

## **Interview with Joe Deville (Mattering Press), 01/02/2012**

**Scholar-Led publishers share some common values around scaling small, removing barriers to open, bibliodiversity and non-competition. Tell me about the impetus to start up your press- why did you decide to found it? What needs were you hoping to meet?**

Mattering Press was started by a group of then very early career scholars just out of their PhDs, who had been working together already during their PhD and we formed this group called the Flows Doings Edges Collective. And we had a number of meetings where we explored, I suppose, the challenges of doing a PhD and authorship, and started to think about the post-PhD challenges of academic life. One of the challenges that was quite present for us at that time was publishing. We were interested in publishing. We knew next to nothing about Open Access. I think our initial impetus wasn't necessarily to start an Open Access publisher. It was just to start a Science and Technology publisher, with texts that were online but also available as hard copies. Then we started reading around Open Access and also started talking to other publishers, particularly Open Humanities Press, to Gary Hall, and also a bit later on, to Mercedes Bunz from meson press. Then obviously we started to learn about Open Access, decided to start an Open Access press, and effectively to learn how to do that. So I'd say our primary motivation was an intellectual one, we wanted to provide a new venue for hosting texts in relation to a particular field, which is Science and Technology Studies. We wanted to start a press that was more community-led and was more focused on a particular field than existing publishing offerings. But then we became increasingly interested in and bought into the arguments around Open Access. Some of our Board Members had empirical areas of focus that included different African contexts, for example. So I think we're very interested in thinking about how to open up a text to a broader readership beyond those just in the more privileged countries. There was also a motivation that we just wanted to keep working together, because we had worked together over the course of our PhDs and wanted to find an excuse to keep working together. The publisher provided that rationale.

**So it was first to establish a Science and Technology publisher that would meet the needs of the books you were wanting to write and see written, and then the Open Access came later?**

I think so. It's a little bit blurred in my memory. I can't remember exactly the sequencing. I think that probably reflects my own journey into it. I think maybe some of my co-publishers, some of my co-editor and co-founders from the beginning had an idea of an Open Access publishing. Maybe the idea of Open Access was there in a very vague form. I don't think we really understood much about the ins and outs of Open Access, such as different licenses. Actually, one of our early books was effectively a non-Open Access book because we licensed it. It's freely available to download online. But the copyright is still owned by the original publisher, which is sort of a mistake, because I don't think we fully understood the issues. I think we saw Open Access at that point more as free access, rather than involving a particular set of licenses.

## **Are you incorporated? As what? Why?**

We are a charitable incorporated organization, CIO, a particular legal form available in the UK. Our primary motivation was just to incorporate. It didn't really matter what kind of form of incorporation it was, but to incorporate. The primary reason for that is because we wanted the liability for our work not to rest with us individually, so that if we publish something that backfired in some way, we wouldn't individually be liable for what we had produced. Instead, the organization would be liable. We've always said that somebody comes and sues us., then we'll just go bankrupt. We can't afford to compete in a court with a wealthy opponent. So we will just go bankrupt. But at least we wouldn't personally be liable, as far as we understand it. I think there are some personal liabilities, but broadly speaking, we wouldn't personally be liable. We also wanted to incorporate and also so we could get a Mattering Press bank account that's a Mattering Press bank account. That was a very practical consideration. But then of course we started looking into different options for incorporating, and I think we just felt that a not-for-profit incorporated form was more in line with our values. We did some reading, and came across the CIO as a structure, which is a charitable form. We thought, 'that seems like it would work for us'. We'd read a bit about it as an organizational form on the government's website, and we thought we might be able to fit within that remit. It seemed to provide a route both for incorporation and for becoming a non-profit, all at once. We didn't have any legal advice. We didn't have anybody that we could ask for advice in that respect. So we just went for it, and started talking to the Charity Commission. They were initially bit sceptical about whether we could come up with an object that was charitable, but we worked with them around that, and then eventually they accepted that our object could be considered charitable. So we went ahead with an application.

