

Between Underfunding and ‘Moral Superiority’: The Position of Diamond OA Journals

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CGHE webinar, 18 March 2025

1. OA transformation: A short (and arbitrary) retrospect

Open Access transformation...

- ... is slow compared to other digital innovations (now in its 23rd year since the Budapest Open Access Initiative).
- ... encompasses different Open Access publishing models (Green OA, Gold OA, transformative agreements, and Diamond OA).

1. OA transformation: a short (and arbitrary) retrospect

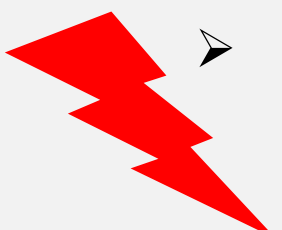
1. Wave: institutional repositories (IR)

A first model for implementing Open Access was the creation of institutional repositories for self-archiving.

- **Development of software for the operation of institutional repositories** (e.g., OPUS, EPrints, and DSpace) occurred between 1997 and 2002.
 - **Controversial aims of institutional repositories (IR):**
 - (a) Providing Open Access to publications that are otherwise locked behind paywalls and inaccessible (Crow, 2002; Harnad, 2013).
 - (b) Enabling access to all intellectual output of a research institution, including technical reports, working papers, and educational resources (Lynch, 2003; Kennison et al., 2013).
 - **Dependency of the model:** Success relies on scientists' cooperation. However, there has been disappointment regarding the volume of self-archiving (e.g., Arlitsch & Grant, 2018; Novak & Day, 2018; Nicholas et al., 2012; Xia, 2008; Westrienen & Lynch, 2005).
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1. OA transformation: a short (and arbitrary) retrospect

2. Wave: Gold OA and publication fees

- Development of **commercial OA publishing models** based on publication fees, article processing charges (APCs), and book processing charges (introduced by BioMed Central and PLoS, around 2000).
- Since 2008: **Implementation of publication funds** at libraries and research institutions in Germany. At the same time, the 7th EU Framework Programme began covering publication fees for project results funded by the EU. Today, publication funds are widespread across the institutional landscape, with 282 German research institutions having access to such funds (Kindling et al., 2024).
-  Model **depends on the integrity of publishing houses**. The model functions effectively only if financial motives do not outweigh scientific quality. Concerns include discussions about predatory journals and publishers, the flood of special issues, cascading strategies of large publishing houses, and retraction scandals.

1. OA transformation: a short (and arbitrary) retrospect

3. Wave: Transformative agreements (for Germany in particular DEAL)

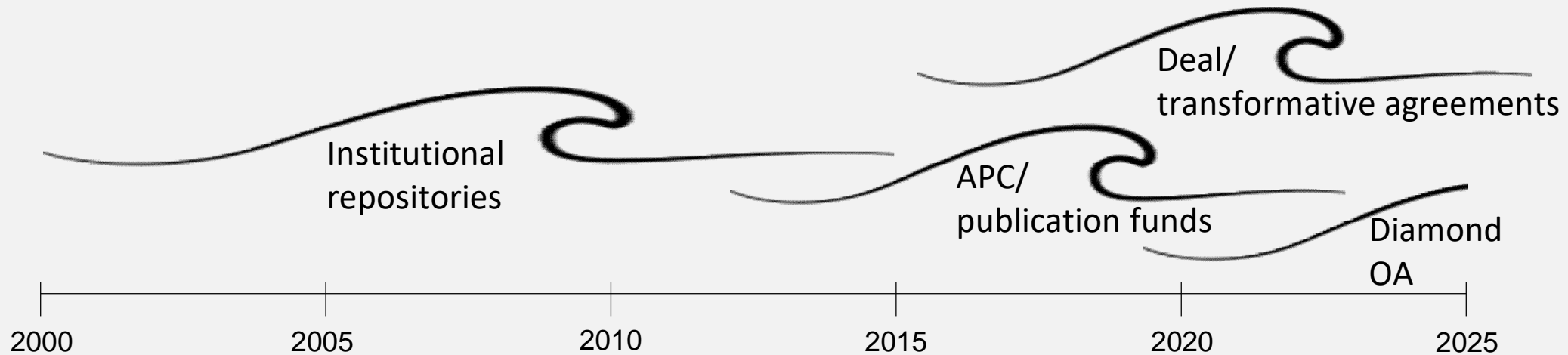
- **Starting point (2013):** Request for a national subscription strategy and pooling of bargaining power into one consortium.
- **Transformative agreements negotiated by DEAL consortium with Wiley (2018), Springer Nature (2020) and Elsevier (2023)**
- **OA model has been controversial from the beginning:**
 - antitrust complaint by Börsenverein¹.
 - Support from large technical universities (TU9) but also highlighting increasing costs for institutions with high publication output².
- **Multiple dependencies** become visible:
 - Scientists** → Dependent on the ability of their institutions to pay for OA publishing.
 - Institutions** → Need for solidarity in cost-sharing.
 - OA transformation of journals** → depends on countries with strong publication output (cf. Jahn, 2024).

