

1 Disclosing funding sources for open 2 access publication fees: the Open APC 3 initiative

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7 ABSTRACT

8 Publication fees in open access publishing hold a prominent place on the agenda of researchers, policy-
9 makers, and academic publishers. This paper contributes to the evolving empirical basis on open access
10 funding. It describes the Open APC initiative, in which German universities and research organizations
11 share their expenditures for publication fees. As method, the initiative uses existing open data tools to
12 aggregate and disseminate institutional spending on open access publication fees. In total, 29 German
13 research organizations self-reported funding of 6,279 open access journal articles, which amounted to
14 8,039,339 €. The average payment for each article was 1,280 €, and the median payment 1,209 €. Our
15 data-set comprises only 53 articles in hybrid journals. With an indexing coverage of 99 %, the findings
16 reveal that the DOI agency CrossRef provides both comprehensive bibliographic coverage of the funded
17 open access journal literature and disambiguated names of journal titles and publishing houses. We
18 show that authority control of these bibliographic information is particularly relevant for the comparative
19 study of the economical effects of open access publishing.

20 Keywords: Open access, open access journal, scholarly publishing, publication fees, article processing
21 charges, science policy

22 INTRODUCTION

23 General Background

24 The rise of open access journals matches the increasing relevance of publication fees in academic
25 publishing (Davis and Walters, 2011; Laakso and Björk, 2012; Pinfield, 2015). To cover these fees, also
26 referred to as article-processing charges (APC), authors tend to make use of funding that grant agencies or
27 academic institutions provide (Suber, 2012). Yet, how and to what extent these research support activities
28 are effective in terms of the number of supported articles and associated costs remains under debate.

29 One reason why the study on how much was being spent is in most cases difficult is that total
30 publication fee spending is fragmented across the budgets of grant agencies, research institutions, and
31 libraries, or, if support is limited, are taken from personal budgets. Asking 9,645 authors from various
32 disciplines how they financed publication fees, a comprehensive survey in 2010 revealed that the majority
33 of the respondents had access to research funding or institutional support to cover these charges. By
34 contrast, 12 % paid publication fees individually (Dallmeier-Tiessen et al., 2011). These findings are
35 consistent with that of other studies, adding that sources of funding mostly exists in higher income
36 countries, mainly to support research articles in the bio- and physical sciences (Solomon and Björk, 2011).
37 Personal budgets, on the other hand, are likely used to cover low price publication fees (Björk, 2015;
38 Solomon and Björk, 2011).

39 Another key problem in this regard is that funding for open access journals using publication fees
40 lacks transparency because the parties involved - authors, universities, funders, publishers - neither
41 release information on who pays for what nor the costs of publishing (Björk and Solomon, 2014), a
42 situation similar to the lack of transparency regarding journal subscriptions (Lawson and Meghreblian,
43 2015). Empirical studies examining publication fees so far obtained price estimates by surveying
44 authors (Dallmeier-Tiessen et al., 2011), or from journal websites. Using the latter method, two studies
45 investigating journals across a broad range of disciplines calculated similar price averages that ranged

between 904 \$ (Solomon and Björk, 2012) and 923 \$ (Walters and Linvill, 2011), as well as considerable price variances across journals and publishers. Accordingly, Solomon and Björk (2012) suggested to cluster fully open access journal using publication fees into several groups. In descending order, these are high-impact journals, followed by biomedicine journals from commercial publishers, large multi-disciplinary journals, and mid-price journals from commercial publishers covering a large spectrum of disciplines. Lower priced journals were published by academic societies and by publishers from low-income countries.

Nevertheless, it remains unclear which factors contribute to pricing in academic publishing. Generally, these might include article processing, impact, rejection rates, management and investment, and profit margins (Noorden, 2013). While fixed prices for individual articles are common, agreements between publishers and institutions can lead to discounts, and publishers sometimes waive publication fees for authors from low-income countries (Björk and Solomon, 2012; Lawson, 2015c). Other factors leading to variable pricing schemes include submission or page charges (Björk and Solomon, 2012).

