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## “Let us get rid of the publishers – Let us do this ourselves” (part 2)



— Jan Erik Frantsvåg  
(fotograf Frans  
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*Guest post written by Jan Erik Frantsvåg, Open Access Adviser at University Library of Tromsø and chairman of the board of SPARC Europe*

In my earlier [blog](#) I wrote that getting rid of (commercial) publishers as such is a bad idea. In this blogpost I will continue to discuss what role(s) publishers should have, what business model(s) they should use, and who they should be.

### **I am not really in favour of the small free-to-publish journals**

I raised the question to what scale we should – institutions, small or large – see ourselves as future publishers. As an example I looked at small, stand-alone journal publishing and summarized that there are hidden costs in the business models of “free to publish” OA journals. Such journals have little room for funding and developing publishing competence.

We need to structure journals in other ways and release the editors from their many menial tasks i...

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journal production. So, no, I am not really in favour of the small free-to-publish journals we see so many of in the Directory of Open Access Journals (DOAJ).

### **Journals will disappear from DOAJ**

DOAJ is going through a process where all journals need to apply to be re-accredited to DOAJ, or they will be de-listed. I fear that many of the smaller journals will not have the resources or competence necessary to comply with this, and will disappear from DOAJ sometime this year. They, and their content, will then also lose visibility.

One way to create viable alternatives is the way eLife was started, and still is financed: Major research funders underwrite their costs. But can we really foresee a number of universities joining forces and creating eLife copies for various fields they fund or perform research in? Will this be sustainable?

### **We need sustainable APC models**

In my opinion, the only model that is sustainable is the APC model (with its variations). It is a model in which income follows the article; the article is what creates costs. Growth is financed automatically.

Of course, this is not to say universities could not co-operate to start eLife clones with a view to make them APC financed over time – it is actually a model that could work well for well-organized start-ups, based on initiatives and ownership from scholarly institutions.

### **A mechanism for funding APCs for authors**

The one thing you need to make such a model actually work is a mechanism for funding APCs for authors, as e.g. publication funds. And any publishing venture large enough to publish the number of articles necessary to achieve reasonable per-article costs, will need to operate so that all costs are visible, and will need commensurate income through their authors.

They won't need to generate profits, but all costs must be covered at a price not higher than what the commercial publishers demand – what is else the point of doing it?

### **APC financing but with start-up financing from the institutions**

My view is that we need institutions to participate and co-operate to organize major start-ups, based on APC financing but with start-up financing from the institutions. These need to grow to sizeable journals/publishers in order to be able to fulfil their role while keeping per article costs down.

### **We can compete with commercial publishers but we should not get rid of them**

Such ventures can compete with commercial publishers in the market for submissions, keeping prices down – when we have rid ourselves from our belief in the Impact Factor and other venerated numbers.

I repeat – let us be clear that the debate has to be about what role(s) publishers should have, what business model(s) they should have, and who they should be. Not how we get rid of them.

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