¹ <https://www.buchreport.de/news/noch-allianz-oder-schon-kartell/>

² https://www.tu9.de/media/fullwidth/tu9-pm_openaccess_19-11-25.pdf

1. OA transformation: a short (and arbitrary) retrospect

Dynamics of the debates about OA models



- **Pattern for each of the OA models:** (1) Enthusiasm, (2) implementation, (3) capabilities, limitations, and dependencies become visible, (4) disillusion and disappointment: Realizing the model doesn't fully meet expectations, ((5) invention of a new strategy).
- **Complexity of OA Transformation**
 - **Redefinition of Open Access:** Evolving meaning and shifting objectives.
 - **Entanglement with other goals:** Cost reduction, breaking oligopolies, performance measurement, quality assurance.
 - **Overlapping of the debates about models.**

“The EU is ready to agree that immediate open access to papers reporting publicly funded research should become the norm, without authors having to pay fees, and that the bloc should support non-profit scholarly publishing models. In a move that could send **shockwaves through commercial scholarly publishing**, the positions are due to be adopted by the Council of the EU member state governments later this month.

To tackle inequalities in the ability of researchers to pay for publication, the text says that such fees should simply not be paid by authors and that non-commercial publishing models should be supported.”

2. Diamond OA as a fourth wave?

Diamond OA

“In the Diamond Open Access Model, not-for-profit, non-commercial organizations, associations or networks publish material that is made available online in digital format, is free of charge for readers and authors and does not allow commercial and for-profit re-use.”

(Fuchs & Sandoval 2013)

“OA diamond journals: Journals that publish without charging authors and readers, in contrast to APC Gold OA or subscription journals.”

(Bosman et al. 2021)

Scholar-led OA

“Besides this understanding of academic-led publishing as “community-driven publishing” (see Wrzesinski, 2023), various publishing projects and initiatives have established themselves as “scholar-led publishers”. As a matter of principle, these publishers see themselves as non-commercial and independent.”

(<https://open-access.network/en/information/publishing/scholar-led-and-community-driven-publishing>)

3. Project CODRIA

Objective: To analyze the performance, efficiency, and operational modes of Diamond OA journals in Germany.

