

PALOMERA Interview

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General information

Stakeholder type (multiple choice, delete irrelevant):

- research performing organisations

Country the interview is focused on: Norway

Language of the interview conducted: English

Interviewer

Our goal is to do interviews in all the European research area countries with a mix of stakeholders, from policymakers to individual universities, research funders, and publishers. So basically everyone who has some touch point to the area of open access and in particularly open access books. Even though there might not be tangible and strong policies yet, it is interesting to compare the maturity and intensiveness in how journal articles have been facilitated towards open access in different countries.

Interviewer

But my first warm up question here is just for you to describe a bit about your background and a bit of what your organisation has been involved in when it comes to Open Access and maybe even Open Access books, but maybe just in general, what your field of activity has been in this space?

Interviewee

I have my background as a publisher. I worked as a publisher at the Scandinavian University Press for 15 years up till 2012. I was also responsible for establishing the platform for national journals in Norway called Idunn. I think that Norway is quite special when it comes to local commercial publishers engaging national journals. This is mainly my background. Regarding my education I have my background from University of Bergen, from where I have a masters degree

in political science. As from 2012, I was engaged at Universities Norway in this project, International Board of Scholarly Publishing. I work, as you know, quite closely with my colleagues in Finland that have adopted the so-called Norwegian model of a publication indicator. This is my main job. I'm Head of the Secretariat at Universities Norway that upholds this national publication indicator. This system also creates quite a comprehensive overview of the Norwegian research outputs. We are discussing different categories of research output with the research community. Amongst those outputs are, of course, books in series and books that are not part of series. I have a long experience working as a publisher and now with this system.

Interviewee

I am also engaged in a working group, coordinated by The Research Council in Norway, assign a task to update to the Norwegian strategy for open access beyond 2024. In 2016, we established national guidelines for open access in Norway saying that within 2024, all public funded research output, research articles, should be openly available within 2024. 2024 is right around next corner. Therefore, we established this group that have invited the research community to comment on our suggested new and updated version of the strategy, the Norwegian strategy. This strategy is now up for discussion until the first of October and will be published as a document both in Norwegian and English within the end of the year. The strategy document aims to advice researchers, research institutions, research funders and the government with recommendation. . Unfortunately, the work does not cover the situation for books very well, I think. But as you probably know, the research council of Norway have established some guidelines for also chapters in books and monographs funded by them. We probably will discuss this later, but I have also been engaged in creating those guidelines. My job when we created those guidelines, was primarily to engage research communities in discussions regarding what is the practical implication of establishing open access guidelines, for books funded by Research Council Norway. So one of the things that are quite difficult is that only a small amount of monographs and chapters are funded by the research council. It's much easier to create firm guidelines for those publications that are the result of their (The Research Council) funding because there is power behind funding. If faculties or institutes are part of the funding system around monographs, as they are in the most cases, then we need a strategy for this also. This aspect is still not sufficiently covered by our strategy.

Interviewer

Thank you. That's a very good context. I was still thinking, you know it so well that maybe it's super familiar already to you, but positioning Universities Norway in a stakeholder category. If I understood it correctly, an international analogue could be something resembling a rector's conference or a linking body for universities.



Interviewee

That's correct. Yes. We work for the benefits of the universities and higher education institutions in Norway. We have 32 member organizations. We have established national strategic units in education, research, innovation, and we have disciplinary units in humanities, social sciences, health and social care, mathematics, natural sciences and technology (MNT), teacher education, art, design and architecture, economics and administration and one disciplinary unit for sami. The National Board of Scholarly publishing holds its secretariate at Universities Norway and we are assigned from the government to be responsible for the publication indicator in Norway. All our strategic units are engaging our universities and are recommending our board when lobbying with the politicians and working for the interest of our members.

Interviewer

It's really interesting if we compare to Finland, for example, we don't really have the same. We have UNIFI, which is our linking body between universities, but they don't really have as strong of a position in setting policies.

Interviewee

It is not. My experience is that University Norway is a mixture of UNIFI and the Finnish Federation of Learned Societies.

Interviewer

I think this is also probably part of the project to think about what are some well-working ways that this coordination around policy development and communication, what it looks like in different countries.

