



Insights into the Economy of Open Scholarship: A look into OpenEdition with Pierre Mounier, deputy director



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About OpenEdition

OpenEdition is a comprehensive open scholarly communication infrastructure for the humanities and social sciences. The OpenEdition portal includes four publishing and information platforms in the humanities and social sciences: **OpenEdition Journals** ([ji.sc/2E5e6v4](https://www.journals.openedition.org/)), **OpenEdition Books** ([books.openedition.org](https://www.books.openedition.org/)), **Hypotheses** (research blogs) ([hypotheses.org](https://www.hypotheses.org/)), and **Calenda** (announcements of academic events) ([calenda.org](https://www.calenda.org/)). The portal is, thus, a space dedicated to the promotion of research, publishing 700,000 scientific documents that promote open access, while respecting the economic equilibrium of publications.

[openedition.org](https://www.openedition.org)

OpenEdition: Business model

Key activities

- ▶ Journal platform
- ▶ Book platform
- ▶ Blog platform
- ▶ Event dissemination platform



Organisation type

- ▶ National research infrastructure
- ▶ 50 full-time equivalent (FTE) staff
- ▶ Hosted by four institutions (CNRS, Aix-Marseille University, EHESS, Avignon University)



Key partners

- ▶ Host institutions
- ▶ Ministry for Research and Innovation
- ▶ Publishers and journal editors
- ▶ Libraries



Revenue streams

- ▶ Host institutions
- ▶ French government
- ▶ Project funding (national, regional and European)
- ▶ Freemium services



IP/Copyright

- ▶ All articles aggregated are open access, ranging from full copyright to open licences
- ▶ Codebase open source, licensed general public licence (GPL)



Customers/users

- ▶ Researchers
- ▶ Publishers and journal editors
- ▶ Libraries
- ▶ Government



Interview with Pierre Mounier

OpenEdition started in 1999 as *Revue.org*, an online platform for two journals in humanities and social sciences (HSS). It soon attracted attention from other journals wanting to join. It was clear that the platform should be open access to increase visibility and accessibility. In 2017, the platform changed its name to OpenEdition. Next to other services, the platform now hosts over 500 journals.

“Today, OpenEdition is a recognised research infrastructure in France. It is even included in the **National Strategy Roadmap for research infrastructures** ([ji.sc/2vWPcZQ](https://www.ji.sc/2vWPcZQ)). We are a “Unité de Service et de Recherche (USR)”, a typical French research infrastructure where efforts are joined to provide a service/platform for the entire research community”, says **Pierre Mounier**, deputy director at OpenEdition.

“Although OpenEdition started out as a platform for journals, we have added other platforms: in 2000 Calenda, a platform for dissemination of HSS events, and in 2009 Hypotheses, a blogging platform. Finally, we moved into monographs and books when OpenEdition Books was added. So now we have a complete infrastructure with four platforms to support scholarly communications in HSS.”

OpenEdition is supported financially by the four founding institutions (CNRS [French National Centre for Scientific Research], Aix-Marseille University, EHESS [School for Advanced Studies in the Social Sciences], Avignon University), which provide the platform with staff, infrastructure and funds to cover operating costs.

They also receive support directly from the Ministry of Research (as a research infrastructure). About 50 FTE staff are permanently seconded from the four founding institutions. The staff are divided into an editorial department that manages the relationships with the content producers (blogging researchers, publishers, journal editors), an IT department that runs systems and development, a department for international development and a department dedicated to the Freemium services - ‘Freemium’ being a pricing strategy by which a digital product or service is provided free of charge, but money is charged for additional features. The other main source of revenue stems from project funding - national, regional and European. These funds are used to develop new and innovative tools and services. Recently, OpenEdition has added the **Freemium model** ([ji.sc/2Vxjge3](https://www.ji.sc/2Vxjge3)) to their revenue streams, but this system has not been introduced to cover operating costs or infrastructures. Rather, it serves to help the journal publishers and editors to cover their publishing and editing costs. Two-thirds of the money collected is transferred to the publishers OpenEdition works with, while the remaining third is retained to operate the commercial services that sell these Freemium services.

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“OpenEdition benefits greatly from its status as a national infrastructure. Many similar initiatives are struggling to find sustainability in the long-term, by which I mean longer than just three or four years”, says Mounier. “I’m always a bit surprised when long-term sustainability is considered for only a few years – I think over 20 years! We have this public, national funding that covers our core functions. But the downside is that permanent funding makes you run the risk that you’ll lose the connection with your users. If you are not attentive to their needs, you’ll gradually lose your users. This can take a long time and you might not even notice it at first because it is not directly reflected in your income streams. Users need changes quickly, so this is something that we really have to keep up with.

