

PALOMERA Interview

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General information

Gender: male

Stakeholder type (multiple choice, delete irrelevant):

- Research funding organization

Country the interview is focused on: Belgium

Language of the interview conducted: English

INTERVIEWER:

This interview is conducted as a part of the Palomera project and focuses on policies regarding open access to academic books. And in this interview, we will look at different aspects of this matter. So we will look into political, economic, social, technological, legal, and environmental. It sounds like a lot, but not to worry. I think that we can make it through. Before we start the actual questions, just as a warm-up question, could you briefly introduce yourself and also tell me how your professional experience relates to the issue of open access books?

INTERVIEWEE:

Yes, perhaps of open access in general and open access books in particular. Yeah, in open access, I have to say that I'm still combining a main job in science policies in the past. Until four months ago, at the level of the French speaking community of Belgium, I was the head of the directorate for months. I've always combined this more academic interest with very involvement in the policies at Belgium first French-speaking community, now federal level in open science. So it combines different parts of my professional life, if I may say so. But honestly, very big involvement for the last 15 years in open science, open access from my side. What could I also say is that, this being said, I never have had a full time working on open science.

It has always been part of more general. Yeah, when I was doing my PhD, perhaps. But in science policies, we don't have anybody in Belgium, at least in the science administration, only working on open science. It doesn't exist. I mean, but I've always been involved, including at the European level. I have been for several years now. That's a group that doesn't exist anymore, but the chair of the European Research Area Standing Working Group on Open Science, and this was also a strong involvement in open science during four years or something like that. And finally, what I could say, I'm not a stranger to Palomera because I'm a member of the committee which accompanies the scientific committee. So in a few words, this is what I can say in regard to my relationship with open science, open access, and now open access books that's maybe more limited because there are not so many developments. Unfortunately, what I could say, my involvement on the academic side was about the evaluation and the impact of the social science of the humanities and this framework.

We worked a lot to on how to study the diversity of outputs from the SSH. And of course, the book is still very relevant in several it's not only for SSH, but particularly in some disciplines in the humanities, and to a lesser extent in the social science book is still very relevant. So we had some work done or

some reflection or discussions during discussion refraction about the role of books in an open science context. I have to say maybe we will go back to this later in the conversation, but some pros and cons. Not everybody agreed back then about the fact that open science books should be promoted at all costs. And then from the policy level, one of the last things I worked on when I was at the French community, the Wallonia Brussels Federation, French community of Belgium, it was finding some funding, and fortunately we found some funding for a project which is now, I suppose, running. But I'm not directly involved anymore. I still have some contacts with some of the guys who are involved directly in the universities, which was the Acobe project about book publishing. It's a pilot action in the French community of Belgium to try to it's really a small-scale pilot, but to see if it's possible to develop.

We can discuss this later, I suppose, in the interview. But this is a pilot project about how to develop at university level involving all French-speaking University of Belgium, a platform for book publishing in all, not only SSH. And as far as I know, this was, at least for the French thinking part of the country, the only really real initiative I could mention. It's a very recent one. It's a currently running one, akab. So like Adobe, but with a C and not a D. Okay, I see.

Yes. In more than a few words, this is what I could say about my relation with open access books.

INTERVIEWER 1:

This is exactly why I was so persistent and really wanted to interview you, because you have a broad experience. And I think that it would be very helpful also to talk specifically to you to understand this Belgian context, where you have the French-speaking community and then you have the Flemish and how does it work, or how does it not work?

Or how do you deal with that in general? Okay, but before we go into that, just for the sake of definition, so I will tell you how Palomera defines academic books. So the Palomera project defines academic books as scholarly, peer-reviewed books, including monographs, edited collections, critical editions, and other long form scholarly works. Is this definition something that is also considered to be an academic book in Belgium, or are there any differences?

INTERVIEWEE:

Honestly, as far as I know, I'm not aware of any effort to have an official definition of books. When I worked on the Walonian and French Community roadmap to open access. I did it deliberately. I just left the definition as open as possible. So there's always this issue about our textbooks considered to be books in the full meaning of the term, but I didn't want because there were as many definition as people I talked to. So the only thing I could tell you when I was working and coordinating this roadmap, this open science roadmap of the French-speaking Belgium, I wanted to include books definitively and monographs, but I avoided it on purpose to define it.

It's not really an answer, but this is why I managed this issue with definitions, because there was no one definition, and from one expert to the other, they had a more or less broad definition of absolutely scholarly book.¹

INTERVIEWER:

Does this also apply to the peer review aspect of it? Because this usually is a given that it has to be peer reviewed, but perhaps not in your context.