Interviewer

But one really fundamental part before we go deeper, is just the definition of what an academic book is. In our project, we've suggested this definition: Academic books are scholarly peer reviewed books, including monographs, book chapters, edited collections, critical editions, and other long form scholarly works. So basically in the project, we try



cover most of what we would think about could be as an academic book. Is there something in that definition or description that you think might be different in Norway or something that could be missing? So we had monographs, book chapters, and edited collections. I think that covers maybe most of what we have in Scandinavia as traditional books.

Interviewee

Yes, I agree. I think that's a quite good definition. What I see as an advantage in Finland and Norway is that, of course, we have this system reporting scientific publication and we have connected this to a funding model. When you create a system like that, you need a consistent definition. When you have a funding model connected to reporting scientific publications, you also have endless discussion with the researchers of what is a scientific book or what is a book series, really. Of course, we have this discussion with the researchers and what differs between the editing of journals and books. It's mainly that we must look into the publisher and verify if the publisher has established routines of peer review? Do they present openly how they edited books, how they perform peer review and so forth? The same way as every journal with respect for themselves have. I have used a lot of time discussing with publishers how to establish good routines for peer review of books because they didn't have that. I think that the system that we have in the Nordic countries has helped us to single out what we understand as scientific books.

Interviewer

You're right. It makes it easier to take the existing and established definitions. But you mentioned here peer review and transparency, or striving towards some transparency. Do books need to be peer reviewed to be considered academic in the Norwegian system and this Norwegian definition? If we think about what could maybe be in scope of an open access policy, should like a requirement for peer review be part of the book mention? How do you see that?

Interviewee

I think it's important to think that research can be published in different outlets, but there must be a common ground for all the outputs and that is peer review. Because we know that researchers participate also in books that are meant for, for example, students, textbooks and so forth. They have a different purpose, I think, than monographs and chapters. That purpose is very important because it's communication and how students should learn. They should, of course, be based on the latest research. But in most cases, textbooks collect information from



existing research that has already been published. I think that it's quite important to distinguish these two types of outlets. I also want the future to include textbooks as open because they are also edited and performed by researchers, employed by us and the taxpayers' money in many ways. But it's important to have a different focus than the outlets that focus on original research, I think. It's important that we have peer review as a common standard for also books.

Interviewer

In this project, we have tried to split our perspective into something that's been used in other contexts as well, like a PESTLE model. I don't know if you're familiar with it, but basically looking at political, economic, technological, legal, and environmental factors of open access policy development. I have a few questions based on each of these categories and we can see how they work here. You already branched into the political aspect of policy development that there is currently a process ongoing where these higher education institutions are offered, was it commenting on a draft policy? Have they been involved in the process from the start?

Interviewee

Yes, they have. Through more or less an initiative that came from Universities Norway. We said to the government that you need to update your recommendation, saying that all public funded research should be open and available for us from 2024, because a lot of things have happened since you created your last strategy. We have progressed a lot concerning a lot of the aspects in comparison to where we were in 2016 when those were formulated. There was a need to update this. The government responded to our challenge by inviting the research-institutions together with the Research Council of Norway to establish a working group that should draft a new strategy and discuss this strategy with the research community in Norway. This is what we have done. We have had representatives from the research communities from the Ministry of Education and Research, and from the different governmental bodies that are responsible for open access policies, implementing the policy in Norway. We have written this document and this document is now out for commenting both for institutions under Universities Norway but also outside. In Norway we have an active hospital sector that perform research and a research institute sector that are outside the universities. All these three sectors that perform research are participating now in commenting on our draft. The end product here is of course, only recommendations, but it's based on all the experience we have from the last five or six years with negotiating with publishers, with seeing the progress and the number of publications that are open available. More or less 80% of the journal articles are now open. But we struggle with the last 20%. I think this is something that we have in common with many other countries.



Interviewer

Yes, I think we are roughly at the same percentage, probably a bit lower in Finland. But the last 20% are probably really require a diverse set of approaches. It's not one big deal, but rather many things.

