

PALOMERA Interview

Date: 11.8.2023

General information

Stakeholder type (multiple choice, delete irrelevant):

- policy makers

Country the interview is focused on: Finland

Language of the interview conducted: Swedish

INTERVIEWER

Within the project, we are trying to get a grip on where we are with open access in general, but especially with regard to books, since that is what this project is specifically about. We have been interested in getting hold of people like you who have an overview of the situation in a specific country.

INTERVIEWER

I have a warm-up question here. Could you please tell us a bit about yourself and what you are working on so that we know about your perspective?

INTERVIEWEE

I work at the Secretariat for the Coordination of Open Science and Research, at the Federation of Learned Societies. One specific focus area has been open access to publications where I am the secretary of the national expert group. So, in that sense, I am probably quite relevant for this interview. I have previously worked with research data, research materials, but my own background is that of a literary scholar before I started my current job. My personal experience in scientific publishing is mainly humanities and literary research.

INTERVIEWER

It sounds useful that you yourself have a research background and know that part of the dynamic as well, not only from the science policy perspective but also from what you have previously delved into in various books and understand their perhaps place in the Finnish humanities landscape, which may not be easy to document in any way.

INTERVIEWEE

As a bonus, I've also worked with Finnish-Swedish literature, so it's also about which language you publish in. Thinking about when it is relevant to publish in English and when it is relevant to publish in Swedish or Finnish.

INTERVIEWER

This is somewhat related to the fact that almost two different rules have been created within our national policies. We'll get more into it soon but there are examples where different guidelines are given depending on if the publication is domestic or international. In the discussions people often separate them in order to be able to distinguish between what you want to happen here in Finland and then abroad. It's tricky.

INTERVIEWER

Something that we have struggled with from the very beginning of this project is the definition of an academic book. Within the project, we propose that it applies to peer-reviewed books, which are monographs, book chapters, edited collections, so-called critical editions and other long scientific works. Do you think that this is consistent with how we in Finland usually view what is an academic book?

INTERVIEWEE

That sounds very sensible to me. I think that here, what is often first mentioned is peer review, and then that route is taken instead of the publisher route, for example. Publishers can have broader profiles in that not everything they publish is academic. What I thought was interesting here was where you left off, the part about other long scientific works. These are now long speculations about the future, but if long works mean something else because of different ways of publishing on different platforms, if the word book somehow becomes questioned. But as a basic definition for scientific books, I also think that you start things with the peer review end. It's also important to mention that there is a fluid and difficult boundary between a non-fiction book



and a scientific book, so you have to remember what we're talking about, especially if you're talking about openness.

INTERVIEWER

Do you think there is something missing in this definition or is it a broad enough definition that we can use in the project Something important that falls outside?

INTERVIEWEE

I don't know if these count as critical, but like Zacharias Topelius's writings or that kind of older, newly published texts? These are the types of works I come to think about most immediately, but maybe there are other kinds as well.

INTERVIEWER

The challenge with the definition we have is that almost everything that is peer-reviewed that is not an article falls within the framework. But you still think it sounds like a perfectly good definition?

INTERVIEWEE

I think so.

INTERVIEWER

As a final follow-up to this, in Finland it is the case that it must be peer-reviewed for it to be considered an academic work or academic book in Finland. That it is. How do we view this matter here? In Finland, we have a rather mechanical system in Finland, the classification of the ministry.

INTERVIEWEE



That's what I'm thinking, the A1 and C3 and so on. It is the peer review that distinguishes them from other publications aimed at research and the scientific community. You have to be pragmatic and start somewhere, and I think the peer review is a reasonable tool to identify your activities. But then people do write biographies, for example of Atos Wirtanen. And then it comes out on SLS, but it is not peer-reviewed, is it not science? I personally put it in a different category.

INTERVIEWER

That's a tricky one.

INTERVIEWEE

As you can see, I don't have a clear answer, but I personally am willing to make the peer review a requirement.

INTERVIEWER

Related to this, in Finland we have a rather luxurious way with the so-called "peer review stamp" or whatever it is called. I haven't seen any other similar concept elsewhere. If we were to use it as a criterion, we have a pretty good basis for more easily recognizing material published in Finland, perhaps something that other countries should take as a model. I don't know, but it's a practice that we've had for quite some time in Finland, which is a unique thing.