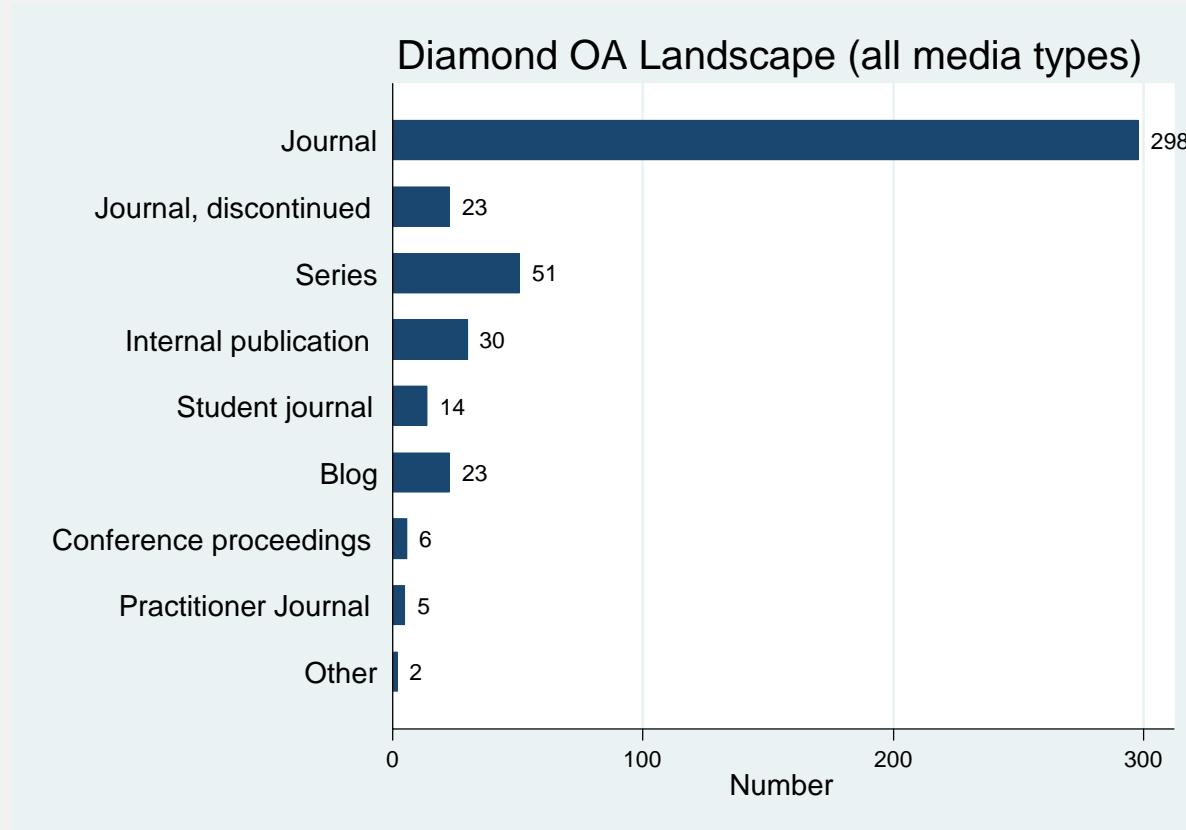
- **Quantitative mapping:** Mapping the Diamond OA landscape.
- **Performance:** Indicator-based comparison of Diamond OA journal performance.
- **Mode of operation:** Interviews with Diamond OA journal editors to explore economic, organizational, and resource-related requirements.

