Attitudes towards Open Access Books in the European Research Area

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Abstract

This paper examines the challenges and opportunities of publishing Open Access (OA) books within the European Research Area (ERA), drawing on data collected through the PALOMERA project. Despite the growing interest in OA books, the landscape remains fragmented due to a lack of clear policies. National policies are often sparse, with institutional and funder mandates typically focused on journal articles rather than monographs. An issue also highlighted is the marginalisation of non-English language works, which receive significantly less visibility than English-language publications. Additionally, the perceived prestige of OA monographs remains a concern, with some scholars viewing them as less reputable than traditionally published works. This paper synthesises findings from 42 in-depth interviews to offer an overview of the current state of OA book publishing

in Europe. It identifies areas for policy improvement to foster a more inclusive and sustainable OA landscape.

Keywords: open access books; open access policies; OA books

1. Introduction

While academic books remain vital to scholarly communication, particularly in the social sciences and humanities (SSH), they have traditionally often been overlooked in policy discussions. This neglect is particularly striking in the context of open access, where policy attention has primarily focused on journal articles. To address this gap, the PALOMERA project (*Policy Alignment of open access (OA) Monographs in the European Research Area*), a two-year Horizon Europe initiative, has been analysing policies for open-access books and monographs. Through a comprehensive research design encompassing desk research, surveys, in-depth interviews, and case studies, PALOMERA provides a detailed examination of open access book policies across the diverse landscape of the European Research Area (ERA), considering variations in geography, language, economic context, and academic discipline. To ensure the broadest possible dissemination of findings, the project data, where feasible, are made available through the project's Knowledge Base.

The project broadly defines an academic book as a scholarly, peer-reviewed work encompassing monographs, book chapters, edited collections, critical editions, and other long-form scholarly outputs. The idea behind this definition was to open it as much as possible to local perspectives. In the PALOMERA project, textbooks and popular science books were not included, as the focus was beyond their scope.[1] The research team set a broad purview, focusing on data from 39 countries within the European Research Area,[2] covering a timespan from 2012 to 2022.[3] The input was sought from five key stakeholder groups: national policymakers, research funding and research performing organisations (RFOs & RPOs), publishers, and libraries, including other infrastructure providers.

In the project's first year, the research team gathered an extensive range of policy-related materials, including legal documents, grey literature, research articles, reports, statistical data, and outputs from related projects. Table 1 provides a summary of the data collection process. The table details the specific

Table 1: *PALOMERA Data collection.*

Process step	Input	Action	Output	Data destination
Datasets, Targeted survey to national libraries and aggregators	Quantitative data	Collection	Results: 16 responses 15 data sources	Paper on the available data
			~ 4 million items	
Documents	Legal documents, research articles	Collection	Documents and Excerpts (Zotero)	Knowledge Base
Interviews	Transcripts	Pre-coding	Transcripts (HappyScribe and DeepL) and pre-coded (MaxQDA) documents	Knowledge Base
Quantitative data	Survey report (Dreyer et al., 2024a); Survey results (Dreyer et al., 2024b)	Pre-analysis	Results	Zenodo

inputs, actions taken, outputs generated, and the final data destination for each step. The documents were collected, curated, processed, and annotated in a Zotero library. Simultaneously, PALOMERA deployed a survey via LimeSurvey, conducted interviews, and scoped the available bibliographic data. In total, the evidence base of the project consists of 967 documents with 1,552 excerpts, 420 completed survey responses, around four million aggregated bibliometric data records, and 42 in-depth interview transcriptions. To capture the multifaceted nature of open access books, the data collection was designed to address political, economic, social, technological, legal, and environmental dimensions. Accordingly, the PESTLE model (which analyses five key external factors: Political, Economic, Social, Technological and Ecological) was employed to frame and guide the analysis of the gathered materials.

One of the objectives of the interviews was to examine the attitudes of various stakeholders towards open access monographs and their position in scientific evaluation in selected countries. In numerous countries, RFOs (e.g., Lithuania, Poland, Switzerland), infrastructure providers, libraries (e.g., Croatia, Hungary, Sweden), and research-performing organisations have developed policies to support open access to publications. However, these policies often lack explicit reference to academic books, focusing solely on journal publications. Moreover, these policies frequently provide only recommendations and

guidelines without binding mandates. When examining the obligation levels for complying with OA book policies by stakeholder category, the policy mapping analysis revealed distinct patterns between Research Performing Organisations and Research Funding Organisations (Laakso et al., 2024). This suggests that RFOs may be more inclined to enforce open access compliance as a condition for receiving funding, ensuring that the research outputs resulting from the funded projects are made openly accessible. Thus, the key takeaway is that despite the small number of OA policies across ERA (and even fewer addressing monographs directly)[4], open academic book movements are gaining momentum. This growth is supported bottom-up by various institutions and funders, with differing degrees of obligation depending on the stakeholder type (Laakso et al., 2024).