INTERVIEWEE

I can also imagine that it is also a pragmatic way of approaching open access for research publications, to use peer review as a criterion so as not to blur the line with other publishing where you get into general publishers and likewise another type of income generation, at least in the humanities. I don't know how it is in other disciplines, if you get a book on the course lists, then you may have a type of significant income. But in my research sphere, I can't think of anyone who lives on the income from their scientific works. However, I realize that there are certainly differences. But what I was getting at was that it is built into the funding system as well. In Finland, this peer review is a pragmatic way of defining the matter.



INTERVIEWER

That's a good observation. This is something that differs greatly between countries. The thing about how carefully individual publications are monitored and counted, and if they affect funding. In many places, it makes no difference to the university's budget what is actually published. It is not counted at the same exact decimal level as here in Finland. The fact that each article has to be recorded and classified, and is linked to euros directly is interesting to contrast with other environments.

INTERVIEWER

Within the project, we divide our perspective according to something called the PESTLE model. This means political, economic, technological, social, legal and environmental. Through these perspectives we try to interpret the rather slow adoption of open access scientific books.

INTERVIEWER

But I thought we would take these thematic issues individually, starting with the political ones. In Finland, we have a rather unique system for developing guidelines and science policy regarding open science and open access. Could you summarize in a few sentences how this process should optimally work in order to come up with common guidelines that the entire research community will adopt? From idea to implementation of various things related to open access.

INTERVIEWEE

We have this Declaration on Open Science and Research, which defines objectives in four areas: research culture, publications, learning and training, and research materials. According to the declaration, policies should be made for each of these areas. And then we have the expert groups where you can form working groups where anyone can join contribute to preparing a policy draft. The policies are prepared in these working groups with the support of the steering group for open science and then the policy at a certain stage goes out on a public comment round to the entire research community where one can comment as an organization or as an individual and then the comments are taken into account and then it goes through the steering group one more time and then they are published. And in the policy, there are both general strategic goals and strategic principles, but also goals with quite concrete and time-bound measures, often with named actors. Not at the individual organization level. The universities, or sometimes the whole research community, or funders or whatever it may be. And all universities



and, as I recall, research institutes have signed the declaration. So they have committed themselves to these goals, not in a legal way, but in principle.

INTERVIEWER

And so we are now talking about this document which is the one that applies from 2020 to 2025?

INTERVIEWEE

Well, yes. Some sub-policies are coming quite late, so they are only barely finalized before this declaration deadline. But we will eventually start the process of updating the declaration and then the sub-policies.

INTERVIEWER

One could point out perhaps that this is the first iteration, the first time this is being done and that everything is created from almost zero so to speak.

INTERVIEWEE

The coordination as it exists today was established in 2018. We have been working on this for five years. We will eventually start with the second version. The point here is really that they should be co-created, so they emerge bottom up and not, for example, from the ministry's initiative top down. The research community should create.

INTERVIEWER

2018 was still quite early for open science, this sounds quite progressive. Some things have changed quite significantly in five years as well. How you look at things and how you can try to promote different branches of open science. What we have in Finland seems to be a rather reactive model. In other words, it is possible to react quite quickly because it is an ongoing process. Is it not the case that the expert groups meet at least a couple of times a year?



INTERVIEWEE

Yes, that's the challenge, of course. That you write a policy and then just when you are done, there is something else that you have to start, a bit like renovations. In addition to the declaration, the oldest policy is open access to research publications, articles, for journal and conference articles from 2019. But we will have to look at which end to start at, should we start with the oldest or should we start with the one where we assume there have been the most changes. But some of them are very new, the sub-policy for open access to research methods and infrastructures came in the spring, so we probably won't start here. Although, of course, this is an area where developments are happening at breakneck speed.

INTERVIEWER

And just as an observation, I think there is a difference in the degree of precision. Let's say how prescriptive the policy is, versus mainly signaling principles. With some parts, you already know better what national and international pieces need to be distinguished, talking about money and quality in a very detailed way. But I can imagine that many of these things that are emerging may not yet have that degree of precision in terms of actually going into numbers. A bit different evolutionary phases also of practice.

INTERVIEWEE

Articles is an area where the level of maturity is quite high, where the level of openness is also quite high compared to, say, source code.