Hybrid journals substantially add to this complexity of open access funding (Kingsley, 2014; Pinfield et al., 2015). These journals, allowing articles to be published immediately as open access after a charge was paid, rely both on subscriptions and publication fees as revenue sources. Although the uptake of open access through hybrid journals was described as lower and more expensive compared to that of fully open access journals (Björk and Solomon, 2014; Solomon and Björk, 2012), this model has gained attention through recent science policies, notably because of open access policies from the UK (Pinfield, 2015).

To address these problems of fragmented spending on publication fees and of in-transparency about what was being paid, some European research funders and research performing institutions have recently begun to disclose their payment for publication as open data. To our knowledge, the first research funders providing such data were the Wellcome Trust (Kiley, 2014) and the Austrian Science Fund FWF (Reckling and Kenzian, 2014). The not-for-profit company Jisc followed by collecting data from higher-education institutions in the UK (Lawson, 2015b). Disclosed as publicly available spreadsheets, these data-sets self-report what was being spent along with bibliographic information, including title, journal and publisher, and a persistent identifier to the publisher's version. Curatorial efforts focused on the disambiguation of publisher and journal titles as well as on detecting duplicates and persistent identifiers to the full text (Neylon, 2014; Woodward and Henderson, 2014). Parts of Jisc's cost data was examined by Pinfield et al. (2015). Although the average spending on publication fees remained stable across the universities, they found large price variances, as well as a varying number of articles UK universities supported between 2007 - 2014, confirming earlier studies that collected price information from journal websites.

Central funding for publication fees in Germany

This paper focuses on how much German universities and research organisationS spent on open access publication fees. In Germany, the Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft (DFG), the largest German research funder, has strongly influenced how universities manage institutional support for publication fees.¹ Before the DFG started to pay for centrally funded publication fees on a pro rata basis through its "Open-Access Publishing" program in 2011, and similar to the situation described in Canada (Hampson, 2014) or the UK (Pinfield and Middleton, 2012), only few central funds existed (Eppelin et al., 2012). Because the DFG has enforced a set of criteria grantees have to comply with, similar implementations for supporting open access publishing across German universities exists (Fournier and Weihberg, 2013). These criteria exclude sponsoring of articles in hybrid journals, and the funding of articles whose publication fee exceeds 2,000 € (excluding value added tax)². Grantees agree not only to reimburse the bills on behalf of the researchers they support, but also to look for ways to improve the handling of those financial transactions. This includes central invoicing schemes, and related agreements between university libraries and publishers, leading to discounts for the authors (Fournier and Weihberg, 2013).

Research institutes organised in the Fraunhofer-Gesellschaft, Helmholtz-Gemeinschaft, Leibniz-Gemeinschaft, and Max-Planck-Gesellschaft are not eligible for this DFG funding program. But in response, some organizations have adopted similar processes to support authors. The Max-Planck-Gesellschaft operates their long-lasting open access activities, including handling spending and publisher agreements centrally, through the Max Planck Digital Library (Schimmer et al., 2013; Sikora and Geschuhn, 2015), while the Leibniz-Gemeinschaft set up a dedicated open access fund in 2016.

¹Guidelines for the funding program can be found here: http://www.dfg.de/formulare/12_20/

²Guidelines for the funding program can be found here: http://www.dfg.de/formulare/12_20/

The evolving institutional support structures to cover open access publication fees has led to calls for an unified approach towards supporting open access journal publishing in Germany. The Allianz der Wissenschaftsorganisationen³, a science policy board representing all major research organisations in Germany, marked price transparency as one way to sustain an “adequate open access publication system” (Bruch et al., 2015). Reflecting Austrian and UK initiatives to share institutional spending on open access publication fees as open data, as well as professional discussions on open access publishing, Bielefeld University Library began to openly share its payment of publication fees in May 2014. After engaging with the working group “Electronic Publishing” of the Deutsche Initiative für Netzwerkinformation (DINI)⁴ other German institutions joined under the umbrella of the Open APC initiative soon after.

