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OPEN KNOWLEDGE

Building a National Community of Practice for Diamond Open Access

Since its establishment in 2021, Irish Open Access Publishers has evolved into a dynamic and engaged network of practitioners. Communities of Practice Theory helps explain how.

By Jane Buggle | 03.04.2025

The IOAP (Irish Open Access Publishers), of which I am manager and co-founder, was established in 2021 as a national community of practice to advance sustainable diamond open access (OA) publishing in Ireland. Its aim is “to unite and strengthen communication and knowledge sharing among a diverse range of Diamond Open Access publishers in Ireland, engaging a wide variety of stakeholders including library publishers, institutional publishers, academics, students, librarians, national and international open access agencies, policymakers, and funders” (Irish Open Access Publishers, n.d.).

At a recent IOAP Advisory Board meeting, discussions on community activity and engagement were so extensive that little time remained for strategic input from expert Advisory Board members. This moment underscored the rapid growth and impact of the IOAP—what began as a small initiative has evolved into a dynamic and engaged network of practitioners. Understanding how this development has occurred requires a closer examination of the processes that underpin effective communities of practice.

A Theory of Transformative Community

Etienne Wenger’s (1998) foundational work on communities of practice provides an important starting point for analyzing how the IOAP has developed as a collective learning space. Wenger conceptualized communities of practice as groups of individuals who engage in a shared domain of interest, learning from one another and developing a common repertoire of practices over time. Building on this, Wenger (now Wenger-Trayner) and Beverly Wenger-Trayner (2015) further refined the theory, identifying three essential elements for a community of practice to be truly transformative:

- **Domain** describes the area of mutual interest or concern that unites a community’s members. It creates a shared foundation and identity for the community, differentiating it from other groups. Being a member signifies a dedication to this domain and a collective expertise that distinguishes members from those outside the group.
- **Community** emphasises the connections and interactions among members. In a community of practice, individuals participate in shared activities, discussions, and knowledge exchange, creating a nurturing environment that encourages mutual learning. This spirit of collaboration is essential for establishing trust and enhancing the depth of learning experiences.
- **Practice** refers to a common collection of resources, tools, narratives, and experiences pertinent to the community’s field. Their practice matures over time

through ongoing interaction and engagement, enabling members to collectively enhance their skills and knowledge

Through this framework, this article will explore how the IOAP has developed as a community of practice.

Defining our Domain

cOAlition S (n.d.) describes diamond open access as:

a scholarly publication model in which journals and platforms do not charge fees to either authors or readers. Diamond open access journals are community-driven, academic-led, and academic-owned publishing initiatives. Serving a fine-grained variety of generally small-scale, multilingual, and multicultural scholarly communities, these journals and platforms embody the concept of bibliodiversity. Diamond Open Access journals and platforms are equitable by nature and design.

Giménez Toledo, Kulczycki, Pölönen, and Sivertsen (2019) describe bibliodiversity as “the diversity of academic content, both at the national and international level . . . essential for preserving research in a wide range of global and local topics, studied from different epistemic and methodological approaches, inspired by various schools of thought and expressed in a variety of languages.” The importance of bibliodiversity should not be underestimated. Lai Ma, Maire O’Neill, and I (2023) have argued that “without bibliodiversity, we are restricting our imaginations and limiting ourselves to the understanding constructed by a minority of prestigious publications and publishers.”

These are the values that form the “shared foundation” of the IOAP. Our vision is to promote publishing activity that is free of paywalls and publication embargoes to further the dissemination of high-quality scholarly output to all in society.

The Beginnings of the IOAP

The Irish Government established the National Open Research Forum (NORF) in 2017 to advance the Irish agenda for open research. NORF carried out an open research landscape study the results of which were published in 2021. Through this study, a diverse range of diamond open access stakeholders were identified, including library publishers, academics, and policy makers.