¹ Added by interviewee after the interview: "I was referring to this excerpt of the BELSPO Open Science policy: "In the case of books, collected volumes, proceedings and other academic publishing venues, basic technical information and peer review procedures have to be transparent on the website of the publishing venue." [StratOA20171220_Combo_en.pdf \(belspo.be\)](https://www.belspo.be/StratOA20171220_Combo_en.pdf)"

INTERVIEWEE:

Okay. On this, once again, on the policy side, I'm not aware of a definition of books based on peer review or not.

INTERVIEWER:

Okay, great.

INTERVIEWEE

And as I said, maybe there are initiatives at Flemish level, which I know quite well. Of course, more than quite well. The French speaking side, I begin to know a bit more about the federal level, but I never worked for the Flemish administration, so I'm a bit less aware of all the developments in this regard. What I can tell you, it's my personal I mean, my opinion about this peer review issue and book publishing. And this also comes from those discussions we had in the COST ENRESSH Action, those very discussions I were mentioning to you that we had pros and cons and some interesting discussions with those colleagues who were mostly researchers in the social science and humanities. Not exclusively, but mostly. We never had an agreement that scholarly books in the SSH, I'm really emphasizing in the SSH means peer reviewed book for the very good reason that in many disciplines, for books, it's not the fact that it's peer reviewed that is an indicator of quality. Mostly it's the exposed reviews. When you had the book reviews in a book review on the journal, this is a kind of exposed evaluation of your book.

Not necessarily that you had peer review in the meaning of blind, double blind, even open peer review of the book. And in many cases in the SSH, what you have is something I'm not saying it's good or bad, but something which is in between editorial work and true peer review. We all know that usually not all the time, but I'm not saying it's easier to write a book than an article, certainly not. But for the peer review aspects, usually you work in a different ways with the editors than you work with the editors in the case of a paper or an article, at least in the social science and humanities. And this was something really coming from the discussions we had in COST ENRESSH Action. On the one hand, it's another type of relationship with the editors or the editorial boards in particular, when you have collected books and edited books. And on the other hand, there were many colleagues maybe no, I was about to say more from the humanities side than the social science side, but I'm not sure that we're always telling....., we have another system in the SSH which is not so much for books, having this peer review before the publication.

But what is very important is if you get a positive review afterwards. And then the second indicator, which is not, in my opinion, a good one, but this is the reality and particularly in fields like history, we have those prestigious names for journals. They also have the prestigious publishers. And if you manage to publish your PhD as an historian with Oxford, I don't know the brand of the publisher in the SSH and in the humanities in particular and in history even more specifically. This is, in my opinion, not a good one, but this is still considered as an indicator of quality. Maybe even more than the fact that it has been peer reviewed in the same meaning as peer reviewed for an article. So, yes, in a few words, this is what I could tell you. So I think that it's not efficient and I wouldn't say as a policymaker, I wouldn't base for all disciplines a strict definition of scholarly book based off the fact that it's peer reviewed as a paper, like a paper or not. Because the reality is that you have many very good books in the SSH which did not follow this paper-like peer review process.

So this is what I can say.

INTERVIEWER:

Absolutely. So, following on this thread of policy here, because you mentioned that you wouldn't add a strict definition to policy. So Mark, please tell me what's going on in Belgium. Do you actually have a national policy that includes open access books? Do you have different policies for different regions? What's going on?



INTERVIEWEE:

Okay, first I have to tell you, you mentioned not the conditions, but you mentioned all the contextual elements of this discussion at the beginning of our speech on this. Honestly, I would prefer not to be quoted by name what I will tell you now because absolutely, this is really background information for you to understand the situation. Currently, at the level of the science administrations, we are facing a very important problem in terms of just having the human resources to manage open access and open science. It's not a secret, I already told I discussed that a bit with Vanessa during the Connosc meetings or so. But yeah, now that I've left the French community, nobody's working on open science anymore. I'm not saying in the universities. And of course there are a lot of people involved in open science on the field, and it was the most important thing. But as far as I know, I've left this position, I was working on open science, and now they have a huge problem in human resource management. And I don't think there's someone there in this community to work on open science. Look at the Flemish side.

So this is a big problem and at the federal level now, I'm trying, but I have different things to manage. Of course, I'm not there as an open science expert or whatever. Of course this is part of my job. This has to be done. And I'm really trying, not alone, of course, but to try to reinvigorate a little bit the Belgian at the administration and policymaking level, you know, just going back to work basically, because there has been for quite a long time a problem in human resources. And we don't have, as we used to have regular meetings, discussion meetings between the entities. Of course we have this structure. But because of this very problem I mentioned to you, and this is really not to be quoted as such, we are facing a very huge human resource problem in the administrations and the policymaking level in regard to urban science.