This article first outlines key definitions and provides an overview of the current landscape surrounding OA academic books. It then describes the methodology applied and the policy mapping analysis conducted. The core sections focus on three critical factors influencing attitudes toward OA books: research assessment, prestige economy, and multilingualism, each examined in detail. The primary objective is to explore how these three interconnected components shape stakeholder perspectives and policy development related to OA monographs in selected countries. By addressing these factors, the analysis seeks to identify systemic barriers and highlight opportunities for advancing OA book publishing practices.

2. Academic Books in the Evolving Open Science Landscape

The digitisation of scholarly practices has tremendously affected how openness is conceptualised and used in the scientific world (Leonelli, 2023). Primarily understood as open access, Open Science continues shaping various aspects of knowledge production, such as methodologies, data or the assessment process (Burgelman et al., 2019; Drach et al., 2022; Moradi & Abdi 2023). The proliferation of OS practices and services, as well as the ongoing discussions on different OS aspects, are only sometimes supported by written policies.

Recently, Plan S has been the most influential catalyst for policy creation, spearheaded by a coalition of funding agencies (cOAlition S), which promoted and implemented regulations regarding open publications of articles

resulting from funded research.[5] cOAlition S recommends that all funded academic books be made immediately open access under a Creative Commons licence, with authors retaining rights and funding agencies supporting open access publishing models.[6] However, these measures are still awaiting implementation, despite being mentioned together with the launch of Plan S OA journal article guidance.

Numerous institutions and private organisations have implemented policies or mandates addressing various facets of open science, with open access being a primary focus (Burgelman et al., 2019; Manco, 2022; Moradi & Abdi, 2023; Potvin & Arant-Kaspar, 2023; Robinson-Garcia et al., 2020; Wenaas & Gulbrandsen, 2022). Among the diverse documents, including laws, policies, and recommendations, the most effective are institutional open mandates. These mandates typically provide concrete instructions to researchers, librarians, and editors regarding preparing research outputs for open-access publishing, encompassing the regulation of publication processes and research data preservation and availability. Furthermore, they address topics such as different types of open access (green, gold, hybrid and diamond), author obligations, and recommended or required open licenses.[7] However, such mandates reflect the institutional needs and do not guarantee systemic coherence or alignment with actual scholarly communication practices.

The implementation of OA practices in different organisations, from universities and research institutions to publishers, is usually preceded by efforts to analyse the impact of such regulations on dissemination and its efficiency in increasing the visibility of research outputs (Bryan & Ozcan, 2021; Robinson-Garcia et al., 2020; Vincent-Lamarre et al., 2016), as well as attempts to determine whether open mandates have an impact on the number of OA publications (Azadbakht et al., 2023). There has been an interest in assessing incentives that increase researchers' engagement in OA practices (Hadad et al., 2023; Koley & Lala, 2022; Terán & Dávila, 2023). Policies, as well as international agreements such as Plan S, tend to concentrate on journal publishing. However, the world of OA books is growing despite the relatively low emphasis on regulating their openness (Laakso, 2022). This growth is largely driven by bottom-up changes initiated by publishers, particularly scholar-led presses and institutional publishers, which are pioneering new models for funding, distributing, and ensuring the quality of OA books. While this decentralised evolution fosters innovation, it also makes it challenging for decision-makers to assess the impact of OA books on

scholarly communication and develop effective incentives for their long-term preservation.

Discussions on open access usually refer to journal publishing at an institutional level. However, few institutions in European countries have introduced policies regulating publishing monographs in open access. Likewise, national policies on Open Access rarely regulate or even refer to academic book publishing specifically (Café et al., 2022; Moradi & Abdi, 2023; Potvin & Arant-Kaspar, 2023; Laakso et al. 2024). The lack of policy, both on national and institutional levels, may stem from many factors, including profound differences in journal publishing, different business models and varied importance of monographs among different scholarly domains.

