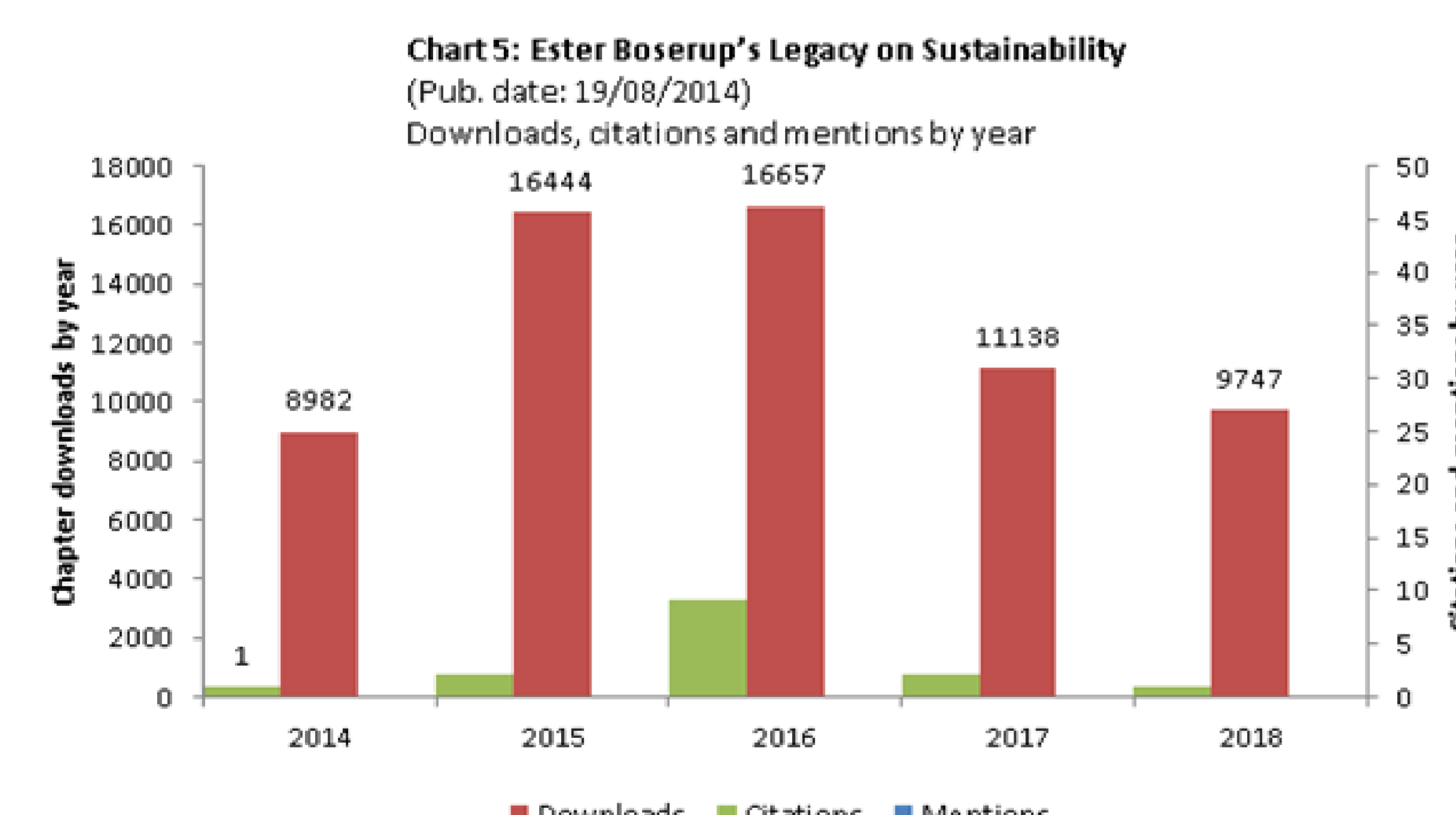


Reporting period	August 2014 – July 2018
# of OA books	7
# of OA chapters in hybrid books	7
Average number of chapter downloads (OA books)	1,077
Most downloaded OA book	<i>Ester Boserup's Legacy on Sustainability</i> : 65,467 chapter downloads
Average number of chapter downloads (OA chapters)	104
Most downloaded OA chapter in hybrid book	<i>A New Perspective on the Tree Edit Distance (from Similarity Search and Applications)</i> : 1,195 chapter downloads

### Excerpts from the FWF report



\*Download data missing for the first six months due to database issue



Data taken from downloads via SpringerLink and other metrics via Bookmetrix

The results are very interesting. For the FWF the results are not very useful because we only have this data for seven books (of almost 470 books published open access). So we cannot use the information in any way.

- Doris Haslinger, FWF

## What did we learn?

As a funder, the FWF does not assess impact for individual OA books nor communicate impact to researchers. When asked if any other publisher provided a similar report, they replied:

*The OAPEN Library provides reports of the usage of the FWF-funded books in the OAPEN Library. It is a COUNTER report. We use this data for short articles (eg 'Steady Rise in Use of FWF-funded Open-Access Books').*

However the OAPEN Library report does not include downloads from publishers' or other third-party platforms, so the data does not provide a complete picture. This raises the question of how we can get a fuller picture of research impact when an open access book is freely available on different platforms.

We have also learned that we need to talk to more funders to understand their needs regarding impact.

## About Bookmetrix

A free service that Springer Nature developed together with Altmetric. Bookmetrix provides any user with information on chapter downloads, citations, reviews and online mentions.

I have actually been addicted to looking at this page, the download site, every day. It's remarkable.

- Prof. BS Daya Sagar, Indian Statistical Institute

## Next steps:

Why is talking about impact for open access books important for the academic community?

- For researchers**
- Understanding the impact of your OA research will help you to make informed decisions of what publishing route to take for future research, and will help demonstrate to funders the value of your work, to secure future funding.
  - Talking about real examples of impact for your OA book will encourage other researchers to publish OA, so that research will continue to increase in impact as more choose OA.

- For funders**
- Communicate to the academic community the impact of research funded.
  - Strengthen the wider message that publishing an OA book leads to greater impact. In turn, more researchers will choose this publication method, enabling research you fund to reach more people.
  - Request data from publishers and other platforms about the usage of your funded OA books.

- For publishers**
- Continue to engage with funders and researchers to understand what measures of impact are important and how to share this.
  - Continue educating researchers about the benefits of OA book publishing, to encourage authors to choose this route to advance the pace and quality of research.
  - Inform researchers about the value that publishers add to the shaping and dissemination of their OA book
  - Inform authors about free services available to them for assessing impact, such as Bookmetrix or Altmetric's Badges for Books.
  - Discuss with other publishers the potential standardisation of reporting impact and usage.

Join the conversation - share your experiences and ideas with us!

This poster is available on Figshare at: <https://doi.org/10.6084/m9.figshare.7334501>