Things are going ahead at the level of the universities, et cetera, at the funding agencies level. And so I'm not saying that Belgium is not doing anything in open science currently, it's certainly not. But we are facing this issue, and this is a big problem, at least at federal level. I will now reinvigorate things a little bit, but I hope that from September, or September/October, it will be possible to relaunch this process of discussion between regions, between communities, and with the federal level, of course. But for the last, I may even say for the last two years, it has been very difficult. That's what I can honestly tell you.

INTERVIEWER:

Okay, right. Where shall we go from here?

INTERVIEWEE:

Yeah, maybe there was another part in our question, and I didn't answer that because this provided you with some context. If you look at it positively, it means that we have the structure. The structure is foreseen for having this dialogue. Each community, so the French-speaking community, each region, the Brussels region, the Walloon region, the Flemish region, Flemish region and community merged. So you only have know, this makes things a bit easier. And then the federal level, I'm not speaking here about the German-speaking community, not that they are not important, but they have no real science policy, or at least open science, they don't have any universities. So I mean, they are a little bit out of this dialogue most of the time. For some of the aspects of science policies they are included, but not for open science, until now at least. So each community and region, as well as the federal level, which is not higher than the other level, which is just one entity among the others. This is important to understand because sometimes people think spontaneously that they tell me, oh, congratulations, now we are working for the federal. You can decide all the things or the other ones. Not at all. I would even say that, okay, I took this position because I think this is a challenging, interesting job. But in terms of what we can do in the last years, the tendency in Belgium is to give the regions more power and less power to the federal level, and this is also true for research, you see? So in any case, federal level is one entity among the others with its own science policies and its own open science policy. This is important to understand, okay? And in no way can the federal level tell the other colleagues okay, guys, now we decided this at federal level we have a law and you have to follow not at all, we have laws, the regions have decreased and for these types of policy they are equivalent get you have one more important than the other. Of course, we try to harmonize as far as



possible. For example, when we had in the French community a decree on open access, which was super important because it mandated for papers or articles, not for books, unfortunately, but the use of repositories and a lot of interesting things we had at the same time.

And it was because it was well-coordinated at the federal level, a new law on copyrights which allows secondary publication rights for the it's not optimal, it could be better. But at least we have this interesting combination of a decree and a law, you see? But it is only because we have coordination between us. We have a coordination group. We have a coordination group on open science where the people in chat open science, in their entity, in their region, in their community, at the federal level, meet together. And we don't need to harmonize but we try to be complementary as far as it's possible at political level this is a bit the idea. So you have different policies. There's absolutely no obligation to harmonize, but in the practice we really try to dialogue at the European level. We need to have a common position on some matters. It's not possible that Flanders say EOSC is the best thing in the world and that Wallonia says don't talk anymore about that. You see, we have to harmonize, but in terms of policies and implementation of policies, we can do whatever we wish. But then we have this consultation group, discussion group, where we really try to present the latest developments and try to agree on positions.

And we also try and manage to be complementary. If my Flemish colleague and this is a problem now, because he's sick, as I explained, is the one representing Belgium at the EOSC board, for example, it means that I won't be the guy going to the EOSC board, I will be the one going to CoNOSC meeting for yeah, we really try to be efficient. Of course, the idea is not that everybody is doing everything. We try to be complementary and then, because we have this group, we communicate all the relevant information. But as I told you for the last two years, because of sickness, because of problem of human resources, it's not really working anymore, and that's a big issue.

INTERVIEWER:

Yeah, I understand a follow-up question for this, because you mentioned the existing policies. Do these existing policies, do they mention books specifically, or are they completely focused on articles?

INTERVIEWEE:

Okay, I will focus here because at the federal level, there is a policy. But as I told you, now that I'm not pretending, I will change everything. But there was nobody really managing open science in the last year. So I won't talk about what exists at federal level because it's a bit, I won't say outdated, but this is really now, and there's nothing specific for books, that's for sure. At the French-speaking level, this roadmap, the only document, the only policy document which exists, this is this roadmap to open access. And last year, before leaving, I mean, I left this year, but this is something I did last year, I updated for the coming two years, but something I didn't change it's. That one of the three big parts of this roadmap. This is part the title is Bibliodiversity. And by bibliodiversity we are not only meaning, as usually a diversity of business models, which is usually at least what some stakeholders have in mind, we really take it. At least I took it when I wrote The Roadmap very at the etymological meaning of the term bibliion book. It means that it encompasses a broad diversity of research outputs, including books and monographs.

