

PALOMERA Interview

Date: 22.08.2023

General information

Gender: female

Stakeholder type (multiple choice, delete irrelevant):

- research performing organisations

Country the interview is focused on: Croatia

Language of the interview conducted: English

INTERVIEWER:

Okay, we're there. All right. So, we know each other, but for the sake of this interview and for the formality, if you could just shortly introduce yourself and tell me how your role relates to the Open Access Books.

INTERVIEWEE:

Okay. I'm a scholarly communication, and e-resources librarian at the [UNIVERSITY 1]. My interest in open access books started more intensely in, I don't know, 2018 when my faculty decided to... We had a press. It's not a university press, but a faculty press—so the management decided that we would go for opening up those books that were previously only available in print. And somehow the library got involved in the process and actually led the process that resulted in FF Open Press, a platform for open access books for our faculty. And that is a rather rare example. There is one more such project in [UNIVERSITY 1], and there are some new ones emerging. We are actively involved in making books openly available. Further to that, we are using open monograph press. Now, I've also done some research into open access books landscape in Croatia. I have some an overview. I was part of the group that was drafting the open science policy for Croatia that also touched on the books part. Unfortunately, it's still just a proposition. We are very much unsure of how will that resolve and whether the ministry will accept that, but that's one thing.

And now, recently, I'm trying to push for Croatian initiative for open access books. Five of the institutions gathered together. So we are trying to make a launch probably in few weeks. And we will try to first assemble a community of practice so that we can share experiences. We would like to, what's the word? Not lobby, but advocate for Open Access Books with our policymakers and with funders. And we would also like to work on the joint infrastructures for Open Access books. That's the plan. And that's my involvement.

INTERVIEWER:

That's great. I think that we will touch on lots of aspects that you just mentioned here during this interview, because as you probably know, that we are using the PESTLE analysis. We're going to look at political, economical, and I forget the others, but we'll go for them. Let me start with the political aspect of Open Access Books in Croatia. Before we go into that, one thing that I just remembered I have to confirm. The Palomira Project defines academic books as peer-reviewed. Peer-reviewed academic books, scholarly books, including monographs, edited collections, critical

editions, and as we say, other long-form scholarly works. Does this definition resonate with how academic books are defined in Croatia?

INTERVIEWEE:

Well, we when talk about... I think that this definition is a little bit vague about conference proceedings, because we usually consider them books as well. They often get ISBN and they are somehow treated. For instance, at my platform for my institution, I guess half of our books are actually conference proceedings. And in Humanities and Social Sciences, sometimes the distinction between edited collection and a conference proceedings is a bit vague and the types of peer review vary a lot. The other thing I think it's typical for, I don't know, Central Europe or Eastern Europe is that our peer review process for books is a little bit... It's open, but not in a way that open peer review is considered for journals, but in a way that identities of reviewers, they are not anonymous. Often, reviewers are not... They are reviewing a book, but actually, it's more like they are writing an appraisal for a book. They are sometimes invited, even by authors to write this review. And it's not the case that the reviewer will say, no, this book cannot be published. It's too bad or something. So it's more like you write why this book is important and then the pieces of those reviews will be published usually on the cover of the book.

And that's not just a Croatian example. I think there is an evidence of that in the literature, and it's a common practice in, I don't know, Central and Eastern Europe.

INTERVIEWER:

That's really something to keep in mind. I think that this difference in peer review. Okay, so moving on to the political aspects here. You started talking about it already. I wanted to ask about probably your national policy, actually. You say that it's there, but it's not really there. Can you please explain a little bit more what the status of this policy is and whether the books are in it? And if so, to which extent they are covered there?

INTERVIEWEE:

Well, we don't have an active open science or open access policy on a national level in Croatia. There was an initiative for... It was called like initiative for Open Science Cloud, I think, and it was approved. Well, the body that should bring such a policy is the Ministry of Science and Education. So it's the main policy maker in Croatia. And this group was and their activities were approved by the ministry. They even appointed a member in that group. And it was tasked to draft the Open Science policy for Croatia or open science plan or it wasn't strictly defined. And we worked for, I think, maybe two years already or definitely more than a year. And we drafted the policy and then it was submitted to the Ministry for the approval. And there isn't yet an official response.

And in this draft that we submitted, there was a mention of open access books because it was clear that otherwise all works funded, at least partly by public funding, should be made available in open access and with rights retention and under open licenses. But for books, there was also an addition where it was acknowledged that for books, we don't yet have actually the infrastructure or business solution. And that in the plan, it was planned that there would be activities relating to building infrastructure for open access books and also defining new business models for open access books because we already have solutions in place for journals, but for books it's very different in Croatia. It was touched upon, but I really don't know what will come out of that, unfortunately.

INTERVIEWER:

Okay, let's see. This is on the national level. I mean, it's not accidentally that I'm asking about national level because I think that you have this situation where it's very centralised, right? But I wanted to ask about your institution. Does your institution have an open access policy that has to do with books or there are no such regulations?

INTERVIEWEE:

Well, we don't have an open science or an open access policy that's called exactly like that. That deals with all books written and published by our authors. So something that's typically defined in open access policy, we don't have that in place. There are some other universities in Croatia that do,



for instance, Zadar, Split, and Rijeka, I think, and our university as a whole and our faculty, we don't. We don't have that. We have a regulation of the publishing activities in our institution. So this is something that deals only with our publications, only with something that we are publishers of. And there, I don't remember the exact definition. It's not like all books need to be in open access because there are books that would be typically something that is more like a textbook or a trade book that could stay in closed access and there is a possibility for embargo, but it encourages open access books. But it's just about our editions - not about everything that's written by our authors.

INTERVIEWER:

Are there any plans for establishing an actual policy or not really, or the regulation that you have is enough?

INTERVIEWEE:

Well, it would be good that we have. There is an action plan that talks about establishing some policies, but there are not yet actual activities going on. We are in a process of revising or bringing the strategy for the next period. Within that, I hope that we will... I will be part of that group, so I will try to bring attention to open access books so they are strategically covered, and also to have it in our strategy that we need to have an open science plan. Maybe something will happen, but not within a year.

INTERVIEWER:

Okay, I understand. Let me move to the economic factors here. I suppose that we are going to talk, in the case of Croatia, we're going to talk about subsidies. It's a lot. Can you explain a little bit what are the sources for open access books, if any, in Croatia, and how does the system work? If a researcher would like to publish an open access book, what can he or she do? Because, of course, some costs are involved.

INTERVIEWEE:

Yeah. There, again, there is a difference between books that are... If you look at books published by Croatian authors and books published by Croatian publishers, there is an overlap, but it's a distinction. So if we talk about books published by Croatian authors, there is funding available not from the ministry, but from the Croatian Science Foundation. So they are the main funder of research in Croatia. And they do have some, if you apply for a grant, for a research grant, you can claim a certain amount for open access publications. And they don't say if that is for books or for journals. Just publication. Yes. Okay. But I think I would have to check what is the cap. They have a yearly cap on that. And I think that it is insufficient for a typical BPC with a known publisher. So they generally, when you compare that to other national funders, they really have low the cost, not the cost, but the expenditures that they cover are lower than elsewhere. So it's not... It has to be a part of a grant. It's not like they have a specific fund It's just within the grant, for a research grant. And it probably can cover chapters in open access books. But for instance, for an Open Access monograph, it would probably be insufficient.

Within that grant, there is like another box of money where you can get some funding, but it's not strictly for open access. It's just for helping you. I don't know, you can get for help or cover a cost of proofreading or something like that. So a certain number of authors use that to cover. For instance, they will publish a book with a Croatian publisher and they will use that as a a voluntary maybe BPC or something to cover the part of the cost of the publishing process. But again, the foundation does not allow that to cover the cost of publishing of a whole book. So just some aspects of it.

So that's when it comes to financing author books. When it comes to publishers, they can apply for certain subsidies. But there are, again, here, the main financier is the Ministry of Science and Education. But still, there are some quite considerable funds also from the Ministry of Culture and from some local authorities or local public bodies or something like that. But those are smaller. So Ministry of Science is the main then the Ministry of Culture. And there you can apply for a subsidy and those are the publishers apply. But they are not specific about whether the book is open access or is it print or is it e-publication. There is no distinction up to now and there are no plans to change that, at least for the next period that we know of. I see. Okay. For instance, I don't know if you're interviewing someone from Slovenia, they have almost the same system of- I don't know.



INTERVIEWER:

Yeah, but I was just talking to XXX. I did Serbian right before our conversation. It's actually also quite similar what I'm hearing. They also have these calls for subsidies for publishers.

INTERVIEWEE:

And Slovenia has almost their call is almost the identical as Croatian, but they do want their books that they subsidize to be in open access. So they already have that stipulation. We don't, unfortunately. I hope that we will change that in future with this initiative. But for now, so those subsidies are for them, it's irrelevant. You can ask for a subsidy for open access book or you can ask for a subsidy for... But it's not that openness will bring you some additional points or something like that.

INTERVIEWER:

My next question was about funding some alternative models. Not only BPCs or APCs for journals, but we're talking about books, but some collective models, for example. Is there any support for that or is it not at all on the agenda?

INTERVIEWEE:

No, it's really not on the agenda at all. It's... Well, it would be difficult for Croatian libraries to justify such form of spending, first, because we are all underfunded. It's difficult to fund something if you are having troubles securing access to the subscribed literature or to print books, then it's difficult to go to your management and tell them, Well, we would like to voluntarily contribute to, however we feel ourselves. And the other thing, the logical place where something like that could happen is the National Consortium. But then again, they are financed mostly not from the budget, from the state budget or from the members, but from the European funds through project grants. And there again, they don't have the... They cannot justify spending something. So at the moment, it's very difficult.

INTERVIEWER:

I see. Okay, yeah. All right. Let's move towards social aspects now. I wanted to ask at... It's more of a general question that has to do with research assessment. How are academic books perceived in your national or institutional research assessment systems? Are open access books taken into consideration? Do you get some additional points for your book being open access? Is it incentivized in any way or not?

INTERVIEWEE:

Okay. So generally, for Humanities and Social Sciences, for Humanities especially, it's very much wanted that you have a book published when you are being evaluated. On the individual, so for promotions. When institutions are being evaluated for reaccreditation of their programs or for financing, then again, the number of published books is taken into account. But at the moment, openness doesn't play any role. It's not a plus nor a minus. So at least that it's not... If you publish a book in Open Access, it's not anymore considered of less value or something like that. That could maybe be the case, I don't know, 10 years ago. One good thing, and that's also maybe a political thing, but there is a change in the way that the institutions will be accredited for. We have a process of accreditation of study programs at the institutions, where institutions have to prove that they have quality of education, but also quality of research. There they are asked about publications, but also in the future, at least that... But that's not certain because there is a public... What is it called? The process of public... discussion

INTERVIEWER:

Tender?



INTERVIEWEE:

No, when the policy is being brought, before that we have a public hearing before it's finally approved. So it's still in that process. And it's probably that first institutions will have to have their open science policies and the institutions will have to have books and other publications in open access. So that's a good thing. So it's not something that's considered when promoting individual scientists or delivering financing to institutions, but with this accreditation process, that's something that is pushing open science with books also. So that's a good thing. Other than that, I think that generally, scientists are very divided in their views on open access books. With books, it's normally, as a humanities scholar, you need to have a book to publish, usually to be promoted. But with Open Access, it's somehow divided. There are a group of researchers who are very positive about it because they understand it raises their visibility very much and they care about that more than, I don't know, having their book printed and in bookshops. But for many, it's still the printed books that's very dear to them and they take care of that. And maybe one thing that we haven't mentioned, but I think it's very important for the publisher of books in general in Croatia, there are either institutions like academic institution themselves who have presses or some publishing programs or small private publishers.

We don't have large or maybe medium size. Some of them are medium-sized, but usually they are small size private publishers. They are founded as a company for profit, but they are not really profiting from book publishing, or at least not in a way that they could be independent on the market. They normally also apply for subsidies from the ministries and from other funds, or the authors help them in making a financial construction for a book to be published.

It doesn't matter that they are for-profit and private, they could still get some public funding.

Yes, because it's very clear that we are very small in terms of... Especially if you publish a book in Croatian on specialized topics, you have a really very limited readership. So it's a matter of cultural and national identity to help publishing survive. So irrespective of whether it's a for-profit or nonprofit company, it's still everyone understands that it's not really a profitable business unless you are publishing textbooks, but they are outside of this scope. But really scientific monographs or edited volumes are endangered species, so they are trying to protect it with different measures, but not always successfully. And socially, books published by private publishers are usually perceived as more valuable than the ones... You know, Because, for instance, if you are publishing with your own faculty or university press, they will be less strict with, I don't know, selection process or peer review. But for profit publishers, they tend to take more care. They edit text to add more value somehow, and try to... Also something that's not important for open access books, but for books in generally, they do more effort in, I don't know, promoting books, getting them into bookshops and so on.

Absolutely. Okay. Those private publishers have a label of being more quality, usually than then... so a little bit more prestigious. Yes. -i see. -in our small circles.

INTERVIEWER:

Understandable. All right. Okay. Now moving to technological issues. You touched on the issue of infrastructure. Is there any underlying technical infrastructure that might support the implementation of policy for open access books? I'm thinking about some publishing portal on the national level or institutional level, something like that.

INTERVIEWEE:

Well, yes, in a way. There are several institutions that are using Open Monograph Press or are starting to use it. And there is also a central installation of Open Monograph Press with the University Computing Center, which is actually a national, although it's under the university, but it's a national service provider. They're also the one who provide Hrcak (hrcak.srce.hr) platform for journals. So they have implementing open monograph press, and anyone who wishes to use it can go there and use it. But it's already, I think, a year that it was installed, but the pickup of that wasn't really strong. There is only one institution that has actively started to use it because for most publishers who are not professional, it's too complicated. So they would need more support with that or some, I don't know, it's not proving successful up until now. What is happening, though, is that more and more institutions, since we already also have a national infrastructure that is quite functional for repositories, and a number of institutions started to use their repositories as a place where they would publish books. That's something that we didn't plan when we were building this repository network. We didn't plan to use it like that, but it's somehow slowly happening.



And also, that repository platform gets quite a lot of visibility, for instance, in Google Scholar. So getting your book into repository will bring more visibility, for instance, than getting it into the open monograph press on this national platform. So what we will probably do in the future is actually to build this common access point for books based on repositories. Like an overlay repository that will consist only of open access books.

INTERVIEWER:

Okay, great. Okay, one more thing in terms of infrastructure support. What happens if you have a researcher who would like to go beyond the usual PDF? Add some multimedia or go a little bit more adventurous. Is there any support for something like that?

INTERVIEWEE:

Well, actually, not really. The only thing that I know, the technologically know, there are some institutions that do something on their own. For instance, we have a very active lexicography institute. They are working on online encyclopedias, and they are having their own platform. They're almost all in open access, so they're very pro-open, but it's a special books and they are not in PDF, of course, but they have their own technological solutions. Not very interactive, but at least in the world. There are some publishers who do E-pubs and they can get financial help for that from the Ministry of Culture. Not from the Ministry of Science, but from the Ministry of Culture.

INTERVIEWER:

Why is that? That Ministry of Culture is into E-pubs?

INTERVIEWEE:

I don't know actually how that. But they are also supportive of digitizing the old edition. I see, okay. -so probably somehow they also- It's somehow connected.

INTERVIEWER:

Yeah, okay, right.

INTERVIEWEE:

But it's also for new books. But then you have to find usually a private service provider who will provide you with a technical solution for that. You have to have additional funds and take care of that on your own. But those are really just few examples of... Actually, I know about one who is at my faculty, but they have a separate platform with some books in E-pubs. And other than that, I know that some people would like to, they would like to have some interactive books, dictionaries or something, but they have to take care of that on their own. There isn't established infrastructure for that.

INTERVIEWER:

I have something to maybe think about for the future. From the technological aspect, we are now going to the legal aspect. Let me come back for a second to two things, actually, to the national policy and then to your institutional regulations. What about licenses? Is there a specific license that is required or encouraged? And if so, what license? Are we talking CC-BY? Are we talking CC licenses in general? How is it regulated?

INTERVIEWEE:

Well, for the policy, what we drafted is the use of Creative Commons licenses, but we did preferably CC BY, but not exclusively. But what will come out of it? I don't know. Institutionally, we, as a default license, we use CC BY NC ND because at the time when we started, it was somehow perceived as the safest things to do. I was a little bit advocating for CC BY, but there was a caution. We generally use CC BY NC-ND. Also for edited books, authors retain rights for each chapter. While for monographs, it's a little bit undefined. In some cases, they retain rights. Sometimes they sign the contract where they sign away their rights. In that case, institution would take care of derivatives and commercial use, but there isn't yet a very strictly established policy on that.



INTERVIEWER:

All right. Okay, moving to environmental aspects. Here it's a big general question now. So, Iva, how do you assess the progress of the transition to open access books? And what do you think still needs to be done to make it progress better?

INTERVIEWEE:

I think that what's currently probably for Croatian publishers, well, for authors, if they want to take part in Open Access book publishing in commercial publishing, there simply needs to be more funding for that, which is difficult. But what could be done is a lot with Croatian publishers. Here the main, since I said that more than half of scholarly books are published by private publishers, and they simply operate in a different world and with different concepts in mind. So when you talk about open access with them, they usually are not aware what's going around outside of Croatia. And they have their own... They're not always against. So the thing that they sell books doesn't make them always against open access because they realize it's not such so much of a threat. But they lack knowledge of how to produce and open access books and what to do with how to market it. They are very good in marketing print books. But when it comes to... And it's not like an important thing is we don't have ebooks for sale, scientific ebooks for sale. So it's simply too small market, so it's not viable. So it's a jump from print to open access.

And they would need to have support for inclusion of books into scholarly indexes or making producing quality metadata or with legal issues, with licenses. It's simply something that's totally out of their perception or knowledge. They have different skill sets.

Providing them with a common infrastructure and also support in these issues, I think, would do a lot. I hope that that will happen. With institutional publishers, some of them are already quite good with publishing in Open Access. But again, there are many small institutions where this will be taken care by semi-professional stuff. And also knowledge and competencies should be very much enhanced in order for us to have something that's really standardized, interoperable, visible, and so on. Both in terms of metadata and visibility, but also for these technical issues like producing something else than PDF or using print on demand for open access, we don't have that. So it's not. I really think that it's more like raising competencies and providing some probably central point of support would do a lot for. Because we don't have... It's not like we have some financial incentives for not making books open access. It's just that we don't have capacities for making them open access.

INTERVIEWER:

Okay, well, perhaps this is something that Palomera could change. Let's hope, at least. That's the ambition here. Hopefully, yes.
Okay, those are all-

INTERVIEWEE:

And also, yes. The other thing that what Palomera could do because it's targeting a lot of national funders. If they would give more pluses for open access books, then that would also be an incentive for both authors and publishers.

In Croatia. Yeah, there is a reason to do it, actually. Well, I mean, there is a reason to do it other than that, but there would be an additional reason to do it. Let's put it that way.

INTERVIEWER:

Okay, great, those are all my questions. But for the closing remarks, is there anything else that we should be aware of when it comes to open access books in Croatia that I haven't asked about and you would like to raise this?

INTERVIEWEE:

At the moment, I cannot think of anything, really.

INTERVIEWER:

If something comes to your mind, we are in touch constantly. We're in the same meetings all the time or over email or whatever. For the next steps...



INTERVIEWEE:

Okay, one moment. I have one more issue that I think it's quite important that when we talk about these institutional small publishers, they very often publish their PDFs of the books they publish. They just put it on their websites. So it's an issue whether you consider that an open access books. So there are no metadata there. It's not really okay. It's maybe visible, but not through the normal channels. Through the Google, yes, but nowhere else. They often don't have DOIs or any other persistent identifiers, and there is nothing done with these books on the issues of preservation. So they are there hanging on some websites that could disappear and they often disappear. And the issues of standardization, using persistent identifiers and preservation of those books are really a big issue. They will just... That's maybe an issue.

Does it bring us back to this question of building capacity, more capacity and more-Yeah. -and more support in terms of actually- and common infrastructure.

INTERVIEWER:

Yes, it does. Okay, all right, good. That's a big gap identified here, I guess. Great. Now for the next step. I will have an automated transcript of this probably today. But the thing is, first of all, it's going to be an automated transcript, so I have to clean it up because I'm sure that there is going to be some outrageous things I've seen at all. But I'm going on holidays tomorrow. I am off till the first of September. You can expect me coming back with this transcript at the beginning of September, okay? Then, of course, you can have a look at it. If you want us to omit something, then we'll do that and decide on the final version of the transcript that will then be publicly available.

If in the meantime you have any questions, just write me an email, but I won't respond until the first of September because hopefully I will not open my computer then. Let's see. I hope so.

