

# Busting myths about transformative agreements



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**Transformative agreements:**  
**Six myths, busted**

**Ashley Farley, Allison Langham-Putrow, Elisabeth Shook, Leila Serman, Meg Wacha**

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**Transformative models seek to  
repurpose existing spending from  
paying-to-read to  
paying-to-publish**



We firmly believe that a large-scale transformation of the underlying business model of scientific journals is possible at no financial risk. Our own data analysis shows that there is enough money already circulating in the global market – money that is currently spent on scientific journals in the subscription system and that could be redirected and re-invested into open access business models to pay for APCs. [Article processing charges]

Ralf Schimmer, Kai Karin Geschuhn, and Andreas Vogler, “Disrupting the subscription journals’ business model for the necessary large-scale transformation to open access,” Max Planck Digital Library (April 28, 2015), <http://dx.doi.org/10.17617/1.3>

# But...

Does publishing need to cost so much?

- Estimates of €7.3 billion to \$10 billion (in 2015)

What's a reasonable profit to be made off of the work that authors provide (and peer review) for free to publishers?

- Is a 34% profit margin reasonable?

Are APCs the best way to move to OA?

How is this really supposed to work for different sized institutions?

- Should institutions be paying €3800 to €5000 per article for their authors to publish? Can they?

Should grant funding be used to pay publishers?

Many people are using the term  
“Transformative Agreement” to refer to  
“Read & Publish” or “Publish & Read”  
agreements

These are not the only transformative  
models!

# Read & Publish/Publish & Read

- “Read” fee for access to all content behind a paywall
- “Publish” fee to make all of the institution’s works OA

$$\begin{array}{l} \text{Total} \\ \text{payment to} \\ \text{publisher} \end{array} = \sum(\text{APCs}) + \text{“subscription-like” payment}$$

**Offsetting**

$$\begin{array}{l} \text{Per article} \\ \text{fee} \end{array} = \frac{\text{Average } (\sum \text{APCs paid}) + \text{Average subscription payment}}{\text{Average number of articles published}}$$

**Double-dipping**

# Transformative models

## Choreographed shift

- “Choreographer” collects funding and makes payments to publisher
- Example: SCOAP3

## Subscribe to Open

- Current subscribers continue to “subscribe” while opening all material
- Example: Annual Reviews

## Transformative Journals

- A “journal that is actively committed to transitioning to a fully Open Access journal”
- Meet annual transition goals, formulate explicit policies against double-dipping
- Example: Springer Nature

Wise, Alicia; Estelle, Lorraine (2019): Towards transition strategies and business models for Society Publishers who wish to accelerate Open Access and Plan S. figshare. Online resource. <https://doi.org/10.6084/m9.figshare.8398406.v1>

Transformative Journals defined by cOAlition S April 8, 2020

cOAlition S Transformative Journals FAQ <https://www.coalition-s.org/transformative-journals-faq/>