Interviewer

I look into all the work that we have done that have mainly focused on articles, but I think a lot of progress can also be applied for books really because it's more about how one looks at open access. Open access is so important. What people often forget when we talk about books, at least I know this because my background as a publisher and responsible editor for many monographs and anthologies, nobody read those books. Very specialized bookstores had them in their shelf and nobody bought them. But of course, digitalization and creating electronic version of books makes it possible for people all over the world to read them. I think it's more important for books to be open than journals, because journals have been part of the digital platform since the late 90s and were available for those that could pay for them, which meant almost all the most important research communities. But books, they were not available in the same way. Performing your research through books didn't invite research community to comment, or read, or be critical to your research output. Now, Open Access facilitate all this. Therefore it is very important to make books openly available. The economic aspects around book publishing for publishers are not that commercially interesting as they are for journal publishing. I think it should be much easier to make this transition than all the discussions we have had around journals, I think.

Interviewer

So just to check, you mentioned that the old or the current policy doesn't really have a specific mention for books. And it doesn't seem like the current version that is under consultation will either have a mention. You mentioned that there is still this quite strong publisher orientation for offering academic open access book publishing options, which is surprising. In Finland, we don't really have anything like that. So that's something I would like to understand where it comes from. If it's not policy driven, where is the awareness and demand coming from in a way?

Interviewee

What differs in Norway from the other Nordic countries is that we have active commercial publishers, or I like to call them traditional publisher and not commercial because I reserve

commercial to big international publishing houses. They are part of the academic society and perform an important role in Norway. They also engage in journals. There was a larger publisher called Scandinavian University Press in Norway, that was established after World War II. This publisher became quite important. It was owned by the research institutions and it played a crucial role in establishing journals, both national journals and journals that later became important international journals. This publisher evolved to be an international publisher at some point when I started in 1997. The publisher engaged and published over 120 journals, of which 60 of them was quite international oriented in English language. This portfolio of international journal was later bought by Taylor and Francis. What was left, after being robbed by Taylor and Francis, was a smaller portfolio of national and Nordic journals mainly in humanities and social sciences. The remains was published under national publisher Universitetsforlaget. The publishers have engaged in the discussions around open access and have been quite important in that discussion in Norway. The platform that I created back in 2005, the Idunn platform, now also publishes books, open access books. There are two or three other commercial publishers in Norway that also publish open access books. They have established a system of the book publishing charges, which many thinks is quite expensive. But this is not in any way big business for these publishers. They have established a model for pricing open access books. They are facilitating those books with an open license and they're using different creative commons licenses that are compatible with the formal policy in Norway. They have tried to adapt before we have a formal politic in Norway. It's quite interesting.

Interviewer

I saw that one of the research performing organisations mentioned that staff could apply for financial support for book processing fees, I think it was NTNU, for up to 50,000 NOK. I think they might be priced higher than that probably, like if you have a full monograph in comparison to an individual chapter.

Interviewee

Yeah, I think you are up to around 150,000 NOK for a monograph, which is quite difficult for the institutions to find funding for. Of course, the previous model was based on funding from institutions or faculties or something like 50,000 and the rest of the money the publisher collected by selling the book in a bookstore. But in this new model, they seldom publish a printed edition of the book. They have only electronic version that are openly available through the different platforms.

Interviewer



Yes. Before we go into just the economic component, I forgot to ask about any incentives currently for either institutions or researchers to publish open access other than just the potential added viewership and maybe citations. But in Finland, we have this built-in multiplier in the funding model. But is there something similar in Norway that would be a direct incentive to do it?

Interviewee

There has been a discussion around this, not only for books, but also for journals at the earlier stages. When Norway signed the Plan S, we saw that almost 90% of the output from Norway were published in subscription-based journals. I think the picture was the same in Finland. I think that the core journals in the world were subscription-based, but all the negotiations and transformative agreements had switched this. Also, by performing publishing and read the agreement, I think that the discussions have also taken a new direction because we now see that the Norwegian researchers, with all the agreements that Norway have negotiated, can publish wherever they prefer and at the same time publish open. On top of the many different agreements with publishing and read arrangements, we see that many of the larger universities of Norway have created a local policy for a rights retention strategy to follow the green route of open access. They say that all output from our institutions should be archived in a local archive, whatever the publisher says. This means that there are very few boundaries for researchers to publish open now, and they can choose whatever channel they like to publish their research in. I think that very much of the discussion has changed since 2019, 2020. But this discussion does not cover books.