3. Project CODRIA

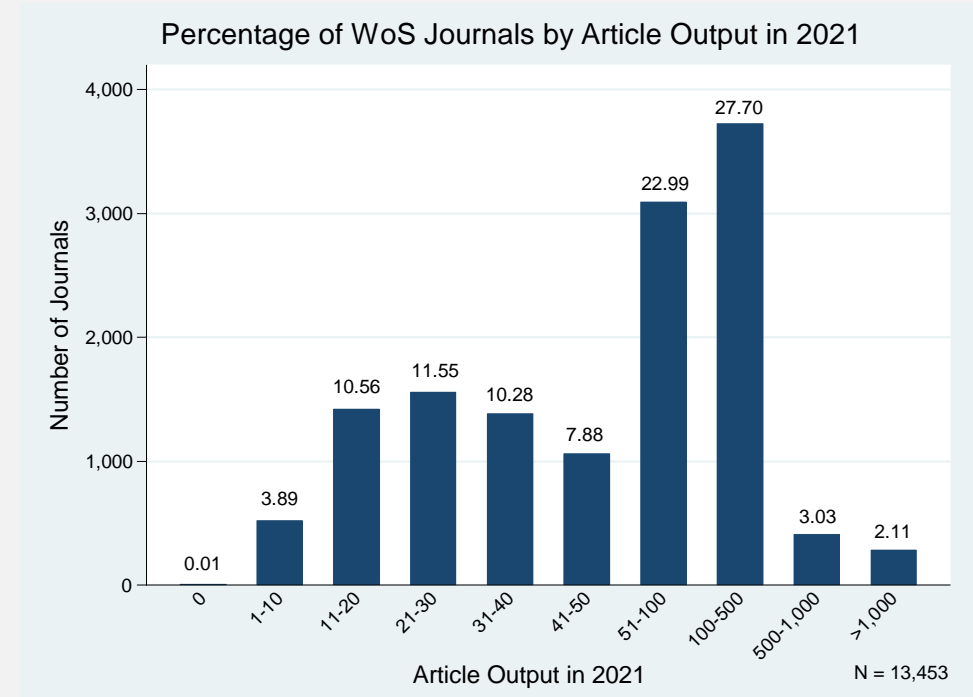
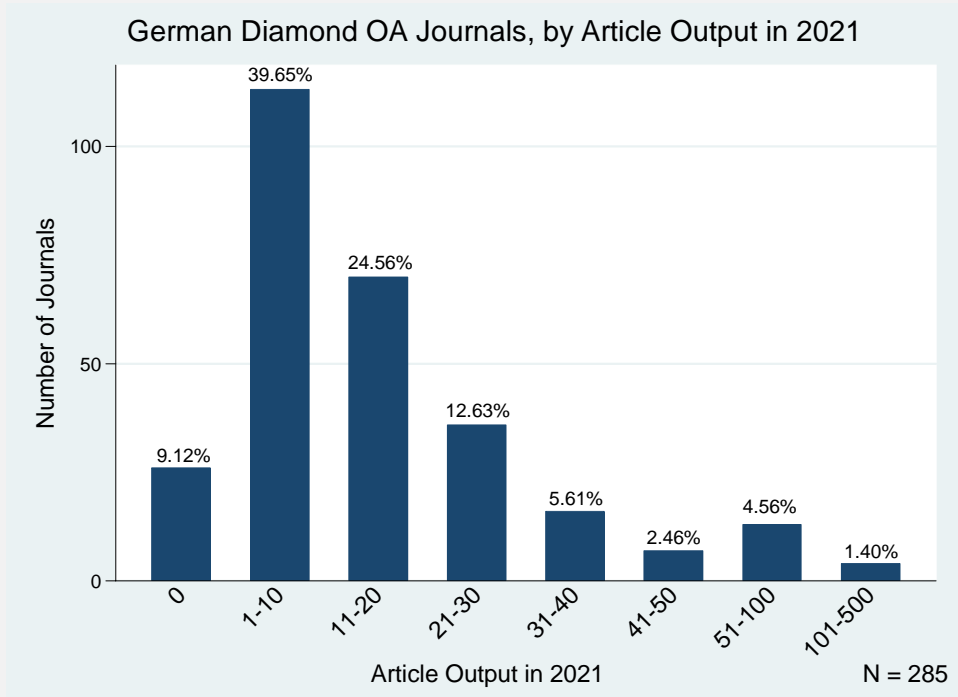
Mapping of the German Diamond OA landscape

- **Compilation** of a list of journals hosted on German-based OJS implementations. Manual check for absence of access barriers and publication fees.
- **Compilation** of a world-wide list of full OA journals using sources like DOAJ, PMC, and ROAD. Restriction to journals with the country domain '.de' for the identification of German-based journals. Manually check for access barriers and publication fees.
- **Feedback from the OA community:** Gather feedback and suggestions for additional Diamond OA journals.

4. Mapping of the German Diamond OA landscape



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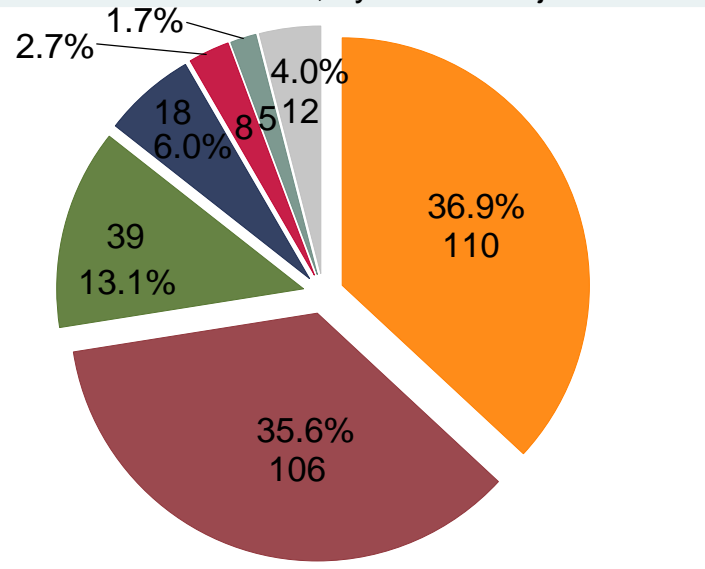


	Diamond OA Journals	Web of Science Journals
Mean	17.76	153.62
Median	11	59
Stand. Div.	25.69	479.93
Min.	0	0
Max.	288	23.307

Bruns, Andre, Yusuf Cakir, Sibel Kaya, Samaneh Beidaghi, und Niels Taubert. „Diamond Open Access Journals Germany (DOAG) Version 1.1“, 2022. <https://pub.uni-bielefeld.de/record/2965484>.