Research question

The aim of the study was to examine how much German universities and research organisations spent on open access publication fees until 2015. Using self-reported cost data from the Open APC initiative, the analysis focused on the amount that was being spent on publication fees, and compared these expenditure with data from related Austrian and UK initiatives, both in terms of size and the proportion of articles being published in fully and hybrid open access journals. We also asked how thoroughly self-reported articles were indexed in Crossref, a DOI minting agency for scholarly literature, and analysed how institutional spending per articles was distributed over publishers and journal titles.

METHODS AND MATERIALS

We analysed self-reported cost data released by the Open APC initiative on May 13, 2016⁵ to assess institutional spending on open access publication fees in Germany. In addition to administrative data about the amount paid per article including value added tax, the reporting institution, and the year of invoicing, we used information about whether an article was published in a fully or hybrid open access journal as well as the recorded DOI from the data-set.

We fetched bibliographic metadata for each article from Crossref on May 19, 2016, on the basis of the reported DOIs. Although the Open APC initiative gathered metadata representing publishers and journals from Crossref as well, this information was retrieved at the time when the participating institutions submitted their expenses. The Open APC initiative kept track of the date when these data-sets were submitted with Git, a version control system, increasingly used for enabling reproducible research (Ram, 2013), and made this information available via GitHub to be transparent over time. However, during these data collection activities Crossref had regularly updated metadata to represent ongoing mergers of publishing houses. A prominent example in this regard was the merger of the two large publishing houses Springer Business + Media and Nature Publishing Group announced on May 6, 2015, that operated as Springer Nature at the time of our study. To reflect these dynamics in academic publishing, we decided to retrieve updated metadata from Crossref for the whole Open APC data-set instead of re-using the historical publisher and journal information contained in the Open APC data-set.

As a client, we used the R package rcrossref (Chamberlain et al., 2016), developed and maintained by the rOpenSci initiative⁶, to access Crossref’s REST API⁷. We requested the XML-based format `application/vnd.crossref.unixsd+xml` in which full and abbreviated journal titles as well as the ISSN media types, the International Standard Serial Number used to identify journals, were distinguished. It also contained normalised publisher information, thus avoiding confusion about naming of publishing houses other studies were faced with when working with self-reported data (Woodward and Henderson, 2014). In cases where no bibliographic information could be obtained, we used the Open APC values. Because Crossref was not the only registration agency for DOIs, but also the agencies DataCite and Medra minted DOIs for scholarly work, we furthermore obtained the DOI agency for each article with the help of the rcrossref client.

Data collection also involved obtaining cost data from related open data initiatives. To compare self-reported spending on open access journal articles by Germany universities and research organisations with that of other initiatives, we consulted the openly available data-sets from the the Austrian Science

³http://www.dfg.de/en/dfg_profile/alliance/index.html

⁴<http://dini.de/english/ag0/e-pub0/>

⁵<https://github.com/OpenAPC/openapc-de/tree/v2.4.3>

⁶rOpenSci: <https://ropensci.org/>

⁷https://github.com/CrossRef/rest-api-doc/blob/master/rest_api.md

146 Fund FWF (Reckling and Rieck, 2015; Rieck et al., 2016), Jisc (Lawson, 2015a, 2016) and the Wellcome
 147 Trust (Kiley, 2015, 2016). For analysis, we obtained the overall publication fee spending on both fully
 148 and hybrid open access journal articles. In the case of FWF, we gathered the cost information from the
 149 accompanying spending reports. We used the spreadsheet data to calculate Wellcome Trust's and Jisc's
 150 spending, and converted the prices from GBP to € in accordance with the average € foreign exchange
 151 reference rates provided by the European Central Bank. Our comparison between the open data initiatives
 152 focussed on the last two years 2014 and 2015. Because Wellcome Trust's spending was reported for
 153 the financial periods 2013 - 2014 and 2014 - 2015, we referred to the average exchange rates of the full
 154 two-year period as we could not determine the actual invoicing dates from the data. We excluded articles
 155 from the analysis for which either cost information or journal type was missing. In the case of Jisc's
 156 2014 data (Lawson, 2015a), for instance, we excluded spending on 2,812 publications that amounted to
 157 4.861.772 € from the analysis because no publication type was given in the data-set.

