Governing Scholar-Led OA Book Publishers: Values, Practices, Barriers

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Introduction

This report has been created as a research output to support the COPIM project. COPIM (Community-led Open Publication Infrastructures for Monographs) is an international partnership of researchers, universities, librarians, open access book publishers and infrastructure providers. Funded by the Research England Development (RED) Fund and Arcadia – a charitable fund of Lisbet Rausing and Peter Baldwin – COPIM is building community-owned, open systems and infrastructures to enable open access (OA) book publishing to flourish.

As part of seven connected work packages, COPIM will work on 1) integrated capacity-building amongst presses; 2) access to and development of consortial, institutional, and other funding channels; 3) development and piloting of appropriate business models; 4) cost reductions for presses achieved by economies of scale; 5) mutually supportive governance models; 6) integration of Open Access books into library, repository, and digital learning environments; 7) the re-use of and experimentation with Open Access books; 8) the effective and robust archiving of Open Access content; and 9) knowledge transfer to stakeholders through various pilots.

This report is an output from Work Package 4. Work Package 4 is exploring community governance with a view to designing the policies and procedures for community oversight of the infrastructures and models that the overall project is developing. Our aim is to create durable organisational structures for the coordination, governance, and administrative support of the project's community-owned infrastructures. This includes developing new avenues of outreach, communication, and partnership with diverse stakeholders in open research with a shared interest in these infrastructures, enabling community involvement and collective control. In conducting this research, which is reflected in this report as well as in our previous research and reports, we hope both to learn from the governance models that our colleagues in scholarly communication are utilising thus far and to look to the future of community governance for academic publishing.

Some of our major outputs include the reports directly preceding this one, 'Exploring models for community governance' (Moore 2021) and 'Towards Better Practices for the Community Governance of Open Infrastructures' (Hart, Adema, and COPIM 2022), as well as the governance policies and model of the Open Book Collective, which is now incorporated as a UK nonprofit in the process of registering as a charity. All our outputs and those of the broader COPIM project can be found at our Zenodo community page.

This report develops and focuses on some of the issues we have previously explored within COPIM with regard to community governance, such as the challenges of governing a collective and the relationship of governance to common resources, to explore how these apply in practice to the publication of books by small-to-medium Open Access publishers, as well as what barriers they have faced in implementing their governance models. It presents and discusses the results of six interviews with the small and medium Open Access publishers which make up the ScholarLed consortium. It then offers some recommendations

and insights into how other small and medium Open Access publishers might set up and/or improve their governance practices, including how the Open Book Collective might support them in doing so.

The question of governance is not necessarily the first concern of fledgling publishers. As already discussed in our previous research reports, governance is not the most glamourous or exciting of topics (Chamberlain 2020). Its construction can too often be an afterthought, or even considered a hindrance to commencing on the urgent work of Open Access publishing or other public-good ventures. Many small Open Access publishers are initially set up by just one or just a few people, including most of the publishers interviewed for this report. Adema and Stone found that academic-led presses are often founded by 'strong leading figures' with a personal mission and set of values (Adema and Stone 2017). In an Educopia Institute report on scholarly communication communities, Skinner (Skinner 2018) found that governance could be seen as a 'distraction' to the actual work of publishing. Some ventures and organisations fear that a complicated governance structure will lead to inefficiency, will slow down decision making and lead to unnecessary complications (Moore 2022). But as we have established throughout our work on COPIM, it is critically important that any Open Access infrastructure establish, maintain and revisit at least a basic governance structure that underpins and guarantees the kind of venture they wish to develop.

Next, we will outline the important role that scholar-led publishers are playing in the Open Access landscape, offering an alternative to top-down, hierarchically structured commercial publishing businesses, and we will explore the relationship of governing an Open Access press to the concept of the knowledge commons. Then, the methodology as applied within this report will be explained and the participants introduced before the interview data is presented.