4. Mapping of the German Diamond-OA landscape

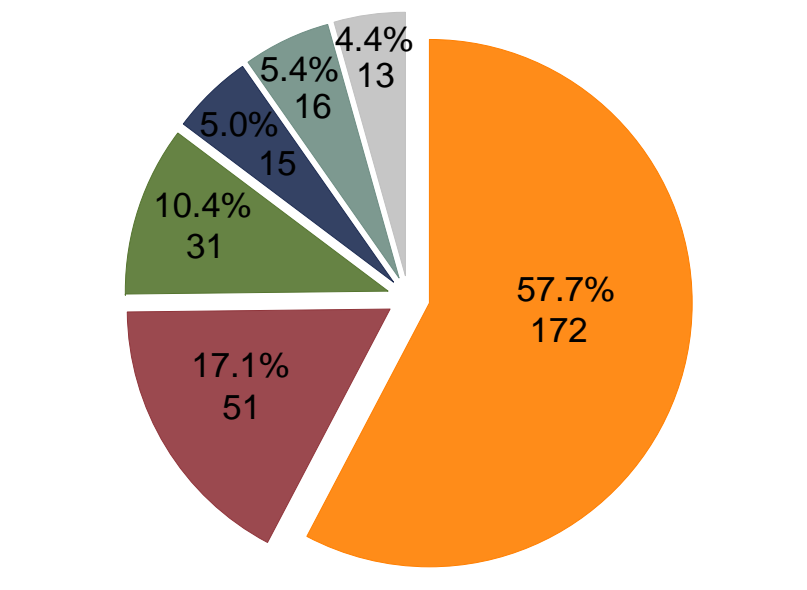
Diamond OA Journals, by OECD major fields



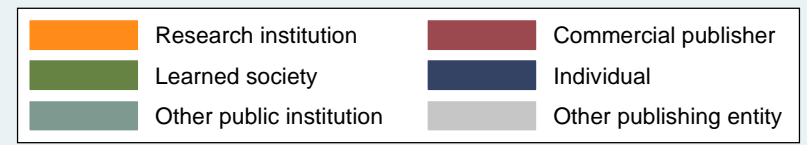
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Diamond OA Journals, by Publishing Entity