The IOAP was formed to bring together these stakeholders into a single dynamic community of practice. In preliminary meetings, all participants agreed that the focus would be exclusively on the promotion of diamond OA publishing and that IOAP activities should be underpinned by principles of openness, equality, diversity and inclusion, transparency and best practice in scholarly publishing, ethical publishing standards as outlined by the Committee on Publishing Ethics (COPE), retention of author rights, collaboration, and knowledge sharing.

The IOAP team was established comprised of academics and librarians. The IOAP website was constructed and a suite of shared resources were collated that promote high quality diamond OA scholarly publishing. Included in this list of open resources are publishing curricula and toolkits, publishing initiatives, workflows, and values, publishing infrastructure, directories, indexes, and portals.

As described by the Wenger-Trayner's Communities of Practice (CoP) theory, in creating this suite of resources we were fostering a collaborative environment where academics and librarians, through shared knowledge and practices, engage in mutual learning and contribute to the collective advancement of diamond OA scholarly publishing.

The CoP theory also describes the crucial role of an expert advisory board, which fosters the growth and effectiveness of a community through knowledge stewardship (Domain), legitimacy and credibility (Community), and practice development (Practice). It can also provide strategic direction and facilitate connections to other networks. This allows the CoP to thrive, evolve, and make meaningful contributions to the field.

This has been our experience at the IOAP: our community suggested names of key players in the area of diamond OA publishing internationally, and from these the Advisory Board (AB) was established in 2023 to provide advice on work to date and future developments. These people were selected on the basis of their contribution to diamond OA publishing through their scholarship, advocacy, involvement in organizations, and publishing programs. Members hail from Redalyc (Red de Revistas Científicas de América Latina y el Caribe, España y Portugal, a nonprofit scholarly publishing platform), DIAMAS (Developing Institutional Open Access Publishing Models to Advance Scholarly Communication, a pan-EU project 2022–2025), Jisc (an UK nonprofit that provides digital infrastructure, open access support, and cybersecurity for higher education and research), Public Knowledge Project (a nonprofit initiative that develops open-source software to support open access publishing in academia), OASPA (Open Access Scholarly Publishing Association, a global organization that promotes best practices, transparency, and sustainability in open access publishing), and universities in Ireland, Algeria, Canada, Indonesia, Mexico, and the UK and USA, among others.

The AB's contribution has been critical in helping frame practical ways in which the IOAP can progress its mission, e.g., connecting with international projects such as the [European Diamond Capacity Hub](#) and the [Global Diamond Open Access Alliance](#). AB members have also spoken at a number of IOAP knowledge sharing events.

The IOAP in Action

In 2022, NORF launched an [Open Research Fund](#) aimed at facilitating the execution of the [National Action Plan for Open Research 2022–2030](#). This initiative sought to enhance the adoption of open research practices in Ireland. The IOAP was invited to partner on four funded projects, all of which are still in progress:

- Open Access Transition Programme—Publish OA, which investigated the feasibility of a national diamond open access publishing platform, led by the Royal Irish Academy and Trinity College Dublin. An index of diamond OA journals in Ireland has been completed. The landscape, business, and final reports are currently being written and the pilot national platform will be launched with 5–6 journals by June 2025.
- SCOIR (Secondary Rights, Copyright, Open Access, Institutional Policies, and Rights Retention), led by Trinity College Dublin and Technological University Dublin.

This project has created an [Open Access Bill](#) and a model [Institutional Open Access Policy](#).

- Cultivating an Open Research Culture in the Humanities and Social Sciences, led by University College Dublin. The project focuses on best practices in open research, the alignment between the principles of open research and research assessment criteria, and the rewards and recognition systems in supporting open research. In stage one, the project team organized a webinar on [Open Monograph Publishing in the Humanities and Social Sciences](#), and the [Research Evaluation in the Social Sciences and Humanities \(RESSH\) Conference 2024](#). Conference papers will be issued soon.
- Building a Culture of Open Research for Irish Health and Social Care Practitioner Researchers, led by the Health Service Executive and Trinity College Dublin. A dedicated administrative assistant is currently being recruited to help establish a diamond OA peer-reviewed medical journal, the first objective of the project.