## **Others have also mentioned the difficulty of convincing the relevant authorities that a publisher could be something other than a profit-making business.**

It was partly that, but it was more that a charity has to have public benefit, not just be for the benefit of small group. Obviously, an academic publisher could be seen as benefiting just the small community of published academics. So we had to argue that Open Access had wider public benefits by opening up academic knowledge to anybody that might be interested in it.

## **Regarding the governance of your press your size: what resources, elements and/or actors are involved in and/or subject to it?**

It's a very Science and Technology Studies question, so I like this question. The formal governance structure of the organization is, in a way, determined for us by the Charity Commission in the sense that they provide you with a template for your constitution which you can adapt. We did adapt it, for example, to allow certain resolutions to be passed electronically and things like that, but in terms of the formal constitution of Mattering Press, that is basically based on a standard template from the Charity Commission. There were some areas within that where we obviously had to make some decisions, for example around who could be a trustee of the charity and the organization. We decided that all the

editors would be trustees, so it was a flat hierarchical structure. A bit like in the COPIM project. There's no one person who was the overall lead of the organization. We also that the trustees would be those that run the press as well, so we also have a dual role. That's just the formal structure. If we think about how the press governs itself, then that would involve a range of different technologies, because we are globally distributed, mostly in Europe, but with one editor in Australia. So we meet on video conferencing platforms. It used to be Skype. Now it's Jitsi, sometimes Zoom and sometimes other things. We have meetings, but not necessarily as regularly as maybe we should. We've had a bit of a workload issue amongst all the trustees recently, which means that we haven't met as much as we would like to, but we do meet. At times we have passed formal resolutions, if there are things that are particularly requiring a resolution to be passed. Most of the governance of the press is done pretty informally, in discussions in meetings, and on Slack. We want to move to Mattermost but we haven't got around to it yet. So we're still on Slack.

### **Talk about the evolution of your governance structure and process? Did you use or adapt any external principles, guidelines or toolkits? Did you consider any?**

We were quite overwhelmed with the complexity of establishing a new organization and new publisher. We were dealing with print-on-demand publishers, contracting with them, and questioning]how are we going to do typesetting, how we were going to do all the practical business of running publisher. I was completely alien to us. We had to learn it all, and most of us were working full time on other jobs at the same time, so no capacity to do what we've been doing in the COPIM project, to explore different governance options, scoping them, analyzing them, deciding what is best. Absolutely none of that happened. We literally thought, 'What do we need to do to become a charity? Here's the template. Okay, are there any things here that we need to change so that we can actually practically run ourselves? Okay, we need to make decisions by e-mail. There are some options here for passages. One I can delete, one I can include. Let's include that. Let's determine the term length. And then let's get done. Submit. Gone'. That was it.

### **Do you know where you got the template?**

The Charity Commission website. I don't think we engaged in any other resources around governance. I don't think we honestly thought very much about it. We thought, 'if this is Charity Commission best practice, it probably is going to be alright. Let's just go with that'.

### **How does governance operate now, regarding mechanisms like election, role appointment and consensus-seeking? How are conflicts and complaints dealt with?**

We have just been rolling over the trustees. We've been reappointing ourselves and we have only had one new person join us as a trustee. One person left, and one person joined. So we had to formally appoint her as a new trustee. We thought it was quite important that

she joined as a trustee. It could have been that she joined just as an editor and not a trustee, but we wanted her to have, again, that kind of equal say and equal role within the press. We formally agreed that with a written e-mail record, confirming everybody's acceptance of that. But everything else is done informally. I'd say we operate, informally, through a consensus-based model. We never formalized that. We never really even talked about it. I think it's just organic. I think we all just know that that is how it is. I don't think we've ever voted on anything. A bit it like sometimes in the COPIM project. I mean, have there been disagreements? Yes, probably there have been some disagreements. I'm trying to think about how we've managed them. Basically we managed them by talking them through, I suppose. We don't have any mechanism for complaints. We don't have any anything like that. We just work things out.