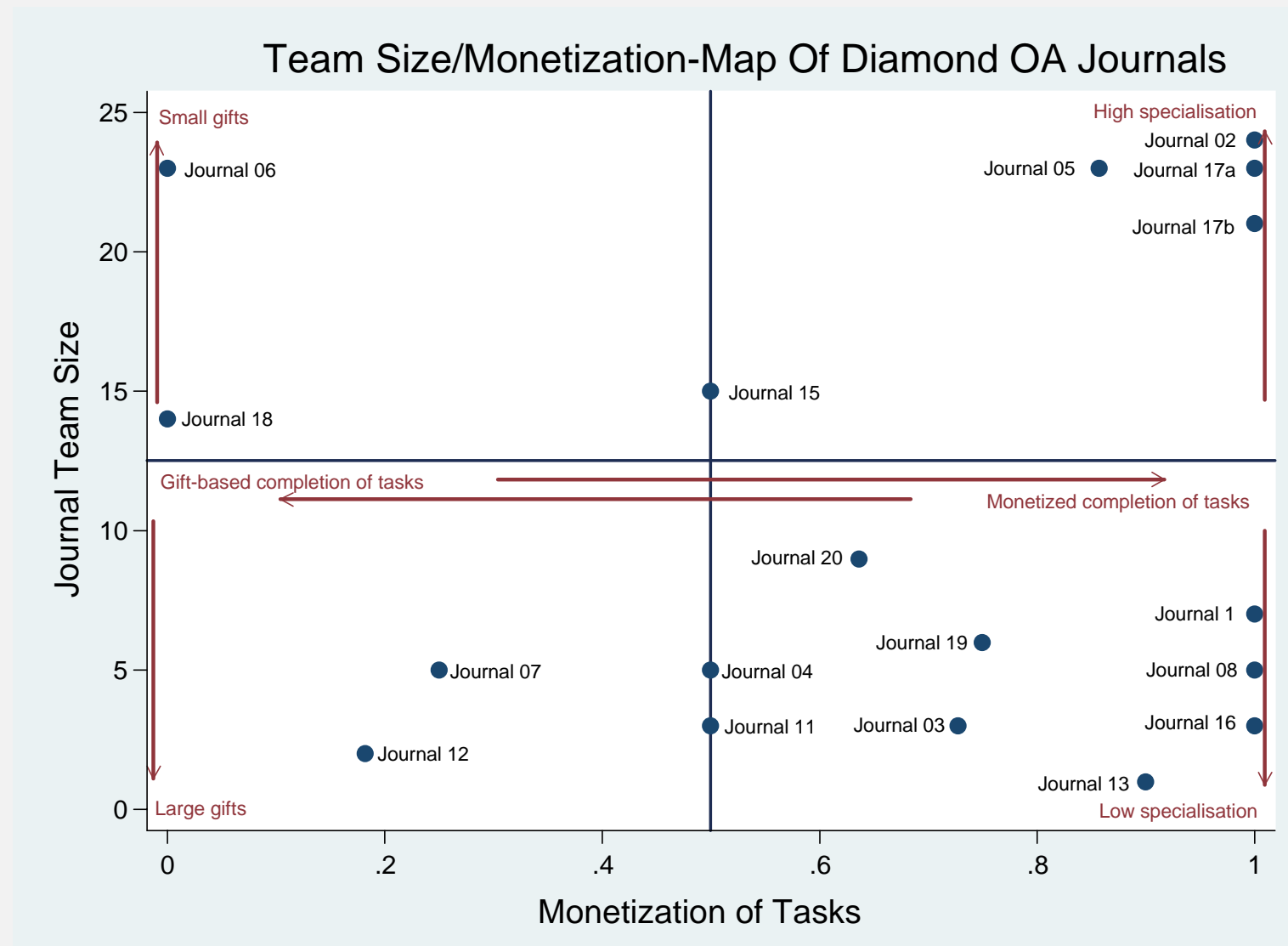
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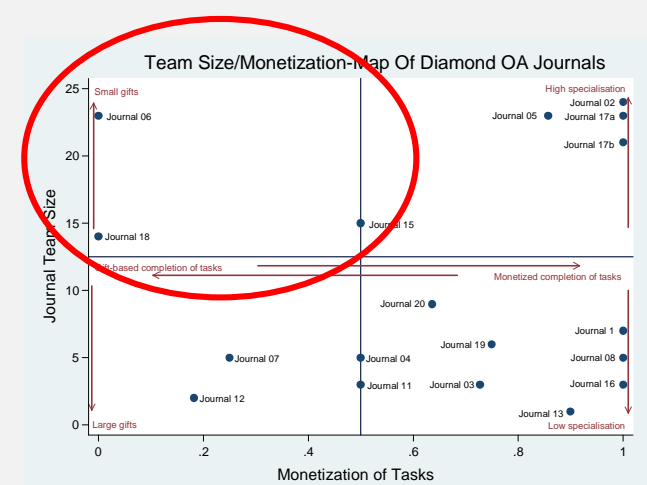
5. Qualitative Diamond OA journal map

- **Monetized vs. gift-based completion of tasks**
 - **Monetized completion:** Money serves as an incentive for task completion. A contract defines the type and volume of tasks and ensures completion.
 - **Gift-based completion** (in-kind contributions): Contributions are voluntary and unpaid. Contributors decide whether and how to contribute. Contributions cannot be enforced.
- **Journal Team Size:** Number of individuals involved in journal production, including the editorial office, service organizations, and contributing editorial board members.