Despite this inertia, the question of advancing OA book publishing remains of utmost importance for a large group of scholars since books are one of the most critical research outputs in SSH, as numerous studies have argued (cf. Adema, 2021; Avanço et al., 2021; Kivistö & Pihlström, 2015). Over the past decade, countless significant reports and articles have been published focusing specifically on open access books. The research focuses on systemic relationships between authors, publishers, funders, policy publishing workflows, and policy-making (Adema, 2019; Crossick, 2016; Fathallah, 2022; Ferwerda et al. 2017, 2021; Frankl, 2023; Penier et al., 2020). Some studies trace the impact of OA books, collecting and synthesising heterogeneous data on how OA affects book publishing. Laakso (2022) shows that though the number of books published in OA is growing, there needs to be more infrastructural support for this process in the long run. Snijder conducted numerous studies on open books' impact based on the Directory of Open Access Books (DOAB) data – one of the largest online databases of OA books and book publishers (Snijder, 2013a, 2013b, 2015, 2022). His experimental study on citations suggests that books do not benefit from being OA as much as journals regarding the number of citations. However, this could be attributed to the longer life cycle of books, which are slower in generating impact. DOAB data also suggest that OA books benefit researchers from developing countries with fewer resources to invest in science (Snijder, 2013a). Furthermore, the data shows that books in SSH disciplines play a role not only for the specialised scholarly communities but also for the wider local audiences. There is a significant interest in books covering regional topics, as the most frequently downloaded ones are often written in non-English languages (Snijder, 2022).

The impact of OA books is one of the arguments that have a significant value for various stakeholders, such as authors, publishers or decision-makers providing support to open infrastructures. The systemic relationships between those actors are a focus of the second strand of research discussed here. Frankl proposed studying "open access culture" which he defined as a set of beliefs, practices, and attitudes towards OA publishing shared by members of the academic field (Frankl, 2023). He argues that studying OA cultures helps better understand authors' needs in each discipline. For categories informing the analysis, Frankl proposes activities, knowledge, prestige and perceptions, funding, barriers and reservations, field populations and publishing needs.

Authors have been the subject of several studies (Avanço et al., 2021; Collins & Milloy, 2012; Frankl, 2023). In general, SSH authors' motivations to publish OA refer to the increased visibility of their work and the possibility of communicating their results to broader audiences (Collins & Milloy, 2012). They tend to be critical of Article or Book Processing Charges (APCs and BPCs), which are usually requested by the recognised publishers that will most benefit them regarding their career prospects (Avanço et al., 2021). What is interesting is the authors' attachment to the printed book as a preferable, tangible object. However, even the biggest OA opponents changed their minds after the COVID pandemic (Frankl, 2023). Frankl (2023) recommends considering authors' attitudes towards OA when introducing OA incentives, not neglecting disciplinary norms and perceiving OA as an art of compromise (2023). Adema (2019, p. 21) sees authors' engagement with OA books as crucial for the success of this publishing model, and points to prestige playing a central role in convincing researchers to publish OA (2019). The complex role of prestige, including the perception of OA as less prestigious, will be explored in greater detail later in this discussion.

Some researchers analyse the publishing ecosystem from the publishers' and presses' perspectives (Shaw et al., 2023; Suhendra & Laksmi, 2022). According to Shaw et al. (2023)'s study of UK publishers, the COVID-19 pandemic accelerated the trend for digital dissemination, whereby OA titles received substantially more usage than those published traditionally. Publishers are at the centre of networking collaborative initiatives, such as the Open Access Book Network (OABN) grown by the OAPEN Foundation, Open Book Publishers and SPARC Europe.[8] They gather practitioners and researchers, concentrating on knowledge exchange and advancing understanding of different publishing models. Particular stress has been put on knowledge exchange,

networking opportunities and investigating collaborative models beneficial for small presses who struggle with maintaining digital infrastructure for publishing books (Błaszczyńska et al., 2023).

Other studies focus on another group of stakeholders – the policy makers. Though rarely researched as an actor, the group is of interest for some advocacy reports and papers. Adema's report "Towards a Roadmap for Open Access Monographs" takes a broad but practical approach and proposes concrete action points for stakeholders to foster OA book publishing (Adema, 2019). Offering practical advice, Adema points out that a good policy should be based on an in-depth analysis of the whole ecosystem, including authors' attitudes and available infrastructures, and should introduce monitoring incentives (Adema, 2019, p. 21).

This exploration of the evolving landscape of OA book publishing underscores the need for a deeper understanding of the perceptions and practices shaping this transition and the decisions made by actors involved in those processes. The following section delves into the methodology employed by PALOMERA to gather essential data on attitudes towards OA books within the ERA.

3. Methodology

The PALOMERA data collection methodology was multifaceted, incorporating a range of data sources (see: Maryl et al., 2024 for details). This article presents the research design behind the interviews, which provided a broader contextual framework for the policies, documents, and data gathered in the project.

