

## Report

### Initial funding for high-quality open access journals in the humanities and social sciences

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In coordination with the Austrian Federal Ministry of Science and Research (BMWF), the Austrian Science Fund (FWF) launched an initiative to provide [initial funding](#) for innovative open access journals in the humanities and social sciences. The initiative targeted media owners operating in Austria and enabled them to submit funding applications for the establishment of new open access journals and for conversion from classic subscription models to open access.

In April 2013, the FWF received 36 expressions of interest in the first stage. Using the seven criteria listed below, the FWF then selected the 19 most promising cases and invited them to submit a full proposal.

Key data on the full proposals submitted:

- The organisations behind the journals are largely research institutions such as universities, followed by learned societies and publishing houses.
- 14 applications were submitted for new journals, while five already existed as subscription journals and planned to make the transition to open access.
- Seven journals can predominantly be attributed to the social sciences, 12 to the humanities.
- For the time after the three-year initial funding period, the median costs assumed were approximately €22,000 per year. As the journals aim to publish some 20 articles each year, the medium-term costs were estimated at €1,100 per article on the average.
- The majority of applicants opted for a long-term funding model based on support from sponsors like research institutions or learned societies. A few journals plan to fund their activities – at least in part – by collecting article processing charges from the authors.

All of the full proposals received were evaluated by three international reviewers from a scholarly, technical and financial perspective; in some cases, individual reviewers assessed two applications.

#### Affiliation of reviewers

USA/Canada	16
UK	10
Benelux	9
Germany/Switzerland	4
Nordic countries	3
Others	3

The reviews focused on the following seven criteria:

1. **International visibility:** The applicants were expected to demonstrate how the journal would attain a maximum of international visibility (or how its visibility would be enhanced). In this context, applicants were to address the journal's thematic orientation, target groups, unique characteristics and its strategies for attracting authors of high international renown.

2. **Quality assurance:** In addition to providing information on editors and members of the editorial board, applications also included detailed descriptions of the journal's editorial policy, peer review procedure and ethical standards.
3. **Indexing and metrics:** In this context, applicants were asked to indicate the databases in which the journal, its articles and their usage would be listed and captured.
4. **Open access:** The requirements of digital journals, especially open access periodicals, differ from those of conventional print journals. As a result, applicants were expected to discuss which software would be used for the journal, how author and user rights would be handled, which digital article formats were planned, or how long-term archiving would be organised.
5. **Initial funding:** The programme offered an initial funding amount of up to €50,000 or €100,000 for the first three years. It was therefore necessary to state the purposes for which the requested funding would be used as well as any other funding expected from third parties.
6. **Long-term funding:** For the six years following the initial funding period, applicants were asked to indicate the chosen funding model and the expected resources in order to ensure the long-term survival of the journal.
7. **Innovation bonus:** In cases where innovative elements were planned for a journal, applicants were allowed to request funding for costs of up to €100,000. In this context, innovations include measures which go beyond the standards of existing journals. These may include high editorial effort/service, new models of use of metrics and scholarly communication, free access to the underlying research data or the integration of new media.

The reviewers and the FWF Board came to the conclusion that eight applications exhibited a combination of scholarly quality, sound technical implementation and sustainable funding which would make up for a promising journal. Based on the 36 expressions of interest received, this represents an approval rate of 22%.

#### Funded Journals

Journal	Media Owner	Editors
Transversal – Journal for Jewish Studies	Centrum for Jewish Studies, University of Graz	Klaus Hödl, Asher Biemann, Gerald Lamprecht, et al
TYCHE – Contributions to Ancient History, Papyrology and Epigraphy	Holzhausen Scientific Publishing	Thomas Corsten, Fritz Mitthof, Bernhard Palme, Hans Taeuber
TDE – Translingual Discourse in Ethnomusicology	University of Vienna	Regine Allgayer-Kaufmann, Gerd Grupe, et al
Region	Vienna University of Economics and Business	Gunther Maier, Michaela Trippl, et al
Musicologica Austriaca – Journal for Austrian Music Studies	Austrian Society of Musicology	Wolfgang Fuhrmann, Dominik Sedivý
APS – Austrian Journal of Political Science	Austrian Society of Political Science	Gilg Seeber, Sonja Puntischer-Riekman, Dieter Segert
MEDIOS – Medieval Worlds Comparative and Interdisciplinary Studies	Institute for Medieval Studies, Austrian Academy of Sciences	Walter Pohl, Andre Gingrich, et al
JRC – Research Cultures: Epistemic Practices in Arts & Technology	University of Applied Arts Vienna	Katharina Holas, Andrew Newman, Matthias Tarsiewicz

The FWF will pay out half of each approved grant in March 2014. The other half will be paid out 18 months later on the condition that (a) the journal is registered in the [ISSN](#) and [DOAJ](#)

systems and (b) the applicants submit a report to the FWF detailing how any suggestions from the reviews have been implemented.

It appears reasonable to assume – and it would also be highly desirable – that those responsible for journals not funded by the FWF will continue to work on implementation and secure funding from other sources. In this context, the reviews obtained by the FWF should serve as a particularly useful source for improvements.

### ***Limits and beyond***

The general tenor of the reviews can be summarised in two categories: On the one hand, there are “natural” limits to the success of nationally funded journals, and on the other hand there are areas of potential where those limits could be overcome.<sup>1</sup>

- The possibilities are limited in a small country without any large academic publishing houses. Therefore, it is not reasonable to expect more than a handful of journals with high international visibility. This also applies to scientifically successful countries of similar size, such as [Sweden](#), [Denmark](#) or [Norway](#).
- Technical implementation and a sound financial basis are necessary prerequisites for a successful journal, but they are certainly not a guarantee of success. Rather, the publication’s future hinges on its quality and the related scholarly reputation of the people behind the journal. In this context, it is not only a question of attracting very prominent academics as editors or members of the editorial board, but also one of ensuring from the outset that some of the most prominent figures in the field are willing to publish in the journal.
- Austria’s research institutions and publishers are still in the early stages of developing structures to provide professional support for scholars in the technical and financial implementation of open access publication models.

At the same time, there is potential to overcome these limits if we consider at least three developments: internationalisation, pooling of resources, high quality standards.

Internationalisation: Individual disciplines within the humanities and social sciences are often more fragmented than in the natural sciences. As a result, especially in a small country, there will only be a limited number of outstanding figures with a reputation sufficient to support a journal. Therefore, it would be advisable to expand the basis for establishing a specialist journal by cooperating with international research institutions which focus on a similar portfolio of research topics.

Pooling of resources: International consortia to support journals in rather small fields would also offer the advantage of enabling technical resources to be bundled and financial capacity to be expanded significantly. In Austria’s case alone, pooling publishing resources – for example in the form of an [Austrian University/Academic Press](#) – would already create significant advantages. Another model would be the [Library Publishing Coalition](#) in the US and Canada.

International quality standards: Building a journal’s reputation is a long, formidable task, whereas open access journals are a very new phenomenon. A great deal of experimentation is currently under way; a number of new journals will fail, the open access model is being misused by certain [dubious providers](#), and only few publications will achieve high international visibility in the long term. This makes it all the more important to maintain high quality standards in terms of both content and technical implementation from the very outset. To this end, platforms which define and safeguard international quality standards, such as the [Open Access Scholarly Publishers Association](#), the [Directory of Open Access Journals](#) or possibly the future [Quality of Open Access Market](#) initiative, are especially helpful.

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<sup>1</sup> See also Stuart Shieber: [Thoughts on founding open-access journals](#), 23 November 2013