5. Qualitative Diamond OA journal map



6. Positioning and its consequences



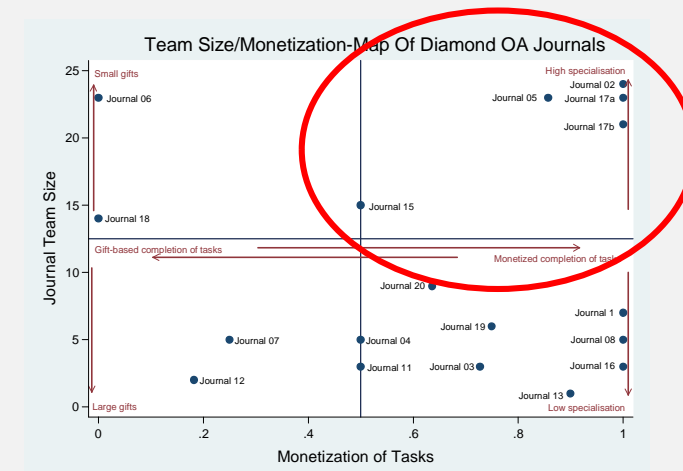
Upper left quadrant: ,The miracle of the crowd‘

”Back then, the editors developed a model that I really like and that still exists. Well, that’s an indication that it sustained for fifteen years or more. If you have a journal with a large turnover, a classical model with two, three or four editors-in-chief is not sustainable. [...] If you have a large journal, the editors-in-chief are usually paid for. [...] and this is missing for our journal. Well, and then they noticed “Okay, we’ll have ten or fifteen editors-in-chief”. [...] So, it works that we have two managing editors and I am one of them. We receive the papers and distribute it to the editors-in-chief. 90% of my work is that I receive a paper, have a look at it and say, “Yes, that looks like as it could be well-suited to be managed by LS” [Name of a colleague]. And via our system LS receives a short email and from that point LS is de facto editor-in-chief. She will do everything until the paper is accepted or rather it is suggested for acceptance to the rest of the editorial board. And this model distributes the workload. Back then, it was something very, very innovative, but like I said it works.” (I-06 pos. 144–172)

Elements of the model

- Division of Work: Based on the entity submission rather than specific tasks.
- Typesetting: Delegated to authors and based on LaTeX.
- Decision-making: Pragmatic approach to manuscript acceptance or rejection.
- Workload Distribution: Fair and equal distribution among the editorial team.

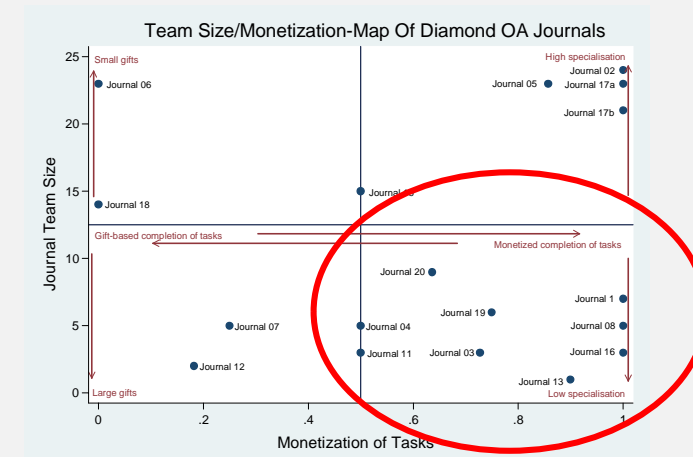
6. Positioning and its consequences



Upper right quadrant: Stable, well-funded journals

- **Daily operations:** Sufficient resources to handle daily tasks and incoming manuscript volume.
- **High Professionalization:**
 - Extensive services, including pre-quality checks, plagiarism detection, and image manipulation checks (I-17, pos. 395-396).
 - Provision of a preprint repository (I-17, pos. 458-466).
 - Extensive copy editing.
 - All article production tasks handled by paid specialists (I-17, pos. 422-441).
- **Flexibility and journal development:** "Again, this is all community-driven, and we're constantly in contact with the community. If there were a need, we would consider this. We're constantly receiving feedback, organizing events and workshops, and staying in close communication with the community." (I-17, pos. 184-188)