Myth: TAs will lead to greater  
transparency regarding  
publication costs

# Cost ≠ Price

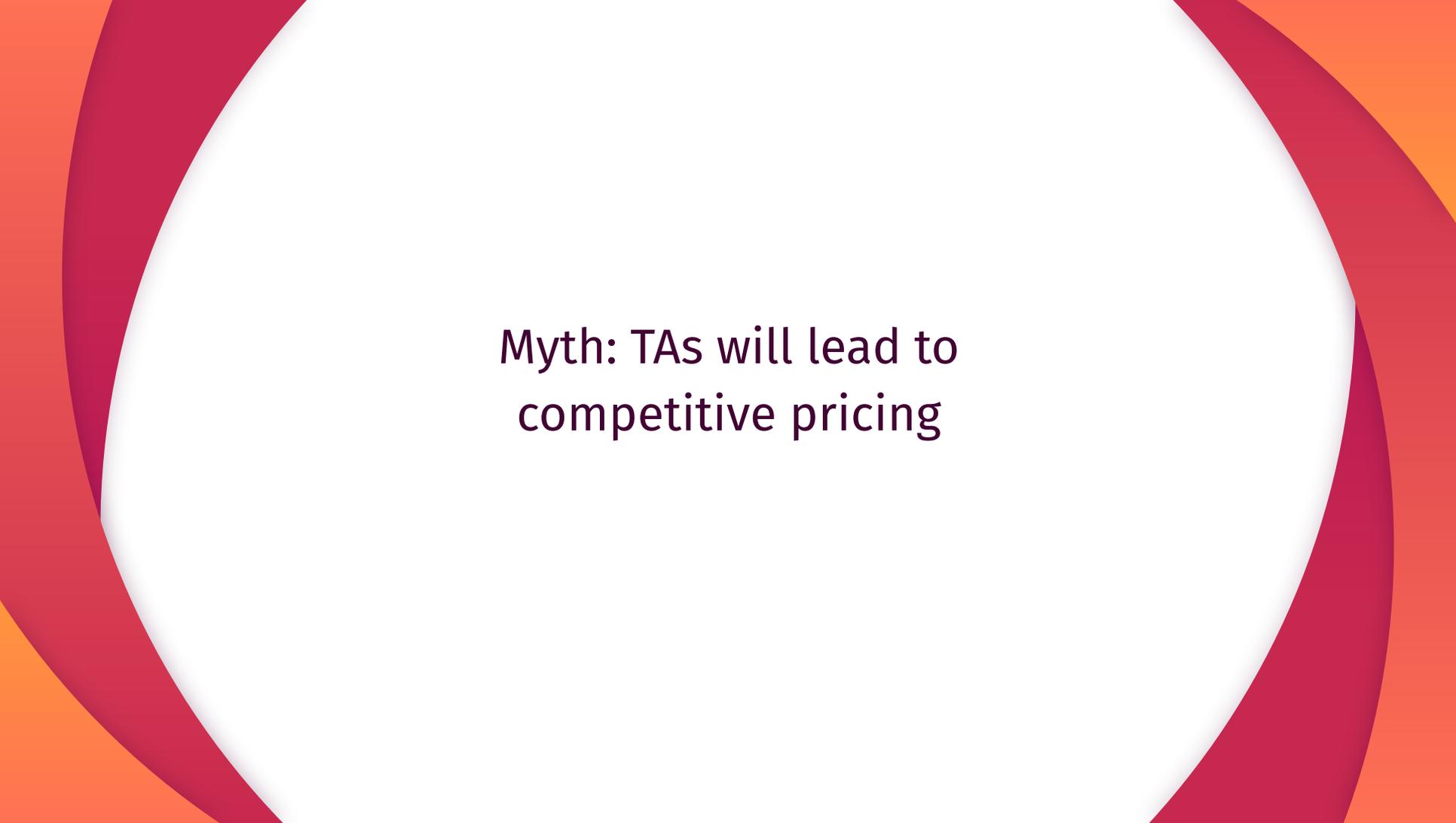
## Publication costs

- Articles published/year + previous prices
- APCs set the bar

## Attempts at Transparency

- Anti-Competition Laws
- cOAlition S attempts for transparent models

“FOAA Breakdown of Publication Services and Fees,” Fair Open Access Alliance, accessed May 5, 2021, <https://web.archive.org/web/20210125200913/>, <https://www.fairopenaccess.org/foaa-breakdown-of-publication-services-and-fees/>; “Plan S Price Transparency Frameworks: Guidance and requirements,” Plan S, accessed May 5, 2021, <https://www.coalition-s.org/price-and-service-transparency-frameworks>



Myth: TAs will lead to  
competitive pricing

# Libraries Lack Details

## Baselines

- Agreements based on:
  - Previous years
  - Printing and shipping costs

## Undisclosed

- ESAC Registry (as of Feb. 2021)
  - 222 Agreements - 44 Publishers
  - 41% had pricing details
  - 25% noted “cost increase”