The research sample was carefully curated to reflect the overall goals of the project, i.e. addressing different stakeholder groups within the entire ERA (Table 2). Throughout the process, we strived for diversity regarding gender, geographic coverage and role. Note that interviewees often represented more than one stakeholder group. A total of 39 individual interviews and three group interviews were conducted, each lasting approximately 60 minutes. Interviewers were supported with a detailed interview handbook and followed a questionnaire, adjusted to each stakeholder group (see: Maryl et al., 2024: Annexes 5 to 7 for details). Interviews were conducted in a variety of

Table 2: *PALOMERA interview sample breakdown.*

Category	Details
Gender breakdown	Female: 24
	Male: 23
Stakeholder breakdown	RPO (Research Performing Organisation): 19
	RFO (Research Funding Organisation): 10
	Library: 11
	Publisher: 8
	Policymaker: 5
Geographic	34 countries – 1 interview per country
	3 countries – 2 interviews per country (Germany, Netherlands, Belgium)
	1 country – 3 interviewees (Slovakia)
	3 countries – no interviews (Albania, North Macedonia, Montenegro)

languages, transcribed with HappyScribe and translated into English with DeepL if required. Anonymised transcripts were validated by interviewees and, if they agreed to publication, subsequently incorporated into the Knowledge Base. For analysis purposes, interviews were pre-coded using PESTLE tags with MAXQDA software and analysed through In Vivo coding. This dual coding approach allowed for identifying critical issues that warrant deeper analysis.

In total, 3,601 codes were applied during this analysis: 1,841 pre-coded PESTLE tags and 1,760 in-vivo codes. This reflects a rich dataset that informs ongoing discussions about OA book policies across Europe. Initial findings indicated that while many stakeholders recognised the importance of incorporating OA books into their policies, significant challenges remain. The more detailed analysis of this qualitative data, presented in the next section, focuses on three main factors influencing attitudes towards OA books: research assessment, prestige and multilingualism.

4. Findings

4.1. Research Assessment

Research assessment is one of the critical systemic factors in the academic ecosystem that affects publishing practices and models. Our interviewees discussed research assessment from two perspectives: policy regulations

shaping the academic system in particular countries or institutions and practices, such as peer review, utilised by researchers themselves to ensure high-quality research.

The research assessment system, or evaluation system, is shaped by national and institutional policies, and in the case of the ERA, also by European regulations and recommendations. It is based predominantly on quantitative measures and indicators produced by commercial platforms, such as the Impact Factor provided by Clarivate or other citation indexes. National policies rarely include OS practices as one of the factors considered in the assessment (Laakso et al., 2024), but even if they do, they often exclude books, like in the example of the institutional policy reported in the interview with an RPO from Iceland.[9] In journal publishing, OA is often enforced by the requirements of the funding agencies and sustained by research assessment practices that encourage researchers and their institutions to publish predominantly in high-ranking English language journals. The transformation to OA for book publishing has yet to be that widely embraced. On the national level, shaped by national laws and national open science strategies, books and their openness (or lack thereof) are rarely mentioned (there are some exceptions, such as Slovenia). Some bottom-up institutional initiatives precede national discussions or documents of any kind, but their efficiency depends on their financial and technical capacities:

> *We have a deposit obligation, which then makes open archiving [possible]. Since a year and a half now, it does include books, book chapters, and conference proceedings, because I campaign for this because I said this is coming (…). But there's absolutely no discussion in the law or something like that to change this, and I see absolutely no support for that time being.* (PALOMERA interview transcript Belgium (1) 2023)

Our interviewees, especially publishers and funders, usually supported the idea of national incentives towards open access book publishing:

> *I'm in touch with this unit and this is something which I'll personally bring to their attention that it's good to have specific treatment of the books. Here I will say why, for example, we will speak later about the incentives. There are incentives for publishing scholarly articles. There is nothing in the area of books. This is showing that books are treated differently.* (PALOMERA interview transcript Bulgaria 2023)

Currently, research assessment systems in many countries do not adequately incentivise or recognise open access book publishing (Laakso et al., 2024). While some initiatives are experimenting with encouraging open practices, such as in Ireland, there is generally a lack of tangible benefits for researchers who choose to publish their books in open access. This lack of recognition within assessment systems is a critical barrier, as highlighted by stakeholders:

> So as long as the researchers are evaluated through impact factors or metrics in any form, they will not be doing anything towards open access of any output, even if this is a book or not. (…) So if this is not recognised, they will not do it. Even though they may know what are the benefits. (PALOMERA interview transcript Cyprus 2023).

These stakeholders, especially RPOs and publishers, encourage open access because it strengthens the visibility of research outputs. They are aware, however, that without a dedicated research assessment scheme including OA it is difficult to convince authors to put more effort into publishing OA unless their department or funder requires it. As a Czech publisher observes:

> I think that it basically gives you no points whether your publication is open access or not. It is just not important in the assessment. And I think that people are aware that this is bad because we need to motivate the researchers to publish open access.[10]

Although stakeholders often agree that OA needs to be recognised, they do not necessarily believe in a system that would not be based on quantitative indicators:

> We don't assess it because we don't have a formal policy, etc., but I assume that we will do it the same way we assess any progress by some key performance indicators that will be defined in the rules and regulations, etc., etc. (PALOMERA interview transcript Bosnia and Herzegovina 2023).