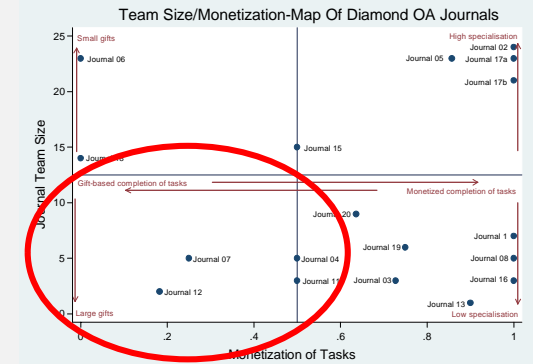
6. Positioning and its consequences



Lower right quadrant

- **Tendencies of underfunding:** “We work under financial conditions that make [...] professional work hardly an option. We have to professionalize ourselves. In the different areas. Yes, we are amateurs in that sense. And ‘amateurs’ now does not refer to our competence, but to our resources. (I-20, pos. 624–640).” (I-20, Pos. 624-640)
- **Third-party-funding and necessity of transformation:** “But the situation in September is, of course, dramatic because the entire staff is falling apart, so to speak. That means, yes, we have to redistribute the work and N. [Name of a colleague] has a lot to do, I have a lot to do and, of course, that's really difficult. [...] Because to make it very clear, to employ staff, you would need a new financier. [...] But with this funding line, it was clear: three years and then it's over.” (I-16, Pos. 772-787)
- **Cooperation with technical partners:** “So, we were always treated by the [Name of the university library] as an exemplar for subsequent journals, so to speak. So, they wanted to try it out on us, how it works. We were the first journal that really got off the ground and then we were supposed to always serve like that, which also had clear disadvantages. We are now setting the standards for everyone else, so to speak. And then we weren't just seen as J-16, but this thinking was always in the background, yes, that's tailor-made for you, but above all, you have to be a blueprint now. What we do with you must potentially be transferrable to everyone else.” (I-16, pos. 689–704)

6. Positioning and its consequences



Lower left quadrant: Precarious journals

- **Limited process control due to gifts:** “Q: “Do you publish the articles as soon as one is ready? Or is it by volumes and numbers?” I-12: “[...] No, we would like to. But that doesn't work technically. So unfortunately, we have to wait until the last article is here. I couldn't stop there, well, I can't tell this technical support from M. [name of a university], I WANT it to be done. But I'm grateful that they do it. And unfortunately, we have to accept that. Because they are not able to do that in any other way right now.” (I-12, pos. 551–560)
- **Transfer of workload to already highly committed team members:** “That you have this feeling: ‘You are left alone. You have to do it yourself, you can't rely on the DFG, you also can't rely on the APCs and not at all, you're just on your own. You had to make sure that you could manage it somehow. Whatever that means.’” (I-09, pos. 1568–1577)“
- **Indispensable team members and long-term stability:** “But I've been there since it was founded, and I've tried several times to be replaced. It's difficult because at the end of the day I'm the only one who knows exactly how things are going, and that annoys me too. [...] So, if I retire next year, for example, I can leave with a bang and then nobody will know how this IT system works. Or I invest even more time, although my whereabouts here is uncertain, to train someone. [...] So, don't get me wrong, I'm not frustrated, I like doing it and I enjoy it too. But the question of what to do is definitely a question of resources.” (I-11, pos. 983–1046)

7. Conclusion

- In my presentation, I have described the OA transformation as a series of waves, each consisting of the following phases: (1) Enthusiasm, (2) Implementation, (3) Capabilities, limitations, and dependencies becoming visible, (4) disillusion and disappointment (5) invention of a new strategy. Based on my findings, I suggest that—at least in Germany—Diamond OA follows this pattern as well.
- There are two main reasons for this assumption: The quantitative analysis shows that, to date (and again, specifically for Germany), the model has spread in the social sciences and humanities but not in the natural sciences, medicine, or engineering. Moreover, it has not been proven to be a successful model for journals with an annual publication output of more than 500 articles.
- The qualitative interview study with editors of Diamond OA journals reveals that while infrastructural support is well-developed, long-term funding for editorial work remains a challenge. The extent to which the potential of Diamond OA can be realized depends heavily on whether sustainable funding structures can be established—ensuring that journals are no longer rely on coincidental local circumstances.