158 The data collection methods of the Open APC initiative and those of the other initiatives differed in
 159 some aspects. For instance, whereas the DOI was a mandatory element in the Open APC data template that
 160 the participating institutions were required to report, in the Wellcome Trust data a publication identifier
 161 was added as part of the automated compliance checks. Our first screening of the data-sets revealed
 162 that some articles lacked a DOI. For this reason, and as our main focus was institutional funding for
 163 publication fees in Germany, we decided to only compare German APC spending with that reported by
 164 other initiatives. We did not compare the distribution of spending over publishers and journal titles, or the
 165 indexing coverage in Crossref.

166 RESULTS

167 Cost Data

168 After excluding payments being made for non-journal articles, as well as articles invoiced in 2016, we
 169 retrieved 7,417 open access journal articles 30 German universities and research institutions financially
 170 supported between 2005 and 2015. As illustrated in Figure 1, payments made for open access journal
 171 articles grew over the years. While one institution supported 5 articles in 2005, the majority shared their
 172 expenditure from 2013 onwards. With 1,999 articles, the year 2015 was best represented in our data-set.
 173 However, the data-set contained 27 institutions that contributed their cost data for 2015 at the time of this
 174 analysis, suggesting a time lag between payments made and reporting these spending to the Open APC
 175 initiative.

176 Figure 1: Growth of Open APC Initiative

177 Among all articles, fees amounted to 9,627,537 € including VAT, the average payment was 1,298 €
 178 and the median value 1,231 €. Figure 2 presents the distribution of institutional spending on publications.
 179 We observed that 6,996 (94%) of the publication fees were paid in accordance with the DFG price cap of
 180 2,000 €. Most payment on publications ranged between 1,000 - 1,250 €.

181 Figure 2: Distribution of institutional spending on publication fees by German research organ- 182 isations

183 Figure 3: Institutional spending on publication fees by German research organisations per year

184 Figure 3 presents the large price variations. Publication fees that were paid by the German universities
 185 and research organisations ranged between 40 € and 7,419 € (SD 486). However, the average price paid
 186 varied somewhat during the period 2011 and 2015 (1239 - 1423 €). Average publication fee spending per
 187 article in Germany was 1,298 (Median = 1,231 €, SD = 486 €).

188 The number of APC payments per institutions varied considerably (see Table 1). With 2,856 reported
 189 articles, the Max Planck Society contributed 39 % of the overall submissions. By contrast, the universities
 190 of technology, TU Clausthal, TU Dortmund TU Ilmenau that recently begun to set up support structures
 191 for fee-based open access journal articles, self-reported low numbers of payments.

192 Table 1: Institutional spending on open access publications (in €)

193 Comparison of related cost data-sets

194 Table 2 compares Open APC spending data with that of the Austrian FWF, as well as with Jisc's and
 195 Wellcome Trust's expenditure. Prices were converted according to the average Euro exchange rate of the
 196 examined periods, and gathered for both fully and hybrid open access journals. The comparison reveals
 197 that the Open APC initiative lacked cost information about hybrid journals, whereas the related Austrian
 198 and UK open data initiatives could report a large share of spending on these journals between 2014 and

2015. This situation presumably reflected the importance of the DFG as funding source for publication fees in Germany. The DFG funding policy excluded support for publications in hybrid journals. Over the years 2005 – 2015, 3 out of 30 German universities and research institutions reported 60 hybrid journal articles to the Open APC initiative, representing 0.81 % of the overall supported article volume. In terms of the number of supported articles and the amount being spent on publication fees, by contrast, the Open APC data-set provided the most comprehensive price information for fully open access journals compared to what the Austrian and UK initiatives had reported.

Comparison of average prices suggests that publishing in hybrid journal was more expensive than in fully open access journals. Price differentials between these two categories were also reported earlier, indicating that prices for fully open access journals were typically lower (Pinfield et al., 2015; Solomon and Björk, 2012). In 2014 and 2015, the mean price for fully open access journals calculated from all data-sets was below the DFG price cap of 2,000 €.