The IOAP is represented on each project team and has organized a number of [events](#) in their support including the webinar on Open Monograph Publishing in the Humanities and Social Sciences and a [Directory of Open Access Journals \(DOAJ\) Sprint: Demystifying the DOAJ Application](#).

As the Wenger-Trayner's discussion of "practice" suggests, the IOAP is maturing as a community of practice through its engagement on these projects, which have allowed us to actively advance the diamond OA publishing ecosystem in Ireland.

Celebrating our Successes and Looking to the Future

Etienne Wenger-Trayner maintains that sharing stories and celebrating successes are important methods to measure progress and to develop paradigmatic trajectories that ensure the future relevance of the community of practice (Wenger, 1998, p. 165).

Accordingly, the IOAP held its inaugural Diamond OA Publishing Awards in March 2024. Submissions were invited to the four categories of Best Peer Reviewed Open Access Journal, Best Peer Reviewed Open Access Monograph, Best Open Educational Resource, and Outstanding Contribution to the Open Access Publishing Field in Ireland. The judging panel consisted of members of the Advisory Board and authorities in each area. While no qualifying entries were received in the OA Monograph category, there was significant competition in both the OA Journals and the Outstanding Contribution categories with Alphaville, Journal of Film and Screen Media (University College Cork) winning the OA Journal category, and with joint winners in the Outstanding Contribution category: Yvonne Desmond (Technological University Dublin) and the International Scenario Project Team (University College Cork). The award for the Best Open Educational Resource went to the MTU Assignment Toolkit (Munster Technological University).

The award winners were announced at the half-day inaugural IOAP Annual Conference 2024, which featured presentations by Dr. Patrick Paul Walsh, director of the UN SDG Academy, Dr. Arianna Becerril Garcia, executive director at Redalyc, and Jan Erik Frantsevag, DIAMAS Project Lead, among others. The program included a student voice panel of PhD students, a speaker from the National Student Engagement Program (NStEP), and a closing panel of the afternoon's speakers, each facilitated by IOAP personnel. This online event attracted an attendance of 173, and each panel discussion engendered lively audience engagement. A full-day in-person IOAP Conference will be held in 2025 and the biannual IOAP Awards will be held again in 2026.

Over the past two years, the IOAP has also forged connections with some other communities of practice and key projects. We have connected with the [LAI Library Publishing Group](#), [OASPA \(Open Access Scholarly Publishing Association\)](#), the [IFLA \(International Federation of Library Associations\) Library Publishing Special interest Group](#), and the [Library Publishing Coalition](#). The IOAP has worked with colleagues across Ireland on NORF-funded projects and is a signatory of the [Science Europe Action Plan for Diamond Open Access](#). It holds regular community knowledge sharing events and brown bag discussions with the [Open Access Book Network \(OABN\)](#), [Open Institutional Publishing Association \(OIPA\)](#), and the [Netherlands University Presses \(NUPS\)](#) communities of practice. In doing so, the IOAP has enriched and expanded its domain, community, and practice.

From the foundation of its clear vision and shared values, through its nurturing of an engaged community, and its ongoing development of a dynamic practice, the IOAP is now helping to advance transformative change in diamond access publishing in Ireland. Grounded in the Communities of Practice framework, the IOAP's success is not only reflected in its strategic growth and impact but in its ability to remain true to its core mission: promoting the values of diamond open access and fostering an environment where innovation and collaboration can thrive. This framework has served both as a solid foundation for scaling a sustainable community of practice and as a critical reflective tool for measuring progress and impact. By upholding the principles of community and shared practice, the IOAP is well-positioned to continue driving meaningful change in the diamond open access publishing landscape for years to come.

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10.1146/katina-20250304-1

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