“It’s important to note that the platform supports the dissemination of the content, but not the editorial process – the responsibility and cost of which remain on the journals – although, with the Freemium model, OpenEdition tries to compensate them partially for their efforts.”

“OpenEdition does not support the editorial process – the responsibility and cost of which remain on the journals – although, with the Freemium model, OpenEdition tries to compensate them partially for their efforts.”

“When we decided to push for open access that was actually the start of a 20 year struggle with a part of the academic community that is traditionally quite reluctant towards open access, although this attitude has changed in recent years. In the beginning, the main driver for this evolution towards open access was OpenEdition founder Marin Dacos, who very early on saw the benefits of it on two levels. A first consideration was that he really saw the advantages and possibilities of the internet and the potential of open initiatives such as Wikipedia: The essence of the web is to be fed by open content. A second consideration was the principle that publicly funded research should be available to the public”, says Mounier. “This principle is especially relevant in HSS, where the societal impact of research has the potential to be very big.” Dacos was able to convince the first journals to not only have an online presence, but to

make the content openly available as well. “Of course, initially there were a lot of objections. There were financial concerns, because journal subscriptions paid for the (often large amount of) editorial work that comes with publishing in HSS. Therefore, publishers saw a threat for their business model. But in HSS, there’s also a more cultural prejudice amongst some researchers who believe that if something is available for free on the internet, it has no value. This rationale, where value can only be added through monetary transactions, had to be argued against and we’ve always had to prove that this is not a valid argument. For example, we have discussions about wordings: We feel that ‘*gratuit*’ (free) is not a good way to indicate the status of an article. Therefore, we insist on using ‘open access’. Making your work open access does not necessarily mean that there are no costs involved, but these don’t have to be carried by the reader.”

In the Freemium programme, OpenEdition provides other types of access than to the html version of the content (such as epub and pdf), against a subscription fee. OpenEdition also offers a metadata feed that libraries can use to feed their

collections, usage analytics and training for libraries who buy these services. Mounier: “I would like to stress that we do not apply any digital rights management (DRM) restrictions – so any individual is still able to create a pdf file from our html versions, for example. So we don’t sell any pdf files, we sell the access to the pdf file, which is a crucial difference. We sell our Freemium services as a package to approximately 500 libraries in France and worldwide and it is not possible to subscribe to a single premium service separately.”

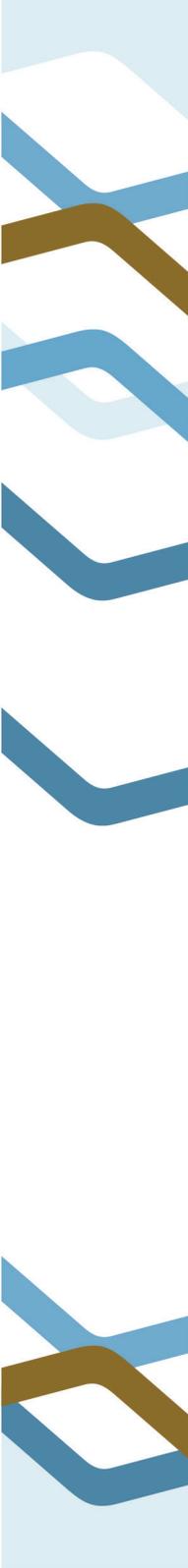
Mounier is not sure that the OpenEdition model can be reproduced in other countries: “We have a significant influence at the national level in France, because we have reached a critical mass – with over 500 journals and 80 publishers and hosting more than 2,000 academic blogs. But I don’t think our model can be copy-pasted to other environments without changes. The research landscape is very fragmented and in every country, and particularly in HSS, structures, habits and stakeholders are different. Topical communities are often very small, and there is always the matter of using local languages. What we are trying to do however, is to help at European

level, with setting up an EU-level infrastructure **OPERAS** (operas.hypotheses.org) – but we don’t try to replicate the OpenEdition model there. For example, we are a centralised infrastructure supported by the national government. In a federalised model, such as in Germany, this would not work. Some countries also don’t have research ministries who are as powerful as in France and in some countries, such as in the UK, the landscape is mainly driven by demand-driven independent Open Scholarship initiatives and services. The French national culture is reflected in the OpenEdition structure, and it cannot be duplicated, I think.”