Interviewer

My next question relates to funding opportunities for open access and non-open access books. But based on your perspective, is it an uphill battle to get funding if you want to publish an open access book, compared to deciding to just publish a pay-per-view book, so to say, where you don't need upfront funding. Would you still say that it's something that is behind a few obstacles for authors?

Interviewee

For potential authors? I think so. What was so easy when books were sold in bookstores was that you didn't have to have funding in the same way. Very often you needed some funding still with the market model because scientific books, they were not commercially interesting, really, in a small market. But they sold maybe 100 copies or so. The rest of the expenses that the publisher

had by publishing a book must come from somewhere. Very often, the faculties and institute at the universities have some funding that they could help publish the book. But if you should publish the book Open Access, you need much more funding because you can't in the same way collect money through bookstore sales and so forth. It's an obstacle. Therefore, many talk about the need for creating funds for this if we want to protect this tradition in an open access landscape.

Interviewer

What would you say are the most prominent current funding sources for someone in Norway who would like to publish an open access book? Was it so that the research council has some institutional quotas? I understood there's some way for institutions to apply for open access funds from there?

Interviewee

They don't have this anymore. I've seen from the research council, they want the institution to bake the publication costs into the project. There is not really a separate fund for applying support for a book. Only 10% of the monographs that are reported in Norway are part of a projects funded by the research council of Norway. The vast majority of monographs are outside the research council, really. Therefore, I think it's so important with a strategy here. This is one of the points that I reflected on when I prepare for this conversation, I look back at the strategy that we have out now and I see that it's probably not good enough when it comes to this point because I think it's needed more focus on funding books if we are not going to disturb this important tradition because it's really an obstacle.

Interviewer

But it's currently so that it's up to the institutions, essentially, to design and offer funding for staff to potentially then publish their books open access their books? But it's not really something that has clear guidelines or even recommendations from somewhere else or what that should be or how it should look like.

Interviewee

No. I think that we see that probably, at least when it comes to publishing international, that there are some journals creating special issues and so forth. They are probably challenging these

questions when it comes to anthologies. But the tradition with the long publications through monographs, it's quite important to have a separate focus on, I think.

Interviewer

I think I got a good grasp of the economic situation. If we move over to the social component, then that's mainly about research assessment and prestige. How would you say that the role of just academic books in general are in Norway? Are they taken into consideration in research performance assessments? I guess, well, very instrumentally in this national publication forum, I guess they are baked in there at least in a numerical way. But how would you say overall what the climate is for, shall we say, monographs and books in Norway? What has the discourse and the strategies been concerning this?

Interviewee

I think you know about some of this discussion, it's a model, a quantitative model that gives you a publication points if you publish an article in a journal, depending on the level of that journal. The same, if you perform a book, it depends on the level of the publisher. But I have always, and the National Board of Scholarly Publishing has always, argued that one should not use those publication points in any individual context when evaluation researchers or research. This model is meant to be a funding model and should be used at the institutional level and allocate funding for the institutions based on performance. But as we know, they are still, for some institutions, used at individual level. We have created recommendations for research institutions covering this problem, arguing for responsible use of bibliometric indicators. But still, we see that some institutions use such information at an individual level. Some use this information to allocate time for research and to select who is to attend in conferences and so forth, if you are more productive, quantitative productive. You know that the research institution, they are autonomous, so they can manage their priorities like they want, but we can come with some recommendations. I am quite heavily involved in also the NOR-CAM project in Norway that you may have heard of. It's a project that we collaborated quite closely with Federation of Learned Societies in Finland also, and advocates what later became the European Agreement of Research Assessment. We tried to establish new ways of evaluating researchers. Of course, you should take your research output also into consideration. But the discussion in Norway has mainly been that textbooks have not been included in the model in a systematic way. You have done that in Finland, I know. You have probably better statistics on textbooks in Finland than you have in Norway because you have included it in your funding model. As you know, when you have numbers, numbers will be used. I think it's quite important with good data on research activities or all the activities that researchers perform, really, also textbooks. But if you ask me if engaging in monographs or chapters and anthologies are taken into account, I will say they are taking into



account in the same way as publishing in journals. In the social science and humanities, this is a more strong tradition, as you know.