Some national agencies, like in the case of Denmark, have already created indicators concerning open access on the basis of repositories. However, they are not always used for research assessment (PALOMERA interview transcript Denmark 2023).

Rigorous academic practices of quality control are in the heart of research assessment. One of the aspects reconsidered and discussed in terms of OA books is peer review and its role in recognising a book as a high-quality scholarly work. Stakeholders discuss peer review as a means to differentiate scholarly monographs from general book publishing (PALOMERA interview transcript Finland 2023). Usually, disciplinary and national requirements demand some form of a peer review as quality assurance, but there are exceptions, like in the case of Greece:

> *Actually, a lot of publications, a lot of book publishing is done without review, without peer review, let's say by private publishers to start with, but also by academic institutions.* (PALOMERA interview transcript Greece 2023) (also in: PALOMERA interview transcript Romania 2023, PALOMERA interview transcript Romania 2023, or PALOMERA interview transcript Turkey 2023 peer reviews are not a prerequisite of a scholarly monograph).

While peer review is often seen as a mark of scholarly quality, reviewers are not explicitly rewarded in research assessment systems. Instead, it remains a voluntary task, embedded within editorial board decisions. One reason for this is resource shortages, as reviewing a book takes significantly more time than reviewing an article. Consequently, editors play a greater role in quality assurance than in journal publishing. Stakeholders view peer review as part of a broader editorial process that ensures scholarly control over published materials.

One of the models with perhaps the most robust control over the quality of content as well as the publication workflow, is scholar-led presses:

> *The keyword "scholar-led" is not used so often for books, but I think that is also a criterion, that of course the review, but also the selection of titles and series and the design of a publication program in general, that this is in the hands of the researchers themselves as much as possible.* (PALOMERA interview transcript Switzerland).

Since open access has faced criticism for its perceived lack of quality assurance, peer review may increasingly serve as a recognized *stamp* of high quality (OAPEN Open Access Books Toolkit, 2024). Strong academic quality assurance procedures play a crucial role in shaping the perception of an OA book.

4.2. Prestige

Open access is the mode of dissemination, not quality control *per se*. Hence, in theory, there should be no difference in the value ascribed to open or closed-access publications, provided they follow academic quality assurance procedures as described in the previous section. Our interviewees seem to share that view. Yet, the prestige economy in academia is a complex notion based on taking the publication venue – a journal "brand" or a publishing house – as a proxy of the work's quality and significance for the field. Hence, researchers are expected to prioritise the dissemination of their research findings through what are deemed the most esteemed channels. There is a growing literature describing how concepts of "excellence" and "quality" have been used within academia (Lamont, 2009; Moore et al. 2017) and operationalised into "quantified control" (Burrows, 2012), trying to disentangle the complex relationship between research culture and the commercial publishing market (Fyfe et al., 2017).

Earlier interviews conducted within the framework of OPERAS-P project illuminated the complex and often contradictory attitudes surrounding innovation in scholarly communication, which mainly was understood as providing seamless and unrestricted access to the academic output (cf. Maryl et al., 2021, pp. 105–122). Although an embedded hierarchy of publication formats persists, with the monograph retaining its position as the most prestigious output in SSH, innovative forms of scholarly writing like digital scholarly editions, computational essays or multimedia narratives have introduced uncertainty. While some scholars have embraced and incorporated these novel output formats into their work, others remain sceptical of their value and cite difficulties in integrating them into traditional academic practices. However, as we are about to demonstrate, the acceptance of open access is increasing, although prejudices still influence this area.

In the contemporary academic landscape, the prestige of a scholarly work appears to be predominantly derived from its inherent content and quality rather than its format or accessibility. Our interviewees largely concurred that factors such as rigorous quality control, stringent peer review processes, and the publisher's reputation play a more significant role in establishing a book's prestige than whether it is open access or not. As one interviewee aptly summarised, "open access is just another format… the prestige comes from the label, comes from the peer review, comes from the collection that the book

gets published on, and comes from the prestige of the imprint" (PALOMERA interview transcript Spain 2023). Yet, as another interviewee observed, this works both ways. The open access format neither diminishes the book's value nor elevates it: "The prestige of a book is, of course, built by its content, and here no open access will help if the publication is poor." (PALOMERA interview transcript Poland 2023).

The notion that OA publications might have been' perceived as less prestigious in the past, particularly in the last two decades, was also acknowledged. However, we observed a consensus among the interviewees that this perception is gradually fading, and OA publications are increasingly being evaluated on par with their traditional counterparts. This shift in attitude is perhaps more pronounced in journal articles, where open access is often seen as a "bureaucratic requirement" rather than a reflection of content quality (PALOMERA interview transcript Ireland 2023).

Nevertheless, some reservations about OA books persist, particularly concerning the reputation of publishing houses. Navigating the OA landscape can be challenging, and scholars may be wary of publishing with less established publishers. As one interviewee noted, "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" (PALOMERA interview transcript Finland 2023). Furthermore, the discriminatory and unjust conflation of open access with predatory and vanity publishing continues to contribute to negative perceptions. Some scholars still associate open access with lower quality and less rigorous peer review, likening it to such outputs as Wikipedia, as our Lithuanian interviewee observed (PALOMERA interview transcript Lithuania 2023). On the other hand, there is also recognition that open access books can be more valuable due to their increased accessibility and wider reach (Lithuania). The relative novelty of OA publishing and the fact that it has been used as a vessel for predatory publishing practices have undoubtedly contributed to these lingering concerns and the resulting confusion for some researchers. As Eve suggests, it may simply be a matter of time before OA outlets accumulate the prestige associated with traditional publishing models (Eve, 2014, p. 50).

Publishers themselves are widely recognised as significant contributors to a book's prestige. Factors such as international reach, commercial success, and established brand reputation are often seen as indicators of a publisher's prestige. One interviewee simply defined academic prestige as "publishing

the book with certain publishers" (PALOMERA interview transcript Ireland 2023). However, pursuing prestige can sometimes hinder the adoption of open-access publishing. Scholars may be reluctant to engage with open access presses, even those with firm commitments to quality and rigorous peer review, due to concerns about their perceived lower prestige. This tension is particularly evident in specific scientific fields, where traditional publishing models remain deeply entrenched (PALOMERA interview transcript Italy 2023). Interestingly, many interviewees struggled to identify prestigious publishers in their countries who actively support OA publishing. This suggests that open access remains a niche within the publishing landscape, with significant room for growth and development.

Beyond open access and publisher reputation, other factors also contribute to the perceived prestige of scholarly books. Individually authored books are generally considered more prestigious than multi-authored ones, and despite the emerging trends of digital use described earlier, print books, particularly in the humanities, are still sometimes favoured for their perceived durability and longevity despite their relative impracticality compared to digital formats. These additional dimensions highlight prestige's complex and multifaceted nature in academic publishing. While open access may not be the sole determinant of a book's prestige, it is increasingly recognised as a viable and valuable publishing model that can coexist with and even enhance the entrenched notions of scholarly excellence, as the improved access and wider reach offer potential for more profound impact and greater visibility, leading to increased citations.

The complex interplay between open access and prestige is deeply intertwined with the power structures that permeate academia. These power dynamics often manifest as systemic barriers to the widespread adoption of open access and contribute to the persistence of prestige biases against open access publications. One manifestation of these power structures lies in the generational divide within academia. Established scholars, who have often built their careers within traditional publishing models, may be less inclined to embrace open access and view new dissemination channels with scepticism, as mentioned by our interviewees from Hungary (PALOMERA interview transcript Hungary 2023) and Netherlands (PALOMERA interview transcript Netherlands 2023). Their influence and authority within their respective fields can perpetuate the notion that OA publications are inherently less prestigious. The pressure to publish books, particularly for early

career researchers (ECRs) seeking career advancement, further reinforces the dominance of traditional publishing models. Books, often associated with prestigious university presses, are frequently seen as essential for securing tenure and promotions. This expectation can discourage scholars from pursuing open-access publishing options, even if they align with their values and research objectives.

Moreover, ECRs face additional challenges in navigating the OA landscape, particularly due to limited access to funding and resources, especially when considering the prevalence of Book Processing Charges (BPCs), i.e. fees levied by publishers to make a book freely available online. While established scholars may have more opportunities to secure grants and subsidies for OA publishing charges, ECRs often lack access to the same level of financial support. This disparity can create a systemic disadvantage for those seeking to publish open access, perpetuating the perception that open access is less prestigious or accessible. These are the challenges of a systemic nature. Encouraging intergenerational dialogue, promoting greater transparency in career advancement criteria, and providing more equitable access to funding and resources are all crucial steps towards creating a more inclusive and equitable scholarly publishing ecosystem, whereby the prestige of academic work is determined by its intrinsic merit rather than its adherence to traditional publishing models. That, of course, would require rethinking the metrics and approaches applied in research assessment, which is beyond the scope of this paper but already actively discussed by such organisations as the Coalition for Advancing Research Assessment (CoARA)