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Mounier: “In HSS, you have many different types of publishers. Besides private/commercial publishers, you have university presses which are essentially public, you have new publishers which are scholarly-led, and you have university departments and learned societies which are also publishing journals. I believe that private publishers are important to perform certain functions, despite their different approach. I think that private and public publishers can co-exist without difficulty, but when it comes to infrastructure there are issues. Publishing platforms have a central place in the Open Science ecosystem. If they are privately owned this is a problem for the entire system, especially when they apply strong DRM technology and impose it on all users – which limits interoperability – or when they apply ‘lock-in’ strategies that trap users in their services. So I believe that infrastructures and platforms should not be privately owned but community owned and/or publicly funded.”

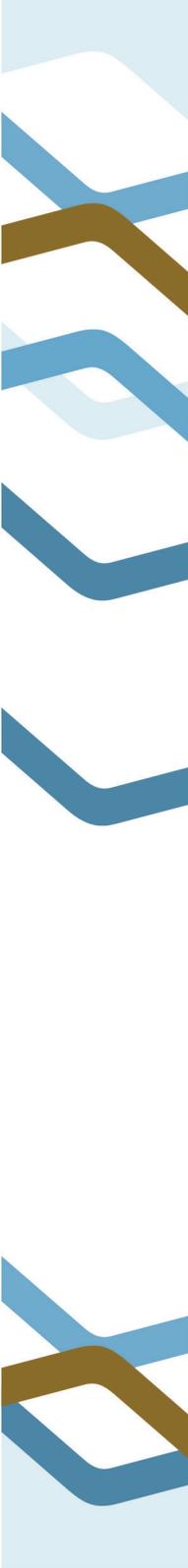
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OpenEdition has developed its own content management system (CMS) open source software **LODEL (lodel.org)**. “In 1999 there were not that many systems that were suitable for HSS online publishing, because of the highly complex content structuring that is needed”, says Mounier. “Now, of course, there are many other options, such as **Open Journal Systems (OJS) (openjournalsystems.com)**, which are very efficient for these purposes. LODEL is openly licensed with **GPL (ji.sc/2Vh6Xxm)**, but we have always struggled to make it really usable outside of OpenEdition. When you develop open source software, it’s not enough to apply the licence and make the code available. You have to package the software, you have to offer community support, etc. We have made some efforts in this area, but to do this right we don’t have the resources available. In the past our position has been that we develop the software for our own needs, we openly licence it and document it as well as possible, but

then the users are mostly on their own. So the usage of our software outside of OpenEdition is rather low, although some French universities have installed their own local platforms based on LODEL. For example, with OJS, it was really part of the Public Knowledge Project’s mission to have their software distributed as widely as possible and to help the community to do this. We like to work with them and learn from their experiences, but this has not been part of our core mission so far. For our blogging platform, we decided that LODEL was not a good solution. We felt that it would be easier to run it on WordPress. This is not without difficulty though – we have no control over the development of this software and versioning, and communicating changes to our users, for example, can be very frustrating, such as when Wordpress introduced a new content editing workflow and everybody was very confused for a while!”

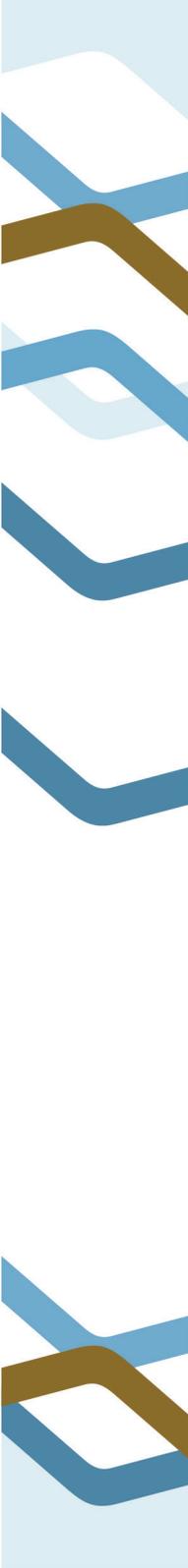
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OpenEdition is in favour of open licences, but it is not always possible to enforce them. Mounier: “In HSS, resistance towards open licences is very strong. Most of our journals still apply a classical copyright regime, although we see a growing adoption of **Creative Commons** (creativecommons.org) licences. However, it’s almost never the most liberal CC BY licences – but rather CC BY-NC and CC BY-NC-ND. We advocate actively for the adoption of liberal licences, but we cannot impose them and many journals, actually, have very good arguments against the most open ones. For example, OpenEdition has come out supporting the option of the ND (no derivatives) clause for **HSS in a reaction to the Plan S Implementation Guide** (oep.hypotheses.org/2169). We are already very happy if we can get them to move from classical

