



SCHLOSS DAGSTUHL
Leibniz-Zentrum für Informatik

Prof. Raimund Seidel, Ph.D.
Wissenschaftlicher Direktor

Geschäftsstelle Schloss Dagstuhl
Universität des Saarlandes
Campus E1 1
66123 Saarbrücken | Germany

Telefon +49 681 302 4396
Telefax +49 681 302 4397

www.dagstuhl.de
service@dagstuhl.de

To whom it may concern

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LIPIcs: Strategy, Costs, Prices

Dear colleague,

Dagstuhl started the LIPIcs series as part of its efforts to support the open access idea that scientific papers ought to be freely and easily accessible with no barriers for any potentially interested reader. In the traditional system of publication these barriers have mainly been the ever increasing costs of subscriptions to journals and series, which have reached a level where many libraries have found themselves forced to discontinue subscriptions to quite important journals and series. This has made a good part of the scientific literature difficult to access for many researchers.

The most straightforward way to achieve more open access is to shift some or all of the costs of publication from the reader to the author. However, traditional publishers have been reluctant to pursue this change – why should they change away from a very profitable business model? At best they have pursued it in very conservative ways with sometimes outrageous fees on the author side.

Dagstuhl's goal has been to facilitate open access to the computer science literature in such a way that no cost is incurred by the reader. The strategy has been one of setting examples, "planting seeds," if you will, to show that open access is viable and thus to make researchers expect that papers are available this way. LIPIcs is the center piece of this strategy, following the observation that conferences are the most important publication venue in many parts of computer science paired with the fact that often conference proceedings are not strongly bound to any particular publisher (whereas moving an established journal to an alternative publisher is typically next to impossible). The strategy of setting examples is best realized by concentrating on the most outstanding examples, i.e. on the best conferences. The LIPIcs board has

Geschäftsanschrift
Schloss Dagstuhl
Leibniz-Zentrum für Informatik GmbH
Oktavie-Allee
66687 Wadern | Germany

Vorsitzender des Aufsichtsrates
Prof. Dr. -Ing. Dr. h. c. Stefan Jähnichen
Geschäftsführung
Prof. Raimund Seidel, Ph.D.
Heike Meißner

Amtsgericht Saarbrücken HRB 63800
Ust.-IdNr. DE 137 972 446

Bank 1 Saar | BIC SABA DE 55
IBAN DE39 5919 0000 0005 1000 03


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done great work in ensuring that LIPIcs is the home for conferences of highest quality.

Of course publishing incurs costs. Since we do not want these to be met by payments from readers we need to cover them in other ways. Possible sources are authors, public support (e.g. through grants or through general Dagstuhl funds), and private support (e.g. by donations or grants from non-public organizations).

When LIPIcs was started the possibility of public support was not questioned. This has changed: In short, publishing is viewed as an economic activity and public funding must not interfere with this market. **We have been told by our funding agency (BMBF¹) that starting 2016 the publishing activities of Dagstuhl must in no way be paid for by general Dagstuhl funds.** Of course we are unhappy with this view but our possibilities of changing it are rather limited. For the time being we have to live with it. Please note that these market non-interference rules are not whims of the German government but apparently they are ultimately imposed by the European Union.

What are the actual costs? When LIPIcs was started we had of course no experience and after some calculations, which also relied on studies done elsewhere, we set a per paper fee of €15. This turned out to be an underestimation, mainly for the following reasons:

1. The preparation of proceedings is managed by workload sharing between the editors of the proceedings and the Dagstuhl editorial office. However, it has turned out that many editors are not willing to spend that much time for the preparation.
2. Even though our LaTeX style is sufficient for most of the published papers, authors tend to use additional packages and macros, which has caused a lot of additional work due to incompatibility and layout changes.

In addition being optimistic in our estimate was justified in the sense that at the time it was acceptable to subsidize and pay for possible shortcomings by general Dagstuhl funds.

In the meantime we have acquired much more experience. We have tried several models to assess the amount of work involved and they all point to an overall per paper cost of about €60, if the current quality is to be maintained.

It is worthwhile to put this price of €60 in context with other prices: We have learned that traditional publishers charge prices between €200 and €600 for comparable services (“golden open access”). If you want to access a recent paper via, say, Scimedirect and you do not have some institutional access, as can be expected for quite a few researchers and students in economically weak countries, you are charged more than €30.

Assuming that public subsidy remains verboten, we feel that in the long run the per paper cost of €60 should be covered fully by the article processing fee. Of course quadrupling the current fees must appear enormous. However, we have managed to secure a generous donation

¹The German Federal Ministry for Education and Research.

from HITS (Heidelberg Institute for Theoretical Studies)² to ease the transition. It makes possible the following schedule for APCs in the coming years:

- 2016: € 15
- 2017: € 30
- 2018: € 45
- 2019 and later: € 60

The APC of €60 should also be put in some general context. In the current setup the APC is not paid by the author but by the conference. In contrast to Dagstuhl, individual conferences do qualify for public funding to have their proceedings published “open access” since they in principle are free to choose any publisher. Dagstuhl may be of help in seeking such funding. Typically the number of participants in a conference exceeds the number of papers published in the proceedings by some constant, very often bigger than 2. Thus in most cases the APC can be covered by less than a €30 part of the conference fee, which in many cases is less than 10% of the conference fee. Considering in addition the cost of lodging and travel the overall proportion of the cost of publication ends up in the low one digit percent range of the cost of attending a conference. Keep in mind that publications are the only permanent remnant of the conference.

We are aware that currently there are cases where conferences do not incur any publication costs at all or even receive some “sponsoring money” from a publisher in exchange for the publishing rights of the proceedings. These rights of course will then not be realized in an open access fashion at all, at best in some mixed fashion that allows true open access to the conference’s papers only a considerable time later (green open access). We would like to point out that, as nice as such arrangements may be for a conference, in the end they increase the overall costs and just shift them to other parties who may be less in a position to carry them (be it the student researcher in an economically weak country, or your own library, which may end up discontinuing subscriptions due to increased costs). In addition this model may not be long-lived: research funding agencies are already expecting that funded results are published in an open access fashion – they even provide money in their grants for that purpose – and it is likely that they will become more restrictive in what counts as truly open access. Remember the value of immediate and unrestricted visibility of your publications. We write papers to be read!

Finally, is it possible to decrease the €60 APC in some ways? The only really viable way of achieving this would be by drastically reducing the quality, in particular the quality of typesetting. The most extreme way would be to forego any sort of enforced common format, just take the pdf that authors deliver and just embellish the pages with minimal necessary information. This is unwise for a number of reasons: quite a few readers (and potential authors) will balk on esthetic grounds; it may hinder the acceptance of LIPIcs publications in various citation indices; and finally it makes it impossible to introduce in the future more adaptive display formats, suitable for ebooks, etc. We should point out

²<http://www.h-its.org/>

that typesetting could also even use much more effort than we expend now, and the current arrangement is already a compromise. We believe this compromise to be a good one.

To summarize: Our funding agency requires us to recover the full costs of our open publishing activities. These costs have been considerably higher than initially estimated, namely €60. We have obtained a generous donation from HITS to stagger the necessary price increase so that the APC will rise by €15 yearly increments from €15 in 2016 to €60 starting in 2019.

Of course we will continue to seek further ideas and sources for funding our open access publishing activities and we welcome any viable idea that you may have.

Sincerely

Prof. Raimund Seidel, Ph.D.
Scientific Director
Schloss Dagstuhl – Leibniz-Zentrum für Informatik GmbH