

<http://somatosphere.net/2015/11/an-open-access-publishing-cooperative-for-anthropology.html>

An open access publishing cooperative for anthropology?

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By Eugene Raikhel

Last month [HAU](#) and [Cultural Anthropology](#) published a proposal for an open access anthropology publishing cooperative written by Alberto Corsín Jiménez, John Willinsky, Dominic Boyer, Giovanni da Col and Alex Golub. The American Anthropological Association's (AAA) current contract with Wiley-Blackwell expires at the end of 2017 and the organization [announced recently](#) that it would be inviting publishers to bid for the business of publishing its 22 titles. Addressed to the AAA, and conceptualized as an OA alternative to its current model, the proposal for a publishing cooperative has stirred up a considerable amount of conversation on social media and on [anthropology blogs](#). To find out more about the proposal, I got in touch with and posed a few questions to two of its authors, [Giovanni da Col](#), the founder and editor of *HAU*, and [Alberto Corsín Jiménez](#), Associate Professor in Social Anthropology in the Department of the History of Science at the Spanish National Research Council in Madrid.

***ER:** Tell me a little about the background for this proposal. How did it come together?*

GDC & ACJ: The idea of a cooperative is the natural development of the model launched by *HAU* through its [Network of Ethnographic Theory](#) in 2011 and adopted more recently by other open access initiatives such as *Cultural Anthropology* and [The Open Library of Humanities](#). We are proposing a no-brainer model for reinventing academic publishing. Rather than having thousands of institutions forced to buy expensive bundles from corporate publishers with revenues over 40%, we can have a limited numbers of institutions paying a smaller amount to guarantee the rest of the world free access to top-notch disciplinary research. The idea for [LIBRARIA](#) harks back to a Wenner-Gren workshop held in Madrid in October 2014. At the workshop the two of us talked with John Willinsky ([Public Knowledge Project](#)) about alternative OA cooperative scenarios to the current ecology of scholarly publishing. Enthused by the productivity of our exchanges, over the following weeks we began drafting a proposal for

one such cooperative project. We made quite some progress very quickly and in just under four months managed to spark the interest of a number of learned societies and journals, including the Wenner-Gren itself, the European Association of Social Anthropologists, the Society for Social Studies of Science and Technology (4S), the Society for Cultural Anthropology and *HAU*, among others. We also managed to entice [SPARC](#) to join the project. (The Scholarly Publishing and Academic Resources Coalition is the world's largest alliance of research and academic libraries and a leading advocate for open access.)

The relevance of such a project could not pass unnoticed: last May the MacArthur Foundation invited the Public Knowledge Project to pitch a project on open access futures that used LIBRARIA as one of its case studies. We are now embarked in a two-year project that aims to bring a variety of stakeholders together to model a robust, large-scale cooperative alternative to commercial publishing. (More on the PKP MacArthur study here: <http://oa-cooperative.org/>)

***ER:** The proposal does a great job of laying out your cooperative model in detail. Now let's hear the elevator speech.*

GDC & ACJ: There are more than enough resources in the system to pay for Open Access. What is needed is a new system of payment streams. What we propose is an imaginative yet robust redesign of the ecology of partnerships between libraries, funders, authors, learned societies and journals, such that they all become stakeholders in a sustainable publishing cooperative. We would (cooperatively) own the journals.

***ER:** The proposal briefly describes a partnership of learned societies and journals called Libraria. What projects is Libraria undertaking?*

GDC & ACJ: LIBRARIA is an agreement between journals, learned societies, SPARC and PKP to explore and test a variety of models that will enable members to flip their subscription journals to open access publications, whilst simultaneously offering long-term economic sustainability to those journals that are already OA.

This requires our pooling and analysing complex databases, which do not always speak to each other. Thankfully SPARC is helping us make sense of all this information.

For example, we need to know production costs for each journal, including

the costs of editorial or managing offices, or simply the amount of money that learned societies are earning from journals and using to cross-subsidize other operations; libraries' subscription lists and access fees; APCs for each journal; offsetting arrangements between libraries and publishers; etc.