4.3. Multilingualism

It is common for SSH books to appear in national languages and engage with local communities. The notions of "multilingualism" and "bibliodiversity" hint at the intrinsic value of using different languages in scholarly communications to make it more accessible but also rooted in local scholarship and theoretical frameworks. Within specific disciplines, in this case, SSH, the perception of academic books varies significantly compared to STEM fields. An interviewee from France emphasised this distinction:

> *In STEM, books clearly don't have the same aura as in SSH. It's important to publish books [in national language], because researchers are aware that it's*

important for them to pass on a whole and not just an article, and that there's a need for different audiences too, and that an academic book will probably not reach a wider audience (France)[11].

This suggests that while local languages are crucial for contextualising research, the authors and publishers often struggle against the dominance of English. This also brings us back to the issue of research assessment, discussed earlier – English publications are usually valued more, which disincentivises multilingualism.

The interviews revealed that, paradoxically, OA publishing may pose significant challenges to this model. As one interviewee from Bulgaria noted, "books in English are more visible than books in [Bulgarian]" (PALOMERA interview transcript Bulgaria 2023), highlighting the bias towards English-language publications, which may overshadow works in local languages. This visibility issue is compounded by the preference of scholars for broader audiences, as articulated by a Hungarian interviewee:

Of course, the scholar himself or herself might prefer a wider audience. Also, it is quite common that if a book is published in an international project (add. English language) or corporation, or it has some particular connections. (PALOMERA interview transcript Hungary 2023).

The publisher's location is also crucial in determining prestige and recognition within academic circles. As noted by an interviewee from Slovenia,

if you're a researcher and if you publish a book, you get more points if you get published by Oxford University Press, for example, than if you publish the same book in English at the University of Ljubljana Press (PALOMERA interview transcript Slovenia 2023).

This reflects a broader trend where academic evaluation systems favour global publishers over local ones, which is usually linked to the issue of the publication language. Additionally, another researcher pointed out that

when you start as a young assistant, you want your tenures… there are very strict rules… if you publish an article in a journal which is in first or second quartile, you get two points for one article… If you publish a good humanistic book in [national] language… you get two points or something very similar. (RPO)[12].

This demonstrates how language biases within research metrics can discourage scholars from publishing in their native languages.

The findings underscore the complex dynamics of multilingualism in OA book publishing. The preference for English-language publications poses significant challenges to the visibility and prestige of works published in local languages. Addressing these issues requires concerted efforts to recognise and value multilingual scholarship within academic evaluation systems to foster a more inclusive scholarly communication landscape.

5. Conclusions

The absence of clear regulations for Open Access books poses significant challenges for their publication. While the obstacles do not outrightly prevent the publication of OA books, they complicate the process, often leaving institutions and individual authors to navigate a fragmented and complex landscape. National OA policies tend to be sparse or underdeveloped. Though institutional and funder mandates attempt to bridge these gaps, they typically lack robust incentive structures to motivate scholars toward OA publishing. In the absence of a cohesive support framework, many authors may opt for more straightforward closed options, limiting the potential impact of academic monographs.

The research discussed here focused on the interplay of three components influencing the attitudes towards OA books: research assessment, prestige, and multilingualism. Current research assessment systems often fail to incentivise OA for books. At the same time, prestige is still largely associated with traditional publishing models, creating obstacles for wider OA adoption, especially among early career researchers. Although OA offers potential benefits for multilingualism, the dominance of the English language and biases towards international publishers pose challenges for non-English language publications. Complementing these qualitative findings, the analysis of existing policies offered further insights. It exposed not only a scarcity of national-level OA policies addressing academic books directly but also a lack of alignment and coherence among the policies of various stakeholders, including Research Performing Organisations, Research Funding Organisations, libraries, and infrastructure providers. While some policies exist, they frequently rely on non-binding recommendations without clear mandates, and

exhibit differing levels of obligation across stakeholder categories (Laakso et al., 2024).

Together, the findings from PALOMERA interviews and policy analysis – highlight systemic challenges that hinder the broader adoption of OA books. Crucially, they raise the question of how to act now to address these gaps and forge a more sustainable OA book ecosystem. To answer this, the PALOMERA project has produced a comprehensive set of evidence-based, actionable recommendations to guide stakeholders towards meaningful change. One of the central goals of these recommendations is to foster greater alignment across the OA book policy landscape. The recommendations are structured progressively, starting with general guidance applicable to all stakeholders, followed by specific recommendations for RPOs, RFOs, policymakers, libraries, researchers, publishers, infrastructure providers, and learned societies (Bandura-Morgan et al., 2024). In addition, the PALOMERA Knowledge Base (KB) serves as a tool in this process. It enables comparative analyses of OA policies across countries and stakeholder categories, helps identify trends and best practices, and supports the development of context-specific policies. Additionally, the accompanying recommendations provide a practical, evidence-based framework to guide stakeholders in designing policies that can lead to systemic change.

