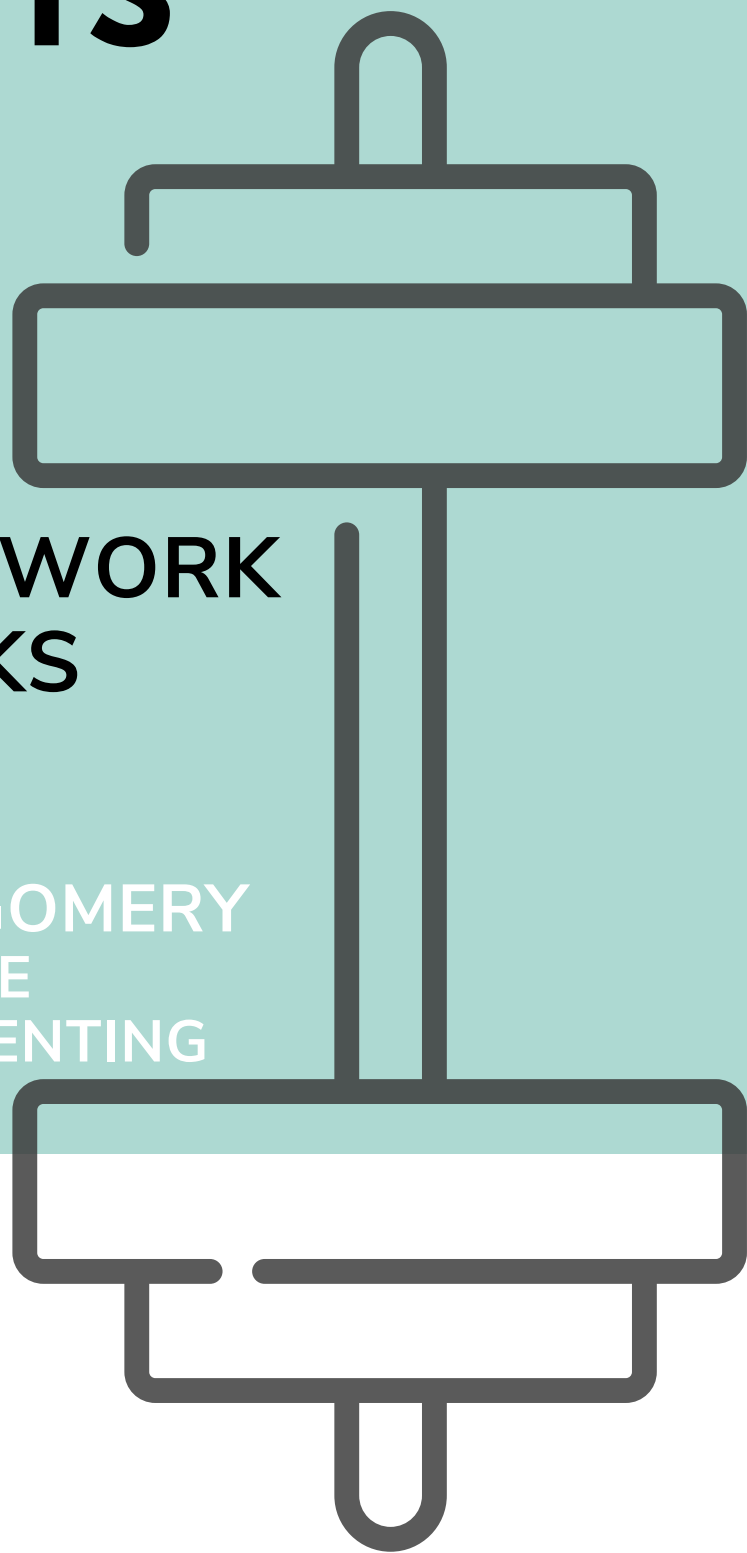


OA BOOKS WORKOUTS

SCHOLARS AT WORK WITH OA BOOKS

AN INTERVIEW
WITH LUCY MONTGOMERY
ON OPEN KNOWLEDGE
INSTITUTIONS: REINVENTING
UNIVERSITIES

**The Open
Access
Books
Network**



LUCY MONTGOMERY

LUCY MONTGOMERY IS PROFESSOR OF KNOWLEDGE INNOVATION AT CURTIN UNIVERSITY IN AUSTRALIA, WHERE SHE LEADS THE INNOVATION IN KNOWLEDGE COMMUNICATION RESEARCH PROGRAM AT THE CENTRE FOR CULTURE AND TECHNOLOGY.



Open Knowledge Institutions: Reinventing Universities

In *Open Knowledge Institutions*, a diverse group of authors offer a bold proposition: universities should become open knowledge institutions, acting with principles of openness at their center and working across boundaries and with broad communities to generate shared knowledge resources for the benefit of humanity. Calling on universities to adopt transparent protocols for the creation, use, and governance of these resources, the authors draw on cutting-edge theoretical work, offer real-world case studies, and outline ways to assess universities' attempts to achieve openness. The authors have used a so-called 'Book Sprint' method to write the book, an intensive and collaborative way to write a book together in a very short time. A first version of the book has also been made available online for public peer review.

1

Looking back at the Open Knowledge Institutions project, can you give examples of the kinds of open practices that have been applied?