**This is a tangent question based on that which has come out in previous discussion. What would you do if two of your trustees fundamentally disagreed whether a manuscript should be published or not?**

I think there has always been an implicit rule of the of a majority. It is supposed to be that we don't mind diversity. If one or two people really believe in something, and the other four don't, then we'd tell them just go for it, if they do believe in it. I can't imagine this happening, but if two editors really wanted to publish something the others actually found *objectionable*, I suppose in that kind of circumstance, we would probably have to resort to the Constitution. I'd have to look but I presume there is a rule around voting in there, but I almost think that would be the end of the press. Because we've worked so effectively through the consensus model that it would be a real earthquake if something like that happened. And I hope it never does happen.

**What written policies do you have and make available?**

I believe our Constitution is publicly available. Aside from that, nothing in terms of our policies. You can have a look on our website. I think we probably do talk about us as trustees. We have to file our both our accounts and our annual report to the Charity Commission. So I believe those are available via the Charity Commission website. To be honest, we would like to put them on our website. But because of our workload, we just haven't got around to doing it. One of the things about I'm quite keen to do with the Open Book Collective is precisely to make some of that material publicly available. There's no reason why we wouldn't. We have discussed our finances and put some of our finance information in public fora. For example, in the Open Access Book Network event about business models, we gave information about our income and outgoings for about four years. So we have made some of that information available in other fora and you can find it online, but and it's not on our website.

## **What institutions or organisations do you have relationships with? How does this influence the governance of the press?**

I don't think we have any relationships that influences the governance of the press, though ScholarLed has a constitution. I'm not the representative of Mattering on ScholarLed. My colleague Julien is so yeah, Julien is probably more aware of what those commitments might be. There is a commitment to sharing, a commitment to supporting other presses and so on. I'm not sure that that necessarily impacts our governance. Maybe it impacts our work.

## **Did you always intend to be independent of any university or did that just come about by happenstance?**

We didn't even think any university would be interested in supporting the press. I can do a thought experiment here. What if a university had said it would support us? I don't think we would have necessarily rejected that offer, and so I think it was more a pragmatic decision based in based on our assumption that universities are much more interested in research outputs from their staff than in infrastructure outputs, i.e. a publisher.

## **How do you feel now about the governance of your press in relation to your aim and missions? Is there anything you would like to improve and develop?**

That's something we've talked about a lot within the press. I think my overriding experience of being part of Mattering Press is a feeling of that we're not doing enough in respect of almost every area of operations, because we're constantly doing it in your free time, constantly juggling it with other things. I'm constantly feeling like you know that there's loads of things that I should do and could be doing, and would like to do if I had time, but it's often the thing that gets affected by other priorities because it's not formal work that a university asks for, or project work for COPIM, for example. We really want to update and completely redo our website. We want to improve the way we deal with metadata. We want to improve the way we deal with sales online. We want to do things at DOI and at chapter level. We want to annual reports on our website. We want to do more direct outreach to potential authors. We want to be clear about our strategy and aims as an organization and as a publisher, what areas that we want to publish in. I'm sure there are others as well. We want to document our processes more clearly. We want to publish our contracts and other resources, for other publishers to use. These are all things we would love to do and we we've talked about doing, we want to explore, engage more with intellectually with publishing. We want to do more experimental publishing. We've talked about doing some stuff around syllabi. That didn't really go anywhere. There are so many areas of the press where we would like to be doing things, and we would if we had more time, but there's just no capacity. I suppose governance would be another one of those. We would like to have a clearer governance structure and we would probably like to be clearer about our decision making, talk about that publicly and communicate more transparently. If I'm honest, I'd say that amongst all those things that are listed, it's relatively far down the priority list. Number 1 priority would be sort of the website for example. And number 2 priority would be dealing with metadata better, and then other things would come after that. Governance would probably come in that cluster of other issues. That's not to say it's

not important, it's just that the practicalities of running the press take priority. Delivering books to people that work and that are discoverable inevitably comes sort of comes first in some way. Whether that's right wrong, I don't know. But that's just the that's just the reality of where we are at the moment. I think we're all particularly feeling the pinch at the moment because of different reasons, professional reasons, personal circumstances. Some of the trustees had children, and I think that just impacts people in ways that they don't fully anticipate. So I do think we are feeling the pressure a lot, and I suppose the COPIM project has taken a bit of my time away from Mattering Press. I feel overwhelmed.