The Need for Scholar-Led Publishers

According to Fyfe et. al, the interests of academics and the major companies that publish their work diverged in the latter part of the twentieth century. They write that:

> there has been a concentration of ownership through acquisitions and mergers among commercial book publishers, many of which are now part of international media conglomerates whose parent companies have diverse [financial] interests beyond academic publishing (Fyfe et al. 2017).

Specifically, Hart, Adema and COPIM write that 'governance of (open) infrastructures for scholarly communication has grown ever more urgent over the last few years with the ongoing corporate acquisition of (critical) scholarly communication infrastructure' (Hart, Adema, and COPIM 2022). Some examples of this we have seen within the Open Access landscape include the acquisition of Knowledge Unlatched by Wiley, bepress by Elsevier, and F1000 by Taylor and Francis.

More generally, the Open Access landscape is increasingly encroached upon by the processes of platform capitalism (Srnicek 2016), wherein for-profit companies extract and redeploy the user data of academic authors and readers, selling it back to universities with data attached for purposes of 'ranking', part of the endless encroach of neoliberalism upon the academy (Pooley 2022a, see also Gatti 2020). Proper governance structures and procedures can guard against such acquisition and encroachment, as well as ensuring the publishers' values and vision are upheld within its own operations.

The interview participants chosen for this study are part of the ScholarLed consortium, which initiated the COPIM project. According to the principles of this consortium, they exist in opposition to the neoliberal capitalist values of major publisher corporations, and share a broader commitment to the governance principle of 'Scaling Small'. 'Scaling Small', a principle we have also embraced throughout our work on the COPIM project, is an alternative to the philosophy of 'scaling up' or expanding (acquiring, monopolising, consuming...) that is native to neoliberal capitalism. As Adema and Moore write, this principle

> eschews standard approaches to organizational growth through economies of scale— which tend to flatten community diversity. Instead, it puts forward the idea that scale can be nurtured through intentional collaborations between like-minded community-driven projects that promote a bibliodiverse ecosystem while providing resilience through resource sharing (Adema and Moore 2021).

This is important to consider from a governance perspective, because as Moore has noted, governance is not the same thing as management, or the daily running of an organisation. Governance is what underpins management: it is 'more strategic and refers to the structures and values that shape an organization's work' (Moore 2021). This includes 'accountability and oversight' of said values and how they play out or fail to play out in an organisation's work, including mechanisms such as boards, voting policies, record-keeping, and complaints procedures. A key conclusion so far from the research we have done on COPIM's Work Package 4, both from our outputs and as a finding from our workshops, is that 'good governance is situated, i.e., it is highly specific to the resource and community in question' (Moore 2021). This means that there can be no standard template or rule book for how an Open Access publisher, or any Open Access venture, should be governed. Good governance always depends on the specific mission, needs, restraints and setups of the institution in question. At a pragmatic level, however, our previous research into scholarly communications infrastructures has found that

> community governance within scholarly communication organizations and projects is dictated predominantly by the differing interactions between advisory boards (representing members, stakeholders, geographies and areas of expertise), values/principles, mission statements, and bylaws (Moore 2021).

This report investigates how these and other procedures are worked out amongst the group of six ScholarLed publishers, according to their missions, values and principles. It also investigates the barriers they have encountered in formulating and enacting their

governance procedures, and how they have overcome them, all of which, we hope, can help other small and medium-sized presses with their governance needs.