copyright to CC BY-NC-ND. Our best argument is that the latter allows for easy reuse in a non-commercial environment such as teaching and research, which is something that a lot of researchers are likely to be doing. So that can work. The main obstacle is that in many cases, researchers don’t want to bother about it. Classical copyright is easier, they don’t have to discuss with their editorial committees about it. But nonetheless, in our application form we ask about the licences, and it links towards Creative Commons – and we get questions about open licences because of that. Many editors could be interested in the possibilities if it is explained to them properly.”

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“ Open scholarship is an ongoing process that supports the entire research lifecycle, not only the dissemination of end results ”

“Open Scholarship is a very broad concept that can include a lot of different activities,” says Mounier. “We deal with scholarly communication and open access publishing, but I think the most interesting move we made was starting the blogging platform Hypotheses. This opened up the entire research process from only communicating the end results to the progressive opening of the research process itself. It allows us to show what’s happening before publication and it offers an incentive for researchers to ‘open up their workshop’, to communicate during their activities what they’re doing to their colleagues and to the public. Open Scholarship is an ongoing process that supports the entire research lifecycle, not only the dissemination of end results.”

Mounier thinks that the position of HSS in the academic environment and in Open Science is problematic: “In terms of funding and policies, developments in Open Science are really science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) driven. Policy makers are really pushing for Open Science practices and policies, but they have mostly the STEM model in mind. HSS have specificities and for me there is a risk that the STEM model will take over in Open Science and that HSS will be more and more marginalised in the movement. We see it as our mission to represent HSS stakeholders in the Open Scholarship ecosystem. An example is open data, which is a core element of Open Science. But when people talk about open data, they often mean big data and data-crunching and this does not reflect what is happening in HSS. In our communities, publications and monographs are the basis of research and research data in HSS is often small data. We need to ensure that these continue to have their place in Open science.”

References and relevant links

- ▶ OpenEdition main site: openedition.org
- ▶ OpenEdition Journals: [ji.sc/2E5e6v4](https://www.ji.sc/2E5e6v4)
- ▶ OpenEdition Books: books.openedition.org
- ▶ Hypotheses: hypotheses.org
- ▶ Calenda: calenda.org
- ▶ ‘French National Strategy On Research Infrastructures, 2016 Edition’: [ji.sc/2vWPcZQ](https://www.ji.sc/2vWPcZQ)
- ▶ OpenEdition Freemium: [ji.sc/2Vxjge3](https://www.ji.sc/2Vxjge3)
- ▶ OPERAS: operas.hypotheses.org
- ▶ LODEL: lodel.org
- ▶ Open Journals Systems (by Public Knowledge Project): openjournalsystems.com
- ▶ GNU General Public Licence (GPL): [ji.sc/2Vh6Xxm](https://www.ji.sc/2Vh6Xxm)
- ▶ Creative Commons licence suite: creativecommons.org
- ▶ OpenEdition Declaration on the Plan S Implementation Guidance (19th February 2019): oep.hypotheses.org/2169

About Pierre Mounier

Deputy director



Pierre Mounier is deputy director of OpenEdition. He has published several books about the social and political impact of ICT (Les Maîtres du Réseau, les enjeux politiques d'Internet, [The network masters: the political challenges of internet] 2001), digital publishing (L'Édition électronique [Electronic publishing], with Marin Dacos, 2010) and digital humanities (Read/Write Book 2 – Une introduction aux humanités numériques [Read/Write Book 2: An introduction to the digital humanities], 2012; Les Humanités numériques – Une histoire critique [A critical history of the digital humanities], 2018). As deputy director of OpenEdition, Pierre Mounier's work mainly revolves around the development of an internationalisation strategy for the infrastructure, in particular by establishing partnerships with platforms and institutions in Europe and elsewhere. To further this objective, he regularly participates in international conferences and seminars to present OpenEdition's programmes and discuss subjects relating to digital humanities and open access. Pierre Mounier coordinates the development of OPERAS, a European infrastructure dedicated to open scholarly communication in HSS, gathering 39 partners from 15 countries.

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