INTERVIEWER

Let's get to the meat of the matter. The current open access policy. We mentioned that there is one in Finland and it is currently the oldest sub-policy we have in force. To what extent does it mention open books? Are they mentioned or are they completely ignored in the current policy?

INTERVIEWEE

So there is no sub-policy on books, it's under development and it has been postponed a couple of times. The last time it was postponed precisely because there is so much going on in this area. Now it is planned for next year. It has been through a round of comments. There are several



major projects underway and various financing models are emerging. It was decided to postpone it and follow developments.

INTERVIEWER

This is something we are trying to help with through this project. We will see how it goes. Now, one of these objectives is to try to get harmonization between different countries that want to promote open books in different ways to different degrees. We will see if it succeeds in helping with that.

INTERVIEWEE

If we talk about this current policy, books are not specifically mentioned when talking about openness to publications, it includes all of them but there is no specific sub-policy for books. In a way they are now excluded because there is a sub-policy for articles and the sub-policy for books is still under preparation.

INTERVIEWER

I have noticed similar traits when looking at the open science policy of Finnish universities. There is rarely any mention of books, but a lot of guidelines regarding articles. But in the current general policy there is no mention of mechanisms or goals regarding books?

INTERVIEWEE

That's exactly where the part that is currently being worked on and planned for next year, specifically books and book chapters in collected volumes.

INTERVIEWER

You mentioned earlier that policy development in Finland is currently a fairly democratic process, at least compared to how it was in the past to develop this current policy for publication that does not include mention of books. So it was via this expert group for open publishing that a draft was developed that anyone could participate in. Then, in

dialog with the steering group for open science within the coordination, a final version of the current policy was arrived at. Was it also open for fully open comment/consultation?

INTERVIEWEE

They all are, all the policies go through open commenting.

INTERVIEWER

Okay.

INTERVIEWEE

This was before I started working here. But if I remember correctly, it was out for open comment twice.

INTERVIEWER

I don't know how well these old comments have been archived, but usually there have been dozens or even hundreds of comments from the public and various stakeholders on these different drafts of the policy. It wasn't completely silent when the current policy was drafted and there were probably different views now?

INTERVIEWEE

They are openly available on our website. No, it's not usually quiet. There are probably hundreds of them, I don't know, but there are definitely dozens. The universities and then often learned societies and research institutes, ministries insofar as they think it is relevant for them to comment. Various organizations, trade unions and publishers.

INTERVIEWER

I think it is a good principle that they are still there. If someone wants to go back and look at that discussion.



INTERVIEWER

Although you were not involved in the process of developing it, are there currently major challenges that are discussed as difficult with the current policy? And you I think mainly in articles, do you hear people commenting, maybe more in a negative way about how difficult it has been made or how defined things are in it?

INTERVIEWEE

What is always a question is, of course, money. Since the policies are built up as they are, jointly from the bottom up, no one has a mandate to say that you pay this much and you pay this much. So there is no funding model built into the policies. Since many of the academic publishers in Finland are published by small scientific societies and publishers with very tight margins, this funding issue is really the biggest one. It can be seen as indirectly against the policy because there is no funding model. But I haven't received any direct detailed criticism regarding individual parts of the policy, but I'm sure when we start working on them it will come. People usually have opinions, but there is no obvious problem like that which we clash with all the time from our side. Then I don't know how it is perceived in the research organizations. What is discussed in some contexts is the parallel publication of which versions and how they are disseminated and how problematic that can be.

INTERVIEWER

This sounds familiar. There are different camps on how to look at it. But the fact is that the current policy has an expiry date of 2025, which is the last year it is in force. You don't have a need to renew it before that for some reason? It doesn't seem to be that urgent, but how do you see it yourself?

INTERVIEWEE

I have not felt that there is an urgent need to update it, but since it is an area that is very much alive, it is good to review what has changed. Hopefully there are a lot of things that have been implemented that we can remove and then others that have not been implemented and think about why and perhaps specify how to approach it in the policy. But we have not been confronted with the need to update.



INTERVIEWER

There have been no small adjustments either, it has been left as it was?

INTERVIEWEE

Exactly.

INTERVIEWER

This is a good sign that it has fulfilled its task and functioned in this way. But a draft of a sub-policy for books has now been prepared and it is publicly available on avointiede.fi in both Finnish and English. It's about a 10-15 pages including accounts of what the goals for open access books should be, and separates between monographs that are edited works and their international and domestic works with slightly different time frames.