The 'open' nature of this book project goes deeper than the copyright status of the final published product. The process of creating this book was an opportunity for us to work with a community to explore the concept of the university as an Open Knowledge Institution. The ideas and principles that we articulate in the book are shaping a larger program of research on Open Knowledge Institutions that we are leading from Curtin University: The [Curtin Open Knowledge Initiative](#).

The first iteration of the book was written in 2018: by 13 authors during a five day '[Book Sprint](#)'. At the end of the workshop we were fortunate to be invited to work with MIT Press as part of a practical experiment in open publishing. This included sharing our book via the MIT Press [Works in Progress site](#) and using the PubPub platform to support a process of open peer review. We also printed the Book Sprint version of the book and shared it with colleagues, senior leaders within universities, and at conferences. Sharing the pre-print of the book was an opportunity for us to invite comments and critiques and to start a conversation about our ideas, as well as to update the book to reflect feedback. MIT Press facilitated a parallel process of traditional peer review. In 2021 the book was finally made available as an MIT Press

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paperback; as well as in a range of open access formats.

2 Why is openness important to you and this project? What did it enable you to do?

Given the topic of the book and the arguments that we make in it, we began this project clear about the fact that we really wanted the book to be made available as open access. Our book makes a case for open access as a powerful mechanism for breaking down barriers to access and use of the knowledge made within universities. We felt very strongly that, in order to be credible, we needed to model the type of action we are calling for.

The other 'open' elements of the way we approached this project also reflect the arguments that we put forward in the book. For example, we argue that the diversity of perspectives results in richer knowledge; and increases the likelihood that such knowledge will generate value for the communities that universities serve. This means more than just diversity of gender or ethnicity, it also means diversity of age and discipline perspective (within universities). The diversity of the group that we brought together to write this book and our efforts to engage with the widest possible range of people during the community peer review process were an attempt to embody the values of the book in the

process that was used to create it. The open approaches that we used in creating the book really have shaped the arguments that we make; as well as the ways in which we make them.

For example, the vision of Open Knowledge that we put forward in the book emphasises the value of diversity in the groups making 'expert' knowledge; as well as the often productive nature of the conflicts that arise at the boundaries between disciplines. This perspective is something that is reflected in the diversity of authors involved in writing the book, which included senior university leaders, scholars of media and culture, economists, science communicators, library and information scientists, statisticians and sociologists. It has also carried over into the deep collaborations between Humanities perspectives and data scientists within the Curtin Open Knowledge Initiative. This hasn't always been comfortable. Working across disciplines and perspectives can be tough. However, I think that the result is more interesting because it is the product of a community, not an individual.



3 Has the 'Open Knowledge Institutions' project changed your understanding of open scholarship? Also in view of specific developments (and needs) in the humanities?

The 'Open Knowledge Institutions' project has absolutely changed my understanding of open scholarship! Before this project I had difficulty thinking about 'openness' as being more than the type of licence applied to a research output. My previous experiences as a researcher and author gave me very fixed ideas about what a book was, how it was written, and how it could be used.

The project has given me the chance to team up with researchers who have different ideas about how books can be written, what peer review can look like, and how books can be used. The choice of a Book Sprint workshop as a way to write this book, and the courage to embrace a process of open peer review, are two examples of how these diverse perspectives have changed my own research practices for the better. I have especially valued the experience of connecting with other researchers interested in the book project through open peer review.

The process turned out to be constructive, exciting and genuinely helpful. Collaborating with people from very different disciplines isn't always easy. However, I think that Humanities perspectives are needed when we are thinking about big questions - including what the future of universities could look like. I also think that the Humanities have a lot to gain from experimenting with new approaches and considering new perspectives when making research openly available, since a model that assumes that academics will have six years to research and write a book that sells around 200 copies is a model that can never be inclusive, and which feels increasingly out of touch.

4 Since you were trying to do something new and experimental with this project, did you have to convince anybody (maybe yourself!) that it could work? How did you do this?

Convincing our university to allow us to use our research funding to pay for a Book Sprint workshop took a bit of work. The concept of a Book Sprint was completely new to our university leadership and there was some scepticism about the idea that we needed to bring an external person in to facilitate the workshop.

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We couldn't have written the book in five days without a very skilled facilitator and the amazing BookSprints team who worked on graphic design, copy editing and layout while we slept. At the end of an exhausting week we had a beautiful book that we could put on the desks of our sponsors within the university - which they found impressive.

The team of authors that we brought together were excited about trying something new. The spirit of excitement about an opportunity to experiment with a new approach, and curiosity about where this would lead, was boosted by MIT Press's willingness to take our book forward through an open, community engaged publishing process. In this case trying a new approach paid off!

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OPEN KNOWLEDGE INSTITUTIONS

LINKS

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[Open Knowledge Institutions in print](#)

[Open Knowledge Institutions open peer review project page](#)

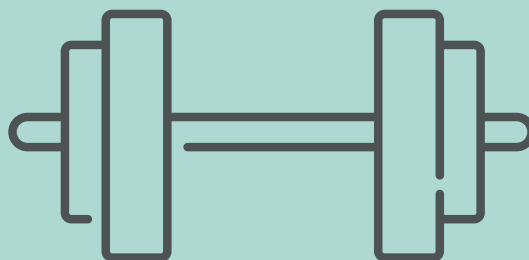
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OA BOOKS WORKOUTS

This interview is one of the outputs of the online series OA Books Workouts: Scholars at Work, a project of the Open Access Books Network. The aim of the series is to share good practices regarding the writing, production, and technicalities of publishing an open access book.

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