In a nutshell we need to understand, for each library, journal and learned society, what their needs are, how much they spend on meeting such needs, and what scope there is for rewiring their needs and monies into a new cooperative system.

***ER:** The funding for your cooperative model seems to come largely from library partnership subsidies. Do you see other potential sources of funding? For example, the model developed by HAU involves a cooperative which includes departments of anthropology and other units.*

GDC & ACJ: We are proposing a cooperative model that aims to be self-sustainable in the long term. In essence, we are simply asking libraries to redirect their acquisition funds to a cooperative structure of which they would become themselves stakeholders.

We do of course contemplate applying for additional sources of funding. For example, a seed grant to help us design and develop a specific leg of our project, say, to work on developing its underlying IT infrastructure.

However, the whole point of the cooperative is that its members are its stakeholders. So although we will of course look for – and welcome! – additional sources of funding from research councils, foundations, etc., our main objective is to enlist organisations with a commitment to becoming partners and stakeholders.

Note also that some members (libraries, infrastructure providers such as PKP) will likely be in a position to provide also in-kind services to the cooperative, for example, journal hosting services, indexing, archiving, etc.

***ER:** Concretely, what would the AAA have to do in order to consider a cooperative model as a serious alternative to another contract with Wiley/Blackwell (or another publisher)?*

GDC & ACJ: First, we think it is important for everyone to know that this CAN be done. We have the time, the expertise, and the resources. We are also pinning down the numbers. As explained in our proposal, PKP and

SPARC have both offered to dedicate resources to this project *at no expense* to AAA.

In practical terms, this is what it would take for the AAA to consider a cooperative model:

1. To announce its willingness to join the PKP-MacArthur and LIBRARIA's data-gathering and modelling exercises.
2. Inevitably, AAA would have to modify the RFP process in order to make time for the cooperative to come up with its financial and governance model.
3. We would use this time to prepare a robust business plan with the help of PKP and SPARC , which at this stage would include a list of library partners, infrastructure providers, publishing contractors, etc.

Why is it a no brainer? Because LIBRARIA will not be the publisher but only the mediator between the partners and the infrastructure provided by university presses (which are non-profit; we should clearly differentiate between Wiley-Blackwell and University of Chicago Press, for example). The recent foundation of HAU Books in collaboration with University of Chicago Press also shows that a collaboration between learned societies furthering open access (such as the Society of Ethnographic Theory, which publishes *HAU Journal* and HAU Books) and university presses is possible and effective.

The key thing here is to understand that a cooperative proposal would not be just one of many contenders for the AAA publishing program. If the AAA decides to "go cooperative" it wouldn't be just signing a new publisher, it would be moving into an entirely new ecology of scholarly communications.

ER: Finally, what can rank and file AAA members do to support this effort?

GDC & ACJ: Everything! They can express interest in the cooperative project by bringing it to the attention of their section leaders and/or journal editors; they can share their enthusiasm for, or endorsement of the cooperative by writing to the members of the Executive Board, members of the Anthropological Communication Committee or the Committee on the Future of Print and Electronic Publishing. The AAA has also named an Advisory Group to guide the association in the RFP process. The group is comprised of incoming AAA President Alisse Waterston, who will serve as its chair; incoming AAA President Elect Alec Barker; AAA Treasurer Ted

Hamann; Section Assembly Convenor Miguel Diaz Barriga; ACC Chair Mark Aldenderfer; incoming CFPEP Chair Sally Merry; incoming Executive Board Student Seat Saira Mehmood; and CFPEP Chair Deborah Nichols will serve ex-officio. These advisors will be responsible for considering all the information relevant to the RFP process, reviewing bids from publishers, interviewing semi-finalists, and recommending a publishing partner to the AAA Executive Board. We are sure members of the Advisory Board would love to hear about the cooperative proposal directly from the membership!

AMA citation

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