Communal Governance and Knowledge Commons

We might consider that in some ways, governing an Open Access publisher means governing an element of the "knowledge commons": the freely available, shared, intellectual resources we hold in common as humans (cf. Adema and Stone 2017). This is particularly true when the publisher is not-for-profit, and when their works are licensed to allow for maximal re-use. The idea of a 'knowledge commons' is different to a commons yielding natural and collectively-owned resources. Traditionally, common resources have been considered subject to a "tragedy of the commons" i.e., a situation wherein actors take without considering each other or the resources until the commons is depleted and unusable. Elinor Ostrom's (Ostrom 1990) pioneering work demonstrated that, in practice, this is not how commons work: agents are not entirely or simply self-interested; resources can be renewable, and commons have their own "rules-in-use". Some resources of a knowledge commons, such as intangible such as ideas, are not depletable. Some are more depletable, such as time, labour, and physical books. If I own a hard copy of a particular book with a limited print run, you cannot also own that copy, and the physical resources that make up both physical and to a lesser extent digital books are finite. Another distinctive feature of knowledge commons is that such arrangements 'usually must create a governance structure within which participants not only share existing resources but also engage in producing those resources and, indeed, in determining their character' (Frischmann, Madison, and Strandburg 2014). Open Access publishers collaboratively create and distribute the 'goods' in question, in conjunction with authors, librarians and infrastructure providers. Further, Fagundes (Fagundes 2014) has argued that commons-like systems of governance are more likely to arise in situations where participants are undertaking work voluntarily: as a 'labour of love' which is related to their self-identity and sense of community. Most small Open Access publishers start out in this way, in addition to any political impetus. Though they may begin very informally and involve a small number of people, they may become more formalised over time, either utilising non-hierarchical models such as polycentric governance systems, in which semi-autonomous 'circles' of stakeholders co-operate with various degrees of contact, or more hierarchical structures wherein the directors or founders ultimately hold decision-making power.[1]

On the other hand, one point we have discovered during previous COPIM work and especially during the establishment of a governance structure for the OBC, regards the difficulty of the terms 'community governance' or 'governance by community' (Fathallah 2021). 'Community' is a comforting word, but if misused, can obscure differences of interest

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[1] Technically, in a polycentric model, such circles could also be in competition with each other, but that is not particularly applicable in our case.

and power differential between individuals, groups and other entities. Latteman and Stieglitz have written that:

> A main problem in implementing governance tools is considering which objectives exist for different members. Profit oriented companies solve this problem by defining one main objective, e.g., profit maximization, which, through support from monetary incentives, is accepted by all member groups. This procedure cannot work successfully in an organization which is based on volunteer work (Lattemann and Stieglitz 2005).

Some scholar-led presses have staff – the work may not be entirely voluntary, though most of it usually is. However, whilst all stakeholders in the press presumably share the broad aim of making books openly available, they may have quite different perspectives on how best to achieve this: there is no one simple motive like 'profit' that we can assume is common to all stakeholders. As a work package, we have often returned to the words of political theorist Chantal Mouffe, who criticised the 'illusion that we can finally dispense with the notion of antagonism' as part of an 'evasion of the political' (Mouffe 2005). In any group or project requiring governance, participants will have differences in roles, interests, need, and power. When it comes to a publishing initiative, some stakeholders might be established academics on permanent contracts. They might hold posts at relatively wealthy institutions. Some might be under-employed PhD candidates or tenuously employed scholars at under-served institutions across multiple countries and time zones. When using phrases like 'community governance' or 'governance by community' we must be careful to remember this.

Methodology

This report was created via desk research and interviews with representatives from the six publishers that make up the ScholarLed consortium. The interview participants were chosen both for the relevance of their experience and their availability for interview, being already established participants of the COPIM project. The primary desk research was carried out between August and December 2022. First, the publishers' websites were analysed, both for insights into their governance processes and as a measure of public transparency regarding their operations. Interviews were then conducted to increase the depth of these insights and compare the actual processes and practices to the websites' public impressions. The interviews took place via Microsoft Teams between October and December 2022. All participants gave their prior informed consent to be interviewed, recorded, for a transcription to made of their recording, and for their data and quotations to be made available in COPIM outputs. The interviews proceeded with a set of semi-structured questions, which were formulated based on the desk research and earlier findings of COPIM's WP4. The interviews were auto-transcribed by MS Teams, then edited by the author. The transcripts are available on COPIM's Zenodo repository here. Verbal quotations in this report may be slightly edited for clarity and/or to remove verbal fillers. The interview data was arranged for the writeup around the common themes that emerged, both as a

response to the semi-structured questions and as part of the flow of conversation.Existing Guidance on Governance