Interviewer

I am maybe trying to be provocative here but prioritizing journal policies is perhaps not due to journals being more highly valued, but maybe that it has been maybe a simpler battle in a way, or at least there have been models and ways to facilitate that with agreements. It's not that books would be deprioritized, but it has just maybe been a more difficult thing to come with a unified policy for to really take a stab at making them open.

Interviewee

Yes. It's also like you know, journal articles were part of the Norwegian model for funding. This Norwegian model is now shut down as part of the funding model the universities and higher education institution, but not in the two other sectors. But we are discussing now how to uphold good national statistics and control and evaluation of the publication channels when there is not funding connected to reporting anymore. The model had five publication points for a monograph and one for an article. This information is also saying something that researchers are discussing all the time. I use much more time on a book than on a journal article. Five times more is not good enough, it should be eight times more or something. Yes, you have this debate. But researchers are acknowledged if they author monographs and perform publication through anthologies in the same way as they do in journals.

Interviewer

How would you say that this relationship between open access and perceived prestige relate to the discussion about books OA Books?

Interviewee

This is an area that has created a lot of discussions in the working group that are creating this new strategy. In the National Board of Scholarly and Publishing, we don't like the term prestige. Because prestige, when you use that term, we perceive that it comes with an ideology. We never talk about prestige. We are talking about leading journals and leading publishers. They are leading because what they do, representing quality work. We really mean that there are good and bad journals and good and bad publishers. The research community recognizes quality from

journals and from publishers. What I want and what I fight for is that there are plenty of open access channels that represent high quality. They perform high quality peer review. They have technical standards that are the best. They have editorial board and editors that are recognized as leading researchers in their field and so forth. There are many aspects with journals and publishers that we recognize as quality. For me, subscription or open access is irrelevant. I think that quality is something that researchers acknowledge. We have all the discussion not really about predator publishers, because this is not so interesting, I think, but a lot of publishers and journals that are operating in a grey zone.

Interviewee

This has challenged quality questions. It's probably the model of article processing charges, I think, that are big explanation of why all this grey zone activity has approached the market. But I know that you can, of course, talk about prestige because you can say if you have published in that journal, you are getting this position. The researcher you are competing with hasn't published in the prestige journals and so forth. I don't think we should use information about journal publishing in that way. But I think it's important to stimulate researchers to publish in journals or publishers where you recognize quality. My perspective is quality exists, but it's difficult to grab what it is. But the outcome, the publication should not be assessed as high quality because of the channel.

Interviewer

I think that's the modern way of looking at it, yes, and progressive. I think that probably translates well also to books that one shouldn't really use this prestige label , because it models the perception then of what it really means.

Interviewer

I have really only one question regarding this technological component, and that's, is there currently in Norway an existing platform or some solution that could help or facilitate if there would be an open access policy for books, for hosting them or even publishing them, depending on if we're talking about Norwegian books or international books that are distributed in a national portal. But is there currently you mentioned, Idunn, as something, but is that something that could work in this capacity?

Interviewee



This is an interesting question. You have the platform, but we also have platforms at universities in Norway, different platforms that are run by the Open Journal System technology. I think you used that also in the journal.fi solution.

Interviewer

Yes, but you have a more distributed environment compared to Finland?