But then this is what I told you, I didn't want to go further in the definition of books and monographs. And implicitly, it can include textbooks because there's another part of this roadmap which includes open education. So you see, there's this connection. Okay, so I see a connection there. I didn't want to be implicit, but by including open education just after the part on bibliodiversity yeah, get you okay, but it was very cautious and not super explicit, to be honest.

INTERVIEWER:

And are there any discussions, or do you think that there will be some discussions about including books in these policies more? Or is it something that is discussed at all?



INTERVIEWEE:

No, honestly but once again, I'm very cautious also because I'm not anymore heading this directorate. So I cannot talk for the current director or whatever. But when we funded this Acobe project so this pilot project involving all universities to develop a pilot platform for publishing books of course this pilot was linked. Let me take it otherwise the other way, one of the use of the roadmap was that if you wanted to get funding, it's only a bottom up process because we didn't have, and we still don't have at the French community level, like the Flemish people have a dedicated funding channel for open access. That was a big difference. Flemish side, I don't remember how much, but it's a very big amount of money. They have a dedicated channel, funding channel, they have a budget line for open access and open science. We didn't have, and I can tell you, we still don't have on this, I'm very sure. So it was a pure bottom up process. Universities of non university, higher education colleges coming to me or to the cabinet and telling me, yeah, we have this interesting project, do you think that there could be some funding?

And then my answer was always the same yeah, first you have to convince me that it's coherent with the roadmap because otherwise why should we have worked together on the roadmap? Yeah, this was a collective approach, this roadmap. I didn't write this alone, I had colleagues from all the universities or the funding agencies. It was really an inclusive exercise. So this roadmap was also a way to decide what could be funded and what couldn't, keeping in mind that we didn't have a lot of money. That's also something I have to tell you honestly, at the French speaking level, we tried to find here and there some money for open access and open science, but we didn't have a dedicated budget. And so this project was fully in line with the bibliodiversity of the roadmap, as I explained to you a few minutes ago. So I just had to convince the cabinet of the minister back then it was Minister Glatigny and they were convinced that it was a good idea. And so we got the funding for this pilot. But the idea is, of course, because this is the only project about books to see to what extent it's useful, to what extent they manage.

Because the idea is to publish a pilot book in different disciplines, not only SSH, but also in the STEM and then, of course, to see if it works well, what's the audience there will be some indicators and so on, to see if it's successful or not. So, yes, once again, it's not explicitly written that it could lead to something broader, but implicitly. Yeah, of course. And when I was there, the internal group on open science within the French-speaking community, of course, because we didn't fund a lot of projects, we monitored those few projects. Five, four, five projects that we were funding. There was another one, for example, data stewardships in the universities. You see these kind of things. And of course, this was in this group that we were also in charge of updating of the update of the Roadmap. So, yes, you shouldn't imagine a lot of people, those were always the same three, four people really involved in open science because it was a small group. And at the level of the ministry, there was only at the end there were two of them, but one people in charge of research in the cabinet.

So on the one hand, it was difficult because it was difficult to follow all the aspects of open science. So such a little team. But on the other hand, it was very convenient. It was not a very big administrative burden to translate results of a pilot project in an update of the roadmap.

INTERVIEWER:

Absolutely. I understand, since you touched on the question of funding for open access books, because this is our economic factor here. So I understand that there is no specific fund for open access books. So what do researchers do in Belgium when they want to publish an open access book?

INTERVIEWEE:

Okay, it's difficult to provide you with an answer because honestly, we should survey them. This is a very good research question. Yeah, there you go. More work to be done.

What I can maybe tell you is that I should check that I think, but I'm not sure. So it should be checked afterwards that the funding agencies, I'm sure and I know that they provide research with article processing charges, which are quite limited in most of the case in the STEM field, it's not enough



because publisher asks so much. I mean, big publisher majors ask so much. But I'm pretty sure that in the last developments at the funding agency level, they also allow book processing charges to be funded to some degree. But I should check, I'm not sure, but this is the only channel I'm aware of to support open access book publishing. This would be, at least in part, the payment of the APCs.

INTERVIEWER:

And this is on the national funder. Okay, I understood. And this is on the national funder level?