Myth: TAs better position  
libraries to negotiate

# Malicious Compliance

## More Costs

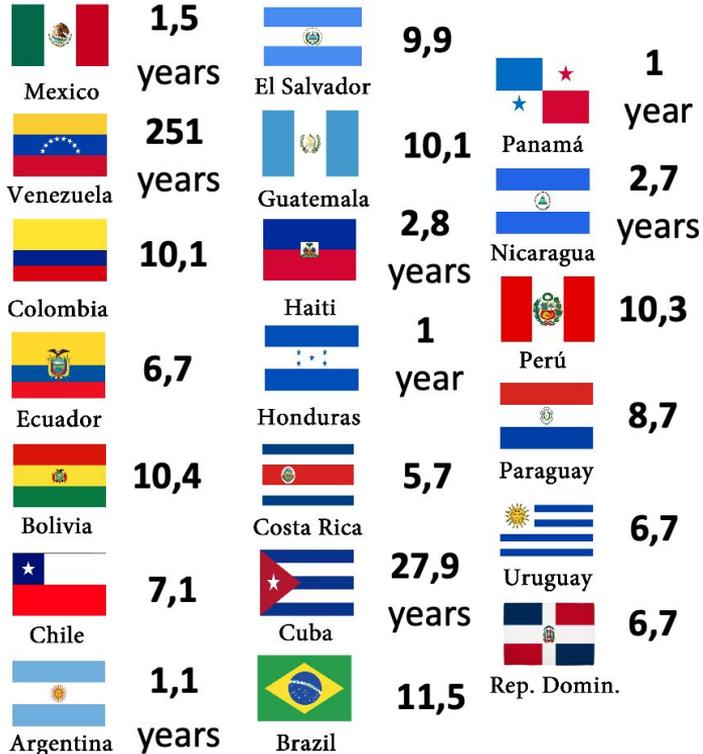
- Who pays APCs?
- Who oversees APC payment?
- Who can afford the APC?





Myth: Transformative Agreements  
move the system away from an  
APC model of open access.

# Why we consider APCs unrealistic (unethical?):



*Months of salary equivalent to a single APC*





Myth: Transformative Agreements  
move the system away from an  
APC model of open access.

# Model Design Details

A total annual cost is agreed to with the publisher, structured as follows:

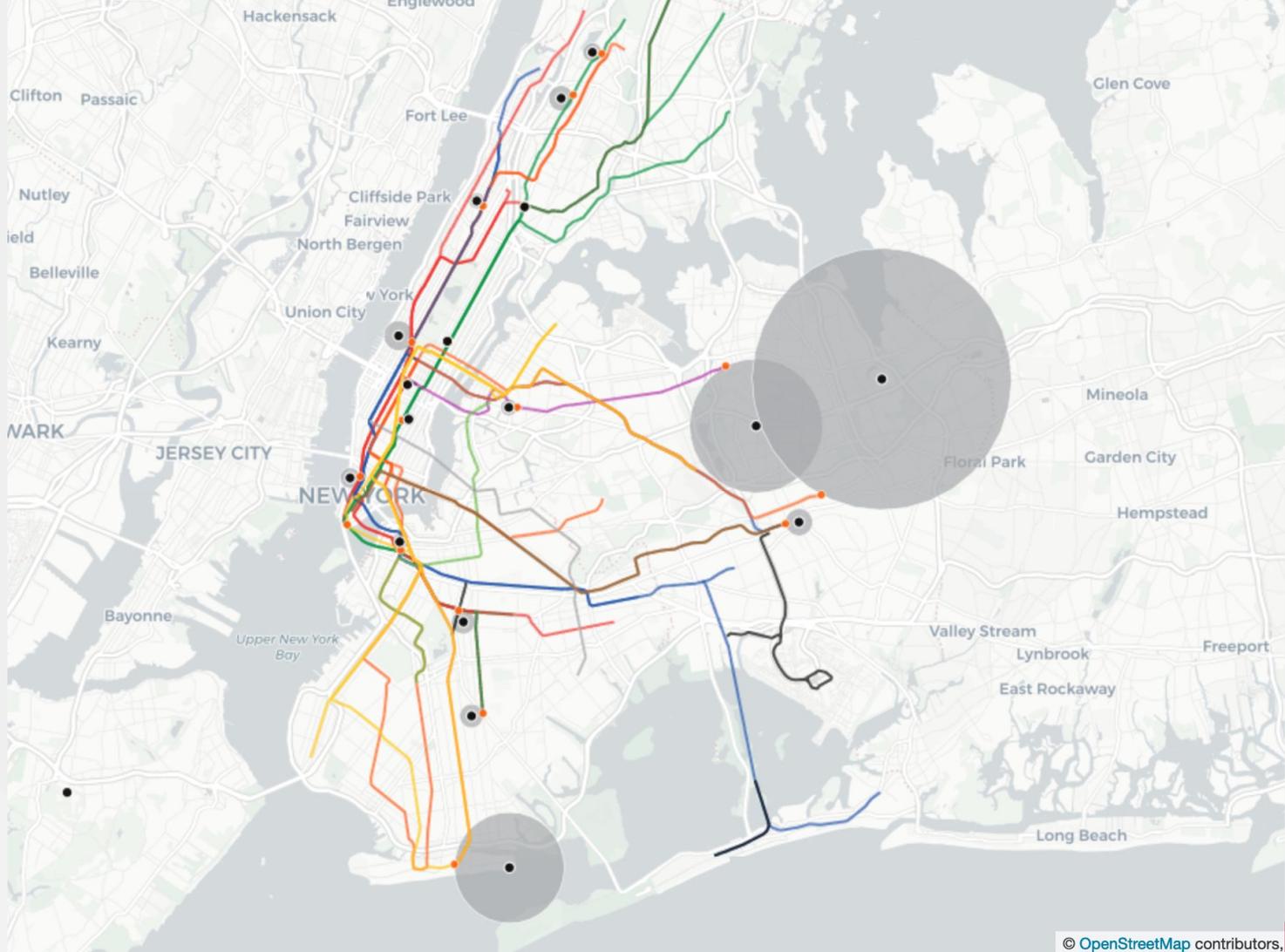
- **Reading Fee: ~10% of prior subscription spend**
  - Reading fee pays for access and rights to subscription content and is fixed for the term of the agreement
- **OA Publication Fees: A capped total, based on negotiated APCs and estimated publication volume**
  - APCs are subject to a negotiated discount
  - UC Libraries subvention pays the first \$1,000
  - Authors are asked to pay the balance from grant funds if available
  - If authors lack grant funds, the library covers the fee
- **Price control mechanism**
  - Total OA Fee is subject to a minimum and maximum each year during the pilot phase to protect publisher and UC from undue risk, with gradual adjustments up or down each year based on OA publishing volume

**Transformative Agreements don't  
eliminate APCs, they obfuscate them.**





Myth: Transformative agreements  
will lead to an equitable  
scholarly publishing system.



**“Start quote**



**end quote.”**

[REDACTED]



**“I worry about equity issues... [The publisher is] arguing that university libraries should be paying for read and publish agreements vs. subscriptions and subsidize university authors (faculty, staff, students). And, of course, [the publisher] still makes a profit. I was wondering where we were going with “read & publish” agreements at CUNY... I worry about scholars at public universities and about students and early career professionals not being able to pay for open access. [The publisher] says it’s up to librarians.”**

**“It’s up to librarians.”**



Myth: “TAs are a proven way to transition the system from closed to open access”

Transformative Agreements “are temporary and transitional meaning that they are not an end in itself but rather provide a framework in which a swift and irreversible shift away from the subscription model can be organized.”

—The Efficiency and Standards for Article Charges (ESAC) initiative

**Transformative Agreements are not available for all institutions.**



**Transformative Agreements Reinforce  
inequity.**



**Transformative Agreements  
consolidate power, further harming  
the least powerful.**



**Transformative Agreements reinforce existing inequity, while appearing to solve access issues.**

**Incrementalism is the way forward,  
just not this type of incrementalism.**



**Thank you.**

**Questions?**



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