Interviewee

This is because we had those publishers that I was talking about. But there have emerged 10 different platforms from different Norwegian universities that have created local platforms for journals. They have also a technical infrastructure to publish books. My project at Universities Norway was to try to copy journal.fi and to gather all those platforms into one Norwegian platform. We started that project by discussing with your colleagues in the Federation if we could do something Nordic. We found that there were so many problems, local problems in Finland and Denmark and Sweden separately, that it was easier to collaborate on the technical platform, discuss difficult standards of technical platforms around journals, open journals system and have separate national platforms. We can meet and discuss technical challenges around a common infrastructure, but we should have separate national platform. But in Norway, I didn't succeed in this project because we are in a period in Norway now that there is less money to research infrastructure. It's a quite tough budget situation for the universities. Every new suggestion of creating something new, they don't want to use money on this because they see that in Europe there are emerging different platforms that we maybe could use instead of doing something locally. I think that they want to rely on what's happening in the international context and see that there should be possibility to publish monographs and anthologies in international platforms that have the standards that are needed, and that the funder demands. But what is a problem with this is that much of the monographs and anthologies are local language publishing and those publications are not relevant for the international platforms. It's also a language question, I think this is. You know why I'm engaged in the Helsinki initiative, and I'm very interested in this question also.

Interviewer

Definitely. I think that's a very good charting of the waters when it comes to the Norwegian environment. There's not really any ready and waiting platform that would be immediately usable, but still maybe a wait and see approach regarding to any international platforms then emerging for common use?



Interviewee

Yes. You can use the commercial platforms like Idunn and like the two other national publishers offer. They try to uphold international standards of databases for journals and they have adopted the same technology for books so that those should be searchable and findable and so forth. But I really think that this is a field that we should have a national solution for, especially because of the language issue.

Interviewer

I think that's very unique for countries that are non-English to think about this balancing of content in different languages. Then I only have basically one question about the legal aspect. You said that quite a lot of the existing policies when it comes to journals have been accepting of CC licensing as being the expectation. Do you think the environment in Norway is accepting also to CC licensing if there would be more policies for books? Or has there been many objections this from stakeholders?

Interviewee

Yes, there have been. There is an ongoing discussion amongst the specialists, not so much among the researchers, but those that perform research in this field are quite critical to what Creative Commons is. But I really think that this debate has cooled down a bit. There is not so much discussion anymore. I think the ideology behind the Creative Commons needed time to sink in I think researchers needed time to understand why they are the way they are, why it is so important for reuse of research output, and that the old regime was based on what publishers needed, really because of the business model, they needed to hold back and protect publications and use copyright agreement to do this to protect really their products, what they are living of. But this is not the situation that is the best for the research and for the rest of the community. Innovation and for the use of research output to the broader community, it's so important to use these open licenses, I think.

Interviewee

The research council have also said that you need to publish with the creative comments or with a non-derivative or non-commercial license. They accept more, a wider variety of options.



Interviewer

But it still seems fairly progressive when it comes to adoption of open licensing of content. You mentioned that quite often there isn't a print version, or maybe not often, but sometimes there isn't a print alternative to some open access books that have been published. Do you think this has to do with environmental aspects of trying to be green or something like this? Or is it more an economic factor of digital enabling, cheaper distribution in a way?

Interviewee

I don't reckon I've heard any of those arguments yet, but I think, and I'm not sure, but I think that it is the economic aspects that are the reasons why so many of the monographs are only digital. But the research council in their recommendation, they have said that if they accept 12 months embargo for books, but at the same time, they recommend immediate open access. They say that if you choose the embargo route, you cannot include the cost for the book in the cost from research council. This is because when you use embargo, you want to sell the book in a bookshop. Then you have a different route to income. I think this is a quite smart solution, really. There are books that are interesting to be printed. Some of these books are in the borderline between textbooks and pure original research. They are also books that are on the list of students they have to read and some lists. Some of the courses are quite large. The potential of selling many books are present, especially in economics and history and some other field, that there are many students. When there is economic route of financing, they choose the embargo solution, I think.

Interviewer

Okay, that's very interesting. I realised my time is up , but is there anything that you think I've missed here or would be interesting to just note regarding the Norwegian situation when it comes to just open access or open access books, developments that haven't been really targeted by any of these questions?

Interviewee

I think that we have covered most of it. It was really an opportunity for me to read once more what we have written in the recommendation that we have now. It's probably more clear for me that we need the Ministry of Education and Research to come up with some active recommendation because there is such a little share of the monographs and anthologies that are funded by research councils. If we are going to achieve open access to books, we need some

recommendation from the government and we need some funding model, I think, for make this happen.

Interviewer

Perfect. Thank you. I'll stop the recording here.