211 **Crossref indexing**

212 To identify publication fee spending on the article-level, as well as to gather bibliographic metadata, DOIs were a mandatory part of the Open APC initiative's data collection activities. The participating institutions reported DOIs for 7,373 out of 7,417 articles. Using these DOIs, we retrieved additional metadata from 214 Crossref for 7,346 publications, representing 99 % of the total article volume. Articles for which no metadata could be obtained, were registered with the DOI agency DataCite (10 articles) or Medra (two 216 articles). For eight articles, our parser could not gather the XML resource, although these publications were registered with Crossref at the time of our study. Seven DOIs reported to the Open APC initiative 218 did not resolve.

220 **Cost data by publisher and journal**

221 We used the DOI to automatically fetch publisher and journal names for each article from the Crossref REST API. Table 4 shows the top ten publishers in terms of payments made that represented 92 % of the overall spending on publication fees. In total, payments were made to 139 publishing houses. In 223 comparison with data from the UK, some open access publishers have a greater share on total spending. Pinfield et al. (2015), for instance, reported remarkably lower numbers for the open access publishers 225 MPDI AG, Copernicus GmbH, and Hindawi Publishing.

227 **Table 2: Publication fees paid per publisher (in €)**

228 Most of publication fee spending in Germany was on articles published in Springer Nature journals, 229 most likely profiting from the merge with the open access publisher BioMed Central in 2008, and that between the well-established publishers Springer Science + Business Media and Nature Publishing Group 231 in 2015. Using the Crossref-Member-ID instead of the publisher name, we were able to differentiate between journals formerly published by Springer Science + Business Media and Nature Publishing Group. 232 In terms of articles, the majority of payments made were for publications in journals formerly associated with Springer Science + Business Media. Springer Science + Business Media journals accounted for 2,027 234 articles, representing 94% of the overall Springer Nature article volume in the Open APC data, and 92 % in terms of the amount being spent. Median publication fee spending slightly differed between Springer 236 Science + Business Media (1,355 €) and Nature Publishing (1,386 €). However, price variation was higher for Nature Publishing journals (SD = 848€) compared with that of the former Springer Science + 238 Business Media titles (SD = 313 €).

240 In contrast to Springer Nature, other well-established publishing houses such as Elsevier and Wiley-Blackwell rank lower in our analysis. Table 2, furthermore, illustrates the price variations across and 242 within publishers, which confirms earlier findings (Pinfield et al., 2015; Solomon and Björk, 2012).

243 **Table 3: Publication fees paid per journal (in €)**

244 Prices also varied within single journals. Based on the number of articles paid for, Table 3 illustrates the top ten out of 732 journals. Payments to these journals represent 45 % of the overall expenditure. 245 The multidisciplinary PLOS ONE and the journals New Journal of Physics, Atmospheric Chemistry and Physics Discussions and Frontiers in Psychology, all of which publish contributions from all branches of 246 their respective discipline, were also well represented in the Open APC data-set. In general, an estimated 14 out of more than 10,000 journals registered in DOAJ in 2015 accounted for up to 15–20 % of all 248 articles published in full open access journals (Björk, 2015) In the case of Atmospheric Chemistry and Physics Discussions, the large price range can be explained by the fact that this journal charges per page 250 and also takes the submission's file format into consideration.

DISCUSSION

In Germany, institutional spending on publication fees charged by open access journals has increased over the years. These findings are consistent with the general trend of publication fees as revenue source for open access publishing (Davis and Walters, 2011; Laakso and Björk, 2012; Pinfield, 2015). They also reflect the increasing importance of providing central support to cover these charges (Fournier and Weihberg, 2013; Kingsley, 2014). Similar to investigations of the expenditure on publication fees at an institutional level in the UK (Pinfield et al., 2015), spending size varies across the German universities and research organisations included in the Open APC initiative. With a proportion of 39 % of the overall number of articles, the Max Planck Society, a large non-university research organisation, supported most open access journal articles. This likely reflects the centralised support structures at the Max Planck Society where the Max Planck Digital Library has managed large open access agreements with publishers over the last decade (Schimmer et al., 2013, Sikora and Geschuhn (2015)). Many universities and research organisations, on the other hand, reported a remarkably lower number of supported articles.