INTERVIEWER

Does this reflect the current state of progress? I haven't heard anything since the draft was published. Is this the extent of the consensus so far and some kind of proposal on what a future policy could contain? How do you see it?

INTERVIEWEE

The very latest is not available online. When it was opened for public comments at the beginning of last year, that version is on our website. The draft is available there in Finnish, Swedish and English.

INTERVIEWER

Ok, but if I understand correctly, there has been work since February 2022 but nothing new has yet been made public? What is this timeframe for publishing the new policy for books, is the target date 2025/2026 in conjunction with the updated overall open access policy?



INTERVIEWEE

As it stands, it will come out next year, in 2024.

INTERVIEWER

Interesting, this was news to me.

INTERVIEWER

Is there anything you can tell us about whether the previous commentary has led to any major changes? Does it seem to be much the same content as the draft that was circulated in February last year?

INTERVIEWEE

Now we are unfortunately at the mercy of my memory, I did not check the details before our conversation. I have the feeling that these years have been adjusted, and it is often the part of each sub-policy that receives comments that the requirements are too stringent too quickly. It's a balancing act, you want to keep a high level of ambition, but not so much that you write unnecessary policy so that no one can achieve the goals anyway. I have a feeling that I know that the year 2026 appears in the revised publication, but I can't remember where.

INTERVIEWEE

Since 2025 is already so close, we have had to be flexible with this one. If the sub-policy on books is published in 2024, it will remain in force for about a year until the full open access policy is reaffirmed.

INTERVIEWER

The public draft of the policy notes that there would be an extra year for domestic publishers for the policy to apply to their books, while books through international publishers would be affected more quickly. For both categories, a one-year embargo period was noted as the maximum. This should make it possible to publish a book both for sale and with delayed open access.



INTERVIEWEE

Now I think the embargo period is something that will be discussed with the new EU conclusions that came out during the summer. In them, immediacy is often emphasized. But then there are probably strong opinions about lifting this embargo, but my guess is that this is a point that will still be discussed.

INTERVIEWER

And then the licensing is also a bit unclear in the earlier draft. It doesn't say outright that it should be Creative Commons licenses but licenses that enable openness and protect the author's rights. So there are tensions here in that you don't absolutely say which family of licenses you recommend.

INTERVIEWEE

Yes, and this is at least also included in the following proposal or version. It is still not specified what kind of license it will be. But this is still a document in process then.

INTERVIEWER

Yes, we don't really know yet how it will go, but there are things that have also been discussed regarding articles back and forth. And precisely this matter of finding some kind of middle ground between what we want international publishers to respond to and obey. And then what we want domestic publishers to enable. It's interesting.

INTERVIEWER

Then there's the financial aspect, it's a difficult thing with books because there are often quite large sums required for individual works that have to be covered in some way. But in Finland we also have the economic aspect of the university funding model, which provides money in another direction. What is your current view on funding opportunities for open access books versus non-open access books?



INTERVIEWEE

Now I almost have to go to my personal experience. I have a feeling that if you are in a research project, you can use money to enable open access. But then it has either been included in the project's funding or the department has been willing to fund it. As an individual researcher applying for funding. It feels like it is possible to say that at the moment it is easier not to publish openly because it requires a lot of knowledge to know how to apply for funding for any book process. You have to know how to factor it in and you have to know how to weigh publication prestige, CV issues against as well as what is appropriate given what you are about to publish.

INTERVIEWER

Requires some proactivity.

INTERVIEWEE

Yes, it is. So in that sense it is difficult.

INTERVIEWER

It's probably a bit tricky. As you say, it's true that you can apply for this within project funding. But there aren't many places that are specifically designed to fund open access to books. In Finland, such costs must probably be included in project applications to various foundations and the Academy of Finland?

INTERVIEWEE

I looked at their publishing conditions and they do not require open publishing as their policy on open books is awaiting this national sub-policy.

INTERVIEWER

Everything with the Academy of Finland is also somewhat linked to Plan S. There is some consultation in both directions, not that they would be the first to demand something, but still among the early ones as long as something is concrete enough.



INTERVIEWEE

But I'm not aware of any direct funding of openness outside the funding model of universities or colleges, other than grants that you can apply for as a publisher from various organizations, for example from the Association for Scientific Publishing, but then everything is kind of project-based.