Implementing these recommendations in a coordinated, collaborative manner, both nationally and internationally, is crucial. Alignment and cooperation across stakeholder groups can translate fragmented policies into practical actions, support diverse publishing models and languages, and strengthen infrastructure and reward systems (Stern et al., 2024). The PALOMERA Knowledge Base and tailored recommendations offer practical tools and examples to facilitate this process.

6. Research Data

PALOMERA interview transcript Belgium (1) 2023, https://hdl.handle.net/20.500.14219/4676.
PALOMERA interview transcript Bosnia and Herzegovina 2023, https://hdl.handle.net/20.500.14219/4679.
PALOMERA interview transcript Bulgaria 2023, https://hdl.handle.net/20.500.14219/4658.

PALOMERA interview transcript Cyprus 2023, https://hdl.handle.
net/20.500.14219/4675.
PALOMERA interview transcript Denmark 2023, https://hdl.handle.
net/20.500.14219/4674.
PALOMERA interview transcript Finland 2023, https://hdl.handle.
net/20.500.14219/4673.
PALOMERA interview transcript Greece 2023, https://hdl.handle.
net/20.500.14219/4671.
PALOMERA interview transcript Hungary 2023, https://hdl.handle.
net/20.500.14219/4684.
PALOMERA interview transcript Ireland 2023, https://hdl.handle.
net/20.500.14219/4669.
PALOMERA interview transcript Italy 2023, https://hdl.handle.
net/20.500.14219/4668.
PALOMERA interview transcript Lithuania 2023, https://hdl.handle.
net/20.500.14219/4666.
PALOMERA interview transcript Netherlands 2023, https://hdl.handle.
net/20.500.14219/4670.
PALOMERA interview transcript Poland 2023, https://hdl.handle.
net/20.500.14219/4662.
PALOMERA interview transcript Romania 2023, https://hdl.handle.
net/20.500.14219/4680.
PALOMERA interview transcript Slovenia, https://hdl.handle.
net/20.500.14219/4682.
PALOMERA interview transcript Spain 2023, https://hdl.handle.
net/20.500.14219/4693.
PALOMERA interview transcript Switzerland, https://hdl.handle.
net/20.500.14219/4691.
PALOMERA interview transcript Turkey 2023, https://hdl.handle.
net/20.500.14219/4690.

7. Data Availability

PALOMERA project has made datasets and the associated data management plan, and reports publicly accessible on Zenodo and in Knowledge Base. These resources include datasets from the OA policy mapping, literature review, interviews, and survey conducted during the project. They can be

found at the following links: https://zenodo.org/communities/palomera; https://knowledgebase.oabooks-toolkit.org

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Notes

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[1] Open textbooks are excluded from this definition on purpose because they are involved in different processes. Policies concerning open textbooks need to consider aspects of Open Educational Resources, which are outside the scope of the PALOMERA project.

[2] Albania, Austria, Belgium, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Croatia, Cyprus, Czechia, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Iceland, Ireland, Italy, Latvia, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Malta, Moldova, Montenegro, Netherlands, North Macedonia, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Serbia, Slovakia, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, Turkey, Ukraine, and the United Kingdom.

[3] Rationale: a decade after the EC approach towards open science was codified (EC, 2012) and implemented in Horizon 2020, which also had significant impact on national policies.

[4] From 246 OA policy documents from the ERA analysed, only the 113 policy documents mention OA books explicitly. PALOMERA Deliverable 3.1 – Report on Analysis Findings. Zenodo. https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.14330282.

[5] https://www.coalition-s.org/.

[6] cOAlition S statement on Open Access for academic books, https://www.coalition-s.org/coalition-s-statement-on-open-access-for-academic-books/.

[7] See various institutionals' policies: https://knowledgebase.oabooks-toolkit.org/browse/author?scope=d1a1c329-7b66-44ff-b888-c1573a3cac85.

[8] As of recently, it has become part of OPERAS Business Models Special Interest Group. See more: https://operas-eu.org/special-interest-groups/open-access-business-models/. https://openaccessbooksnetwork.hcommons.org/.

[9] The interviewee did not agree for the whole transcript publication.

[10] The interviewee did not agree for the whole transcript publication.

[11] The interviewee did not agree for the whole transcript publication.

[12] The interviewee did not agree for the whole transcript publication.