Our research has found that there is a lack of dedicated guidance or toolkits around governance for Open Access publishers, a gap we have been trying to address as part of our work within COPIM's WP4 and which this report also contributes to overcoming. However, there are several extant toolkits from related values-based scholarly projects that can be useful for publishers to consult and which we have drawn upon for our research here. The Educopia institute has guidance on the formation of governance for community cultivation, such as strategies to identify priorities and action and convert them into obtainable goals. The Open Source Way has a chapter on Community Governance available in multiple formats, offering models to consider, including 'do-ocracoes' and 'benevolent dictatorships': see Sam Moore's (2021) previous work for COPIM. Prospective Open Access publishers might also consult the University of Kansas' Community Toolbox; and the Open Source Alliance Handbook for Open Scholarship Handbook for its chapters on its 'Governance in Open Scholarship Source for Scholarship' (Walker 2018a) and governance 'Resource List' (Walker 2018b). Templates like this may be usefully adapted to the needs of individual publishers, particularly in the encouragement of self-reflection and self-assessment for alignment with mission and values. Particularly comprehensive is Skinner and Wipperman's 'Living Our Values And Principles: Exploring Assessment Strategies for the Scholarly Communication Field' (Skinner and Wipperman 2020) and the related 'Values and Principles Framework and Assessment Checklist' by Skinner and Lippincott (2020), both outputs of the Next Generation Library Publishing project (NGLP). These texts are aimed primarily at scholarly publishing service providers, but could certainly be of use to Open Access publishers. Skinner and Wipperman write:

> Based on our findings, we recommend that academic stakeholders more concretely define their values and principles in terms of measurable actions, so these statements can be readily assessed and audited (2020).

In their examination of service providers' manifestos and principal statements, they found that 'with very few exceptions, [they] left open important questions of accountability and how values translate into actions in practice' (Skinner and Wipperman 2020). Self-assessment and self-audit are thus key. The NGLP checklist (Skinner and Lippincott 2020) is designed to help organisations check and evidence their practices against a set of common values, including diversity and equity and representative governance. The authors remind us:

There is no "right" or "wrong" type of organizational formation for scholarly publishing, but different types of organizations may not be able to adhere to principles in exactly the same way. They may likewise require different types of principles-based evaluation. Take "community-led governance" as an example. A 501c3 not-for-profit organization in the US is required to have a governance board and officers who bear fiscal and legal responsibility for the entity and oversee its policies and procedures. If a 501c3 implements its board and officers such that its community members are fairly represented therein, it should be able to

demonstrate that it has "community-led governance" via its policies and practice (Skinner and Wipperman 2020).

This was a key point that also came out in our interviews with the ScholarLed publishers: certain aspects of governance are tied into and necessitated by the organisation's form of incorporation, which in turn is tied to both its mission and its geographical location. On which note, we will now introduce the ScholarLed consortium and its individual publishers more thoroughly, before turning to the interview data.

The Participants and their Relevance to this Work

The ScholarLed Consortium was formed in 2018. The current members are Mattering Press, meson press, Open Book Publishers, punctum books, African Minds, and mediastudies.press. The collective seeks to develop ways for small, scholar-led Open Access presses to collaborate, grow and prosper in the changing publishing landscape (ScholarLed 2022). These are values-based publishers committed to a more equitable and diverse landscape for Open Access books, and thus we would expect to see the embedding of such values and principles within the ScholarLed publishers' governance structures. Academic-led or scholar-led presses (literally, presses founded and led by academics or scholars) might be a less familiar publishing model than university presses but academics and scholars have been involved in running publishing projects for more than 300 years, most importantly as part of the publishing activities of scholarly societies (Kieft et al. 2013). Kathleen Fitzpatrick argues that 'from the beginning, scholarly societies were designed to play a crucial role in facilitating communication between scholars working on common subjects' (Fitzpatrick 2012). Likewise, academics have been a significant force in the adoption of open access publishing, and founded some of the earliest fully-OA journals (Adema and Stone 2017). Open Access book publishing has historically presented some different challenges – Adema and Stone write that learned societies, for instance, are more likely to publish monographs through external publishing houses due to greater financial and technological demands, as well as the reported preference of academics for print versions of monographs in addition to digital (2017). The rise of Print-on-Demand services has gone some way towards ameliorating this, and we have over the last couple of decades seen the emergence of a new wave of presses led by both libraries and academics themselves. As is the case with the ScholarLed presses, some of these ventures have been 'setting up horizontal alliances between independent projects within a certain sector […] in order to create multi-stakeholder ecologies within scholarly publishing' (Adema and Moore 2021). According to the ScholarLed site, the founding publishers:

> Asked [themselves]: how can we 'scale' the work we do as presses, while preserving the advantages of being small, academic-led publishers with distinct identities and priorities? Instead of aiming to fit within the current infrastructures, processes, and priorities of a publishing system that tends to serve larger (often commercial) presses, we want to establish collaborative modes of working and to build infrastructures that will support the work of publishers like ours, in order to enable more such presses to grow and flourish (ScholarLed 2022).

Thus, each member of the consortium retains a distinct identity. What they share is the overarching commitment to opening up scholarly research, to resisting the neoliberalisation of the academy, and to collaborative rather than competitive modes of work.

Moreover, representatives and founders from several of the ScholarLed presses are outspoken advocates for OA, equity, diversity and alternative forms of publishing. Jeff Pooley of mediastudies.press has argued that 'the scholarly communication ecosystem should aim not only to be open but non-profit too' because 'the profit motive is fundamentally misaligned with core values of academic life, potentially corroding ideals like unfettered inquiry, knowledge-sharing, and cooperative progress' (Pooley 2017). He considers that 'non-profit, scholar-run' governance structures can act as a safeguard against buying out, whereas for-profit organisations like bepress 'had no such protection' (Pooley 2017). Pooley has also argued for the damaging effects of platform capitalism employed by vertically integrated companies he calls 'full-stack publishers' , which use predictive analytic services to gather and analyze users' 'behavioral residue on the prospect of monetization to come' (2022a). Such platforms typically sell this data back to universities who are already paying for the content, contributing to the ever-increasing hierarchisation and ranking/rating obsession within the academy. Eileen Joy and punctum books have made regular statements on the ethical necessity of a sustainable not-for-profit Open Access ecosystem, and condemned the criminalisation of efforts to distribute knowledge more equitably across the globe (Joy and van Gerven Oei 2022). Thus, it is important to examine the extent to which the governance structures of the ScholarLed publishers reflect ideas like community, equality, and the commons.

In the next section we will be discussing the governance practices of the six ScholarLed Presses: African Minds, Mattering Press, mediastudies.press, meson, Open Book Publishers, and punctum books. First, we will examine the ways in which each press presents its governance on its official website, both as an initial insight into these processes and a measure of their transparency. We will then go on to discuss the interviews with their representatives and what we have learned about how they have set up their governance. First, summaries of the publicly available website information are presented in turn. Afterwards, the interview findings are presented thematically and in more detail.

African Minds

African Minds self-describes as a 'not-for-profit, open access publisher based in Cape Town, South Africa'. They claim to

> offer a new publishing channel to authors frustrated by a lack of support from traditional book publishers as well as with publishing's anachronistic and lengthy approach to making knowledge available ("About" 2022).