INTERVIEWEE:

There's no national funder level. There's nothing national. You have a federal level, but which is not national, as I told you. I told you it's one level among the others. So there's nothing national in research. Unfortunately, there are even not any more national programs. There are collaborative programs, but national and research policies, those are two different concepts. So yes, no, you have a funding agency for the Flemish, for the region and community. You have a funding agency for the French-speaking community. You have the Walloon region, which directly funds research, more applied research, and you have the Brussels region, which also funds more applied research and citizen science. So each region is community as its dedicated either agency, like for the fundamental research in Flanders and another one in French speaking community. In the past it was the same, but as everything in Belgium now is split. It's the FNRS for the French speaking side and FWO for the Flemish side, and then you have the other regions and federal level which are directly funding research, which are a bit themselves funding agency, if you wish.

INTERVIEWER:

Okay. Now I understand. And just to complicate it a little bit more, so are you aware of any sort of support, I mean funding support for models different than BPCs, so, for example, collective funding for books, all of these new models that are coming in now, diamond and so on, or is it BPC?

INTERVIEWEE:

Okay, once again, I was trying to check for the FNRS, but I will check later. Okay. Yeah. As far as I know, and I'm not pretending because the last two years I didn't mention it because it was not relevant for open science, but the end of my career at the French community, I was in a more managing as Deputy Director General for IO Education and Research. And I didn't manage to find that was also part of the problem. I didn't have a lot of time to dedicate to open science. So maybe there are some developments that I'm not fully aware of, but as far as I know, and still being very partly still doing a bit of research and still publishing a very little bit, I'm not aware on other kind of supports for book publishing done. And I should even check that BPCs at funding agency level. And of course this Acobe, this pilot project I was mentioning, those are the only initiatives I'm aware of. We didn't have in Belgium. And even in France, I'm pretty sure they don't have either like they have in France. Yeah, something I didn't mention. I still have done it this year.

I'm part and I've co shared this one year two years ago. I'm not a standing member, but I've done it three or four times already in this committee de la San Suvert in France. They have a course every two years. They will change their way of working in the future. But I'm very involved at French level also in the evaluation of all these proposals. So I can definitely tell you that we don't have anything similar in Belgium because there, of course, the FNSO in France. They are purposefully funding projects that include books and diamond publication model. We don't have this in Belgium. We don't have dedicated calls to support this kind of initiative. I would dream of this kind of thing, but we don't have currently perhaps.

In the future, who knows?

Yes, perhaps.

Let's hope.

INTERVIEWER:



All right. Okay. So if we move into the social aspect of open access, I wanted to talk a little bit about the research assessment system in Belgium. And I think that you are more than qualified to answer my question here. So, how is it like, are open access books taken into consideration in the research performance assessment? No.

INTERVIEWEE:

Once again, I'm very much more aware of the French-speaking side than the Flemish-speaking side, but for the French-speaking side, no, for the Flemish speaking side, I honestly don't think so. And open access in general is taken into account quite strongly, but not directly. It's indirect because we have this decree I was mentioning at the beginning of your discussion from 2018, which mandates the deposit of articles on the open access repository of the university or any other repository. And this is very important, this is for evaluating research within universities. But the system is the same at the funding level, at the funding agency level, at the FNRS level, they only look at what you have put in the open access repository for articles, not for books. So if you don't wish to deposit your articles in the repository, you are free. The former rector of the University of Liège always said that you can do whatever you wish, whatever you want, don't deposit it if you don't wish to, but then it won't be taken into account in the evaluation. So there's a very strong link in the universities, but also since a few years at the funding agency level between open access to articles and evaluation, okay, I'm not saying that it has to be directly in open access, you have to deposit it and if there's six or twelve months embargo, it's still okay.

If for whatever reason it cannot be open, that can also sometimes happen. It's still okay, but the Evaluators, the committee, they only can base the evaluation on the repository. So this is very strong. But this was not foreseen for other types of application than articles. Something I did last year when we had the opportunity of just rephrasing a bit, not rewriting, because the legislative process is different. But I had the opportunity of adding a few things. And what we added last year is making more explicit that although only articles are taken into account for the evaluation, this doesn't mean that it's not important to, as far as possible, also deposit and make open access other types of indication because otherwise it could be misinterpreted by research like just reinforcing this misperception that only articles matter. You see what I mean? There was a potential counter-effect of this mandate.

Why write books then?

Yeah, absolutely. So we rephrased it in such a way that it was obvious that it didn't mean that only articles matter in the evaluation, but only articles must be deposited. We encouraged to deposit all types of application, but yeah, we tried to rephrase it in such a way that it didn't mean that only articles matter in evaluation. But so yes, we encourage the deposited, the open access to other types of publication, including books, but it's not on the must list that is evaluated by the committees and the evaluators.

INTERVIEWER:

Thank you. And I wanted to ask about the perception of open access because it still lingers very often, this perception of open access being allegedly of a lesser quality and especially when it comes to books, right? Is this something that still persists in Belgium? Does it exist in Belgium?

INTERVIEWEE:

I did my PhD quite a long time after having being after my master, so it was not so long ago, but it was still the interview, that was maybe 15 years ago. So something like that. At that time it was quite obvious that there was this perception. My research was about SSH research on the Flemish and French-speaking side. And then we had an international survey and it was very obvious that there was this perception at that time, and not only for books back then, that open access was a good thing maybe. But yeah, be cautious because the quality maybe is not there. When you ask people I remember that it's a bit long time ago, but when you ask people to elaborate about this perception, usually they couldn't. But there was just this idea. And yeah, at that time, there was a big difference between the Flemish side, the French-speaking side, which is still there, I think, and the Flemish side. They engage very early in this new public management oriented way to fund research with indicators,



which means looking at the high impact factor journals and these kind of things while at the French-speaking side back then. But this is still a bit the case today in the SSH. I'm really emphasizing in the SSH they never engage to that extent in this quantitative approach to quality. If I may say so, this was a big difference. But I remember that back then they couldn't elaborate why open access would mean lesser quality. But another interesting thing in the international survey we conducted with a PhD in communication studies, so we worked with international associations, Korea associations. And I remember that one of the very interesting results on this survey and this was 15 years ago, that a majority of respondents mentioned that in their experience. I remember now how it was framed, the question in their experience, open access for journals, I'm not speaking about books and for journals didn't mean lesser quality, but when they were asked about how they felt, colleagues perceived open access journals, they felt that it was perceived by other as being less quality. But they didn't consider this. But everybody was thinking so it was everybody thinking that the other ones and I remember because this was one of my first conference, I had to present something and I really emphasized this and we had a lot of discussion about it.

So this was an interesting issue. But then when you look at even the recent surveys done by the big association, by Science Europe or by EUA, I think it's still a bit there this feeling that open access may mean lesser quality, and also because some people are confusing contestable business models for some open access publishers and the so called I don't like this expression for many reasons, but predatory publishers. And they are confusing this with the quality of the peer review system, you see? So this didn't help. This issue of predatory publisher has become more important in the last decade. This didn't help in terms of perception of the quality of open access. So this is for journal. So I still think there's this perception today, although my own research about that is really old. But from what I still can read in the literature, I have the feeling it's still there, generally speaking, for the books. I can only relate to the discussion in Cost Enrich about once again, and sorry, my academic research is more targeting SSH than Stem. But then it was quite obvious, as I told you, that it was not so much open access or not, it was the brand of the publisher which mattered a lot in many fields. And this was very clear also in the interviews we conducted in this project with researchers, early career investigators in particular around Europe, and even for some of them outside of Europe. That although they were very much in favor of open access, not only for articles of all types of publications. They felt that they didn't have the choice. They have to publish with this particular publisher's Brand. And this was very obvious in some disciplines and in particular in history, to be honest. And this come from my Cost English experience. And then another element is that some colleagues but this was more informal discussion between us, but the interest is that they were colleagues from all around Europe. For some of them it was not so much open access, but digital versus still having this big book that you.

Can put on the shelf, questions on the list.

These are super important, that at the symbolic level and the professional satisfaction of having this book published means putting this on your shelf.

INTERVIEWER:

Yeah, absolutely. And to touch it and then you can give it yes.

INTERVIEWEE:

And this feeling was a little bit less and not only with senior colleagues, also young people, it was still an achievement. You have your PhD, you publish the book and then the book is there on the shelf in your room. Maybe it's even an emotional level, but.

INTERVIEWER:

I'm sure it is it's some kind of a psychological also fact of having an artifact in your hand. You can send a link to someone to your book, but it's not exactly the same kind of experience.



INTERVIEWEE:

Absolutely. I have no idea if it's I didn't I never had this kind of conversation with people from STEM fields. But yeah, in some fields you don't even publish books so the question is not there, but within the SSH you really had this argument that in terms of even self-esteem and career progression, it's good to have this book published and having it in your hand. Then maybe also a few more epistemic arguments that why do you publish books? It's to have something coherent. And there was this impression that in the digital world it's more looking at the subpart of the books and maybe not taking into account the wholeness of the book and that a book project should be more than an addition of parts. You see what I mean? And this is also the discussion about when you have edited books, is it good to put in open access some chapters and not some others? And this is more epistemological or more epistemic than emotional? There no some people say a book is a book and it shouldn't be cut out in subparts which could be accessible independently of the wall. Yeah, this was discussed, but I cannot tell you that there was a final conclusion of this discussion.

This was a discussion we had a few times and including with colleagues who were very much in favor of open access. When you tackle the book issue, you...

INTERVIEWER:

See yeah, absolutely, I know exactly what you mean. I mean, I've also worked for publishers before and actually developing open access books program ten years ago to propose to someone to publish their book, especially in history. I think history was the worst, actually. Worst in that aspect.

The most complicated, yes.

It was just that the conversations with potential authors were just extremely challenging. No one wanted to do it really. And actually I understood their arguments very well. So it's not obvious, it's very ambiguous, I think still and I'm not entirely sure where we're going to go from here, although there is more and more of this push towards making pretty much everything open. I don't know. Well, yeah, now sorry, I'm mindful of our time. So I just wanted to because I have two more questions which I really would like to ask. So the first one is about the technological aspect. So Mark, you were talking about this pilot project. This had to you mentioned that it had to do with some kind of a publishing portal. Right. So I wanted to ask if there is any sort of at this moment, is there any sort of underlying infrastructure that could be used for the purpose of publishing open access books?

INTERVIEWEE:

Yeah, at technical level I won't engage very much in the details because I'm not aware of the latest developments. But yes, this Acobe project is based on the infrastructure that are already in development, already existing for journal publishing. In the University of de Liais they have a pop ups platform to publish open access journals like yeah, I don't know the word in English. In French we say "pépinière de revue".. It's a place when you can they are the journals of university, but in the future it could become open to other universities just to avoid a very fragmented landscape of platforms publishing in open access. They did have at least some I cannot be very precise, but they had a technological base to start the project. But I didn't read the project for quite a long time, so I just couldn't so tell you which was the no, that's fine.

INTERVIEWER:

It's already great to know that there was something at University de Liege.

INTERVIEWEE:

I'm just going to yes, absolutely. The UCLouvain they also have a platform for journals. But I would say that maybe this is the University de Liais, which maybe the colleagues from Leuven wouldn't be happy if I say that, but they are a bit more advanced in this regard.



INTERVIEWER:

We talked to colleagues from Leuven actually yesterday.

INTERVIEWEE:

There are two different you say Louvre, the French speaking one. You have the KU Leuven, which is the French university, and they are, I think, quite advanced. Yeah. In the past it was one university, but for years now, it's two different okay.

INTERVIEWER:

My goodness. Yeah. I don't know how you operate.

INTERVIEWEE

They were not starting from scratch with this Acobe project. Another an important issue, maybe I mentioned it because it's not technology, but at the level of the human capital, if I may say so, what is very interesting in this core project is that the idea is also to create new work relationships between the University Press and the librarians. They work together on this, which is new, you see, this is a new job for both of them because librarians, usually they are not publishers, they are not editors and University Press, what happened with the platforms in the libraries? This remained a very obscure role for them. And with this Acobe project, they have to work together.

INTERVIEWER:

Nice. Okay. So it's also introducing new stakeholders.

INTERVIEWEE:

Absolutely.

INTERVIEWER:

That's great. Okay, one last question, because I know that we are about to finish here, so it's a big one, though.

How do you assess the progress of the transition to open access books? And what do you think still needs to be done in Belgium? I assume a lot.

INTERVIEWEE:

Yes. I think that it should be made more this bibliodiversity principle should be more central in research evaluation. There is some progress, but it should be made more obvious that it's not better to write four articles than one book, for example. You see what I mean? There are a lot of transformation currently running with the Coara Coalition and all those developments in Europe in regard to research assessment, and I'm very pleased to see that. I think all Flemish universities, and now progressively the different French-speaking universities are joining this movement. And at least for the university in which I'm still working in, I know that the vice rector for Research is totally convinced that we have to go to more recognition of the different types of research outputs in research assessment. And this is the first time I hear of a vice vector for research, having explicitly this discourse. I wouldn't be too optimistic, but I wouldn't be too pessimistic either. Honestly, I think there now some changes really happening, and this is in great part because of this coral coalition and at European research area level, this development assessment. I was a bit worried that I was working on it, because when I was the chair of this standing, working over the open science, we worked a bit



on these developments and I was a bit worried that it would remain like so many declarations in the past that everybody signed and then nothing changes.

You see what I mean? It's purely declarative level. And then I have the feeling now, because it's really included in this European research area monitoring. And there are some new people in Charlie universities more convinced than in the past that open science is relevant, at least some forms of open science. So yes, I think that there are some changes, but we are only at the beginning of those changes. And yes, this is crucial. If you don't explicitly explain to researchers, including early career investigators, that they can engage in something else than trying to publish as many papers as they can, nothing will change. For me, the research you need two things. You need three things. I usually say that you need a triangle on the one hand, and all the things must go together hand in hand. Research assessment has to be explicitly in favor of publication of books. Not only books, it has to be included in bibliodiversity a diversity of outputs books, but also popularization papers, but also data. Papers, but also data sets. It should be open, we shouldn't stop. Papers are important, of course, but we shouldn't continue to focus so much on papers.

Papers, papers, papers. That's the first thing. The second thing is that you need to provide research with I don't find the word now a supporting framework at budget, at funding level, you should supply if they need to pay book BPCs, the policy should be the same than for APC, no difference. This is what I should check with the funding agency, because I'm not sure they have the same policy, but if they don't, I think it's very important they should have. And then at the technological level, this kind of platform like the Akob Pilot, it should be developed, of course, because researchers should be helped if they wish to publish open access books, they have to benefit from the adequate infrastructures. So the research assessment policies, the supporting framework in terms of funding, but also in terms of infrastructures. And then thirdly, the training. When you train the PhD candidates, in particular, you have to train them in research assessment. But if it's more open. You have to explain to them that it's more open than in the past. You have to change the mindsets. And it's really in the PhD training that these kind of things can happen or not, and also explain to them how they can publish open access books.

So I think we need to have this triangle between research, assessment policies, supporting framework in terms of funding and infra and infrastructures and, yeah, training and skilling of researchers. I think different initiatives started in the last years in the different part of this triangle. But it has to be make coherent.

INTERVIEWER:

Absolutely. Okay, well, hopefully we're getting there at least a little bit. We're trying to put the triangle together here. Mark, thank you very much. I will stop us here if anything else comes to your mind that you haven't touched upon but you think it's super important, just please write me an email.

INTERVIEWEE:

If you just have 1 minute. Because there was just discussion in the discussion. I thought about an unexplored but maybe which tackles another type of issue. I think there are also some responsibility from the publisher side to make and I'm not discussing here the issue of the business model and the BPC, et cetera, just to make the life of researchers who wish to publish open access books easier. And I have a very concrete and recent anecdote I contributed I wrote this chapter a long time ago, but it's not yet published because I won't tell you the name of the publisher, but it's one of the important publishers in the SSH, and this is a book about impact of SSH. And I wrote the chapter about the Belgian situation. And we all agreed, including the publisher at the beginning, that it would be an open access books and et cetera. And for whatever reason, the editorial process changed. And in the end, the two editors told us, the two colleagues who are editing these edited books told us that the publisher changed his mind. And now, if you want to have an open access book for whatever reason, which looked very confused, we have to go again in the peer reviewing process, and then we have the choice to publish it early 2024.

And I wrote this chapter honestly maybe two or three years ago, I mean, or going again in the open access process. And the reason were really confusing. Honestly, I was thinking, yeah, this is not helping. And so we decided between all the authors that we preferred, although we were all in favor of



open access publication, that we didn't want to have another delay of one year and that we would publish it in closed access with the right to deposit in our repositories the author version or something like that. But this is also a pity. I mean, there's a responsibility on the publisher side to make the life of the authors as easy. And here I have the authors, the author site and the result is of the people were not so much convinced about open access books. We're just saying, you see what happens with open access publishing for books. So this is an anecdote. Maybe it shouldn't be over generalized, but this is something I experienced a few months ago. So I wanted to mention that also, this is also we need responsible publishers also.

INTERVIEWER:

Yeah, absolutely.

INTERVIEWEE:

I wanted to add this little anecdote in the end.

INTERVIEWER:

That's really good, because we would love to also interview some publishers, because, of course, they are a crucial stakeholder in this process. They are, in the end, publishing these books. Yes, but we actually don't have that many people who agreed to an interview on the publisher side also, interestingly enough, I suppose. Right.

All right, it's a wrap. And then I will contact you, most likely next week with a transcript of this so you can decide what you want to keep, what you don't want to keep, and then we'll just go from perfect. Thank you so much.

INTERVIEWEE:

I know that I talk a lot.

INTERVIEWER:

No, but I enjoy that you talk a lot, because right now I have a better vision of what's going on in Belgium. I

INTERVIEWEE:

Yeah. But it's not easy. Usually we say that if you understood it correctly, it's because I explained in not in a good way, because I'm.

INTERVIEWER:

Still a little bit confused. But I guess that's how it is, a bit confusing.

INTERVIEWEE:

Okay, good. Yeah. Thank you very much.

INTERVIEWER:

Thank you so much. And you will hear from me next week then. Thank you. Bye.