INTERVIEWER

Do you think the current system has incentives for authors to publish open access books? Are there many incentives or are there disincentives? What incentives are there to do all this extra work of applying for money in time and negotiating.

INTERVIEWEE

From my perspective, I am not sure that this chain of incentives reaches the researchers. It's sort of in the funding model so the organizations have incentives. But beyond that? You have to be principled to look after the best interests of the organization as an individual employed researcher. But this is also linked to the researcher evaluation.

INTERVIEWER

But perhaps the incentives are mainly intangible at the moment? As with open access in general, it can at best give more visibility and more citations.

INTERVIEWER

Financially, it is perhaps a little more tricky in Finland because we have the Kopiosto system that coordinates author compensation for sold and lent books. But you usually get something back as an author anyway, and you don't get that if the book is only available online and no one buys it. It is perhaps a disincentive if we look at it that way, as you lose the little you might otherwise have received as compensation for your work.

INTERVIEWEE



It is exactly as you say. The incentives are mainly intangible and principled. You don't do research for yourself; you do it so that as many people as possible can benefit from the results.

INTERVIEWER

Regarding this social component, how do you generally see that academic books in general play a role in research evaluation in Finland and are considered and open access books in that evaluation. Partly the position of academic books, but especially the openness of the books.

INTERVIEWEE

I'm just looking at the recommendation for researcher evaluation and it talks about open access being a factor. But at the same time, the policy also states that research publications should be evaluated based on scientific quality and not on openness. With the CoARA agreement, work is also underway for a national evaluation matrix where different aspects of open science will also be important in researcher evaluation. I do not have much insight into specific research organizations, I have seen a few, and then I have some insight into this national FINCAM that does this work. It does mention the openness of publications. So FINCAM is still under construction, it doesn't exist yet, but it is a national matrix related to evaluation.

INTERVIEWER

How do you see the issue of publishing and writing in national languages, are there incentives for it? The university funding model does not distinguish between languages or domestic and international publishers.

INTERVIEWEE

Personally I see research incentives to publish in native languages. But other than that, I don't really know. It's getting a bit old-fashioned perhaps, but the prestige of the publisher certainly plays a role, at least indirectly.

INTERVIEWER



How do you see the issue of open access books and prestige in Finland? It may be a challenge among domestic academic publishers who publish books. They do not even offer open access publishing.

INTERVIEWEE

The only one I can think of off the top of my head is SLS.

INTERVIEWER

So you may have to make a choice between a prestigious domestic publisher or you may have to publish internationally if you want open access?

INTERVIEWEE

Today, apart from a few university publishers, there are a handful. It is quite true that there is a tension there.

INTERVIEWER

But it seems to be in the works anyway. What is mentioned in that draft sub-policy for books is that there should be a new, or at least an addition to the established funding channels to support publishers financially.

INTERVIEWER

Then if we come to the technical part. Do we in Finland have a pending or in progress, a technical infrastructure to support open publishing of books.

INTERVIEWEE

What I can think of offhand, of course, because I work where I work, is edition.fi, which is an e-book equivalent of journal.fi. It's still pretty much a work in progress so there's sort of. There

are some publishers there. It's under construction on many different levels and not in widespread use.

INTERVIEWER

As said, edition.fi is similar to journal.fi, but is a little different. This is because it is not an ongoing publication, but is more about individual works. Could it be that different publishers connect their own open books there and we'll see.

INTERVIEWEE

That's the question - the more resourceful publishers have their own services, of course. But it remains to be seen to what extent a national infrastructure like this is attractive, so that everything would be in the same place, for example.

INTERVIEWER

I would still have a question here about the environment. How do you see the balance between printed books and purely digital books? This is something that is not exclusive, but publishers have to balance it.

INTERVIEWEE

I have not been involved in such discussions too much, but what I seem to hear is that one does not exclude the other. Just because something is open there is no obstacle to printing a book.

INTERVIEWER

Is there anything else you would like to say about Finland and open scientific books before we close?

INTERVIEWEE



We have this, as I understand it, quite unique policy environment. And it's interesting that books have been such a difficult thing to deal with. Or it still is. From the point of view of the policy, we are very interested in what you come up with in the project. But I don't really have anything to add.

INTERVIEWER

Thank you very much for the interview! Turning off this recording here!