Their website states that their aims include 'fostering access, openness and debate in the pursuit of growing and deepening the African knowledge base'. As a member of OASPA, African Minds notes its adherence to their membership criteria, which are linked, and states that 'all African Minds titles are published under a Creative Commons Attribution 4.0

International License (CC-BY)' ("Policies" 2022). African Minds does accept Book Processing Charges (BPCs) at the present time, yet also waives them when the proposed title is found deserving of publication and funding is unavailable. Some information on African Minds' governance structure was available online. Their website briefly profiles four Board members under the heading 'Governance', and also mentions an Editorial Board, whose members 'assist African Minds in the review of publishing proposals and manuscripts', and gives details on the publishers' incorporation as a not-for-profit organisation registered in South Africa. The site specifies:

> Its legal status is that of a trust (Trust no. IT2864/2012). Trustees were elected based on their abiding belief in the values of the organization, particularly open access to knowledge about and from the African continent. Additional members of the board bring a wealth of experience related to scholarly publishing and research in Africa and internationally ("Governance" 2022).

As the site states, the choice to incorporate as an NFP is in keeping with publisher's prioritisation of 'the broadest possible dissemination of its list rather than on sales or profitability' of its content ("Governance" 2022). A date of founding was not given on the site.

Mattering Press

Mattering Press self-describes as publishing 'high quality, peer reviewed open access books within relational research on science, technology and society' (2022). Their statements of value are incorporated throughout their website, claiming a 'production model that is based on cooperation and shared scholarship while ensuring the high quality of the resulting work through systematic peer-review.' ("About – Mattering Press" 2022) Mattering utilises a hybrid business model, so that their eBooks are made freely available whilst printed copies are sold. They state a mission to 'support books using formats that are experimental or difficult to publish using conventional publishing models' ("About – Mattering Press" 2022). This press was founded initially in 2012, but incorporated as UK registered charity in 2013. Mattering Press may also charge BPCs should the author or their institution have funding available, but publication does not depend on this. Their website lists a variety of groups of people involved in the press, including an Editorial board, a Science and Technology Studies advisory board, an Open Access Advisory Board, and partners who have supported its work financially and in kind, but does not specify the relationships between them or how they collaborate with regard to governance.

mediastudies.press

The subject focus of mediastudies.press may of course be inferred from the name. It states an aim to 'publish living works, with iterative updates stitched into our process' and 'encourage multi-modal submissions that reflect the mediated environments our authors study' (mediastudies.press 2022). Mediastudies.press is a registered 501(c)(3) nonprofit corporation in Pennsylvania, USA, and being launched in 2019, is one of the newer publishers in our sample. Their website is one of the most comprehensively transparent with

regard to governance. Details of the editorial team with listed director, associate director, and various other roles such as copy editors are given. The site lists an Advisory Board, a Board of Directors, and 'Staff': though notably, the staff and the Board of Directors include the same people, so it is not entirely clear how these functions differentiate.

Mediastudies.press is explicit in stating its belief 'that ownership and governance matter too—that sustainable Open Access publishing should be nonprofit and scholar-led' ("Open Access Principles" 2022). The site lists certain tenets adapted from Jean-Sébastien Caux's Genuine Open Access Principles (Caux 2018), including community ownership, its commitment to open infrastructure, reservation of copyright to authors, and Open Access licenses for all books and metadata (with Creative Commons BY-NC being the default). There is information on peer review processes, links to statements of accounts, and other details. Overall, the website is impressively thorough and transparent, though one would still not be able to gather the precise detail of the governance processes and interactions without an interview.

meson press

According to their website, meson press 'publishes research on digital cultures and networked media'. They are a humanities-focused press, which supports 'hybrid formats and novel collaborative production methods' ("About Meson Press" 2022), though they also affirm a commitment to the book as a scholarly communication form. Meson press is a co-operative, the only publisher in the sample which is incorporated as such. There is not much information on how their governance runs in practice on their website. Meson press was founded in 2014, but this date is not given on the site. Meson press was initiated and is run by the three-person team of Mercedes Bunz, Marcus Burkhardt and Andreas Kirchner. Meson makes a series of values-based commitments available. They state their beliefs in 'Gold Open Access' and 'collaborative modes of creation' ("We Are Committed to Open Access" 2022). Gold Open Access is specified as opposed to Green, meaning that the final, edited and proofed version of a book will always be available OA, rather than an archived author's draft. Meson specifies a commitment 'to publish under a Creative Commons CC-BY-SA license if possible' ("We Are Committed to Open Access" 2022), in order to protect author's rights whilst maintaining a commitment to openness.