To answer data curation issues while unifying spending data that were raised by the UK initiatives, re-using DOIs to gather bibliographic metadata from Crossref is a promising approach. In our study, Crossref thoroughly indexed open access journal articles disclosed in the Open APC data-set, providing publisher and journal titles for 99 % of the overall article volume. Making use of metadata from Crossref, therefore, reduces the extensive validation work of bibliographic information provided that the reporting of the DOI along with the expenses is made available through the data-sets, a requirement also addressed in other fields of the quantitative study of scholarly communication (Haustein, 2016). Drawing on Crossref would also increase the comparability of cost data to prepare future negotiations with publishers on open access agreements, because Crossref's metadata reflects the current landscape of academic publishing in terms of ongoing mergers of publishing houses or name changes. Comparative studies of publication fee spending using data on the article-level would also benefit from such an approach.

This study is limited in some respects. One is that we cannot assess whether publishers and journals granted publication fee discounts because the Open APC initiative does not track this kind of information. However, large price ranges of particular journals suggests that varying pricing schemes are in place, an observation also made earlier (Solomon and Björk, 2012, Pinfield et al. (2015)). Adding to this complexity, it is likely that some institutions only paid parts of the publication fee. Take for instance the journal *Nature Communication*. Charges reported to the Open APC initiative ranged between 2000 €, the DFG price cap, and 4.403 €. Although such payments made from several budgets are a proposed strategy to sustain publication funds at German universities (Fournier and Weihberg, 2013), these pro rata amounts cannot be recognised as such, leading to possibly flawed representations of publication fee spending. In another case, one university included its charges for participating in the German SCOAP consortia and presumably divided the sum by the articles published in SCOAP journals. In this national consortia, managed by the German National Library of Science and Technology, payments were not directly made per article. Instead, subscription costs between a participating library and a publisher were reconciled, and the reduction transferred to the consortia to finance publications in SCOAP journals.

It must also be noted that reporting to the Open APC initiative is voluntary. Therefore, not all institutions in Germany that provide central funding of publication fees contribute cost data to this initiative. In a qualitative survey, asking why German institutions are reluctant to share their cost data through the Open APC initiative, one institution feared that increase in transparency would allow publishers to adjust prices in their favour. Others pointed out that the workload to produce such a data-set could be too extensive (Deppe, 2015). As no registry of institutional open access funds or similar support structures exists, we cannot assess the number of non-participants in Germany.

Our analysis on how institutional spending per articles was distributed over publishers and journal titles indicates that open access publishing is heterogeneous and concentrated at the same time. While we were able to identify 139 individual publishing houses that were supported by the German universities and research organizations, the distribution is highly skewed. 92 % of open access publication fee spending went to ten publishers, being consistent with a observed high concentration of few publishers in current academic publishing (Larivière et al., 2015). However, our study could not confirm that publications in open access journals owned by traditional publishing houses account for most of the spending on publication fees as observed by Pinfield et al. (2015). Rather, open access publishers such as Public Library of Science (PloS), Copernicus GmbH or MPDI AG rank higher in our study than in the analyses of cost data in the UK.

One possible explanation why traditional publishers are less well represented in our study, is the lack of cost information about hybrid open access journals. 99 % of the overall article volume German universities and research organisations financially supported were published in fully open access journals. This presumably reflects the DFG funding policy which excludes the support of articles published in hybrid open access journals through many university open access funds. However, reviewing self-reported cost data from funders or countries that also support hybrid open access journals or open access books, we observe smaller proportions of payments in favour of articles in fully open access journals. Because open access publication fee spending is fragmented, it remains open to speculation whether authors affiliated with universities and research organisations simply avoided opting for open access when publishing in hybrid journals for political or economical reasons, or used other budgets to pay publication fees required to make their work open access through these kind of journals.

CONCLUSION

ACKNOWLEDGMENT

We thank Andrea Hacker and Ada-Charlotte Regelman for valuable comments on the first draft of this paper. We also thank Christoph Broschinski, Vitali Peil, and Dirk Pieper, the members of the DINI working group “Electronic publishing”, and all data contributors⁸ of the Open APC initiative.

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