Open Book Publishers

Open Book Publishers (OBP) is 'the leading independent Open Access publisher in the Humanities and Social Sciences in the UK' ("Welcome to Open Book Publishers" 2022). Founded in 2008, it is one of the more established publishers in the ScholarLed group. Their website states that OBP is 'not-for-profit, run by scholars, and committed to making high-quality research freely available to readers around the world' ("Welcome to Open Book Publishers" 2022). OBP does not charge Book Processing Charges. OBP is registered as specific kind of nonprofit called a Social Enterprise and Community Interest Company (CIC) in the UK. CIC is a special kind of company which exists to benefit the community rather than its shareholders, meaning it must have a 'community interest statement', explaining how it does so, and a legal promise that the company's 'assets will only be used for its social

objectives'. It can, technically, pay money to its shareholders, but there are legal limits on this. It must also have a constitution. OBP also make a vision statement available on their website, affirming a belief in Open Access as 'the future of academic publishing' ("Our Vision" 2022). It operates a Library Membership Programme, providing a sustainable revenue stream without the need for BPCs, and is committed to the development of Open Access infrastructures. The site provides a list of directors, an editorial board and advisory panel, and certain specific roles like Editor and Outreach Coordinator, Open Access Advocacy and Projects Manager, and Software Engineering. Some staff fill more than one role. The website does not provide any further information on how these elements interact with each other or what the actual procedures for governance are.

punctum books

punctum books describes itself as 'an independent open-access publisher dedicated to radically creative modes of intellectual inquiry and writing across a whimsical para-humanities assemblage' ("Spontaneous Acts of Scholarly Combustion" 2022). punctum was founded in 2011, though I did not find this stated on the website. They do have an extensive mission statement and several blog posts situating themselves as a radical press, refusing the traditional markers of prestige associated with the academy, and a commitment to 'genre-bending and paradigm-shifting' ("Spontaneous Acts of Scholarly Combustion" 2022). Punctum defines itself as an 'outstitutional press that is both within, alongside, and outside of the University proper' ("A Vision Statement for Thinking, Writing, and Publishing Otherwise in the University Without Condition" 2022), and aims to publish works which would not find their niche within the relatively rigid programs of publication common to major presses. In terms of governance, it lists two co-directors, two associate directors with specific roles (Editorial Development and Community and Library Outreach respectively), plus various roles such as web developer and system administrator. They also use an Editorial Advisory Board and a Library Advisory Board. Like OBP, punctum run a consortial funding model with library members, and those library members have a seat on that board. Whilst their website provides a full account of the human agents involved, it is hard to get a sense how they interact with each other or how decision are made.

Interviews

The interviews for this report were conducted between November and December 2022. The participants representing the various ScholarLed presses were as follows:

- François van Schalkwyk, Director of African Minds
- Joe Deville, Co-Founder of Mattering Press
- Jeff Pooley, Director of mediastudies.press
- Mercedes Bunz, Co-Founder of meson press
- Alessandra Tosi, Co-Director of Open Book Publishers
- Eileen Joy, Co-Director of punctum books.

The participants were issued with information sheets and signed informed consent sheets. The interviews were semi-structured and based around the following questions, which were submitted to interviewees in advance:

1. 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?

2. Are you incorporated? As what? Why?

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

4. 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?

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

6. What written policies do you have and make available?

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

8. 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?

We did not adhere to the wording rigidly as the conversation naturally evolved, but these were the basic themes covered. We have thus arranged the data according to these themes, though this was not necessarily the order of conversation. The next section presents these findings.

Impetus to startup: gaps, values, needs

In answer to the first question, with regard to impetus to found the press, the publishers presented a variety of motivations grounded in both ethical values and personal desires. Very often, these overlapped. A common theme was that he publishers were attempting to produce and finance the sorts of texts they were not seeing published. François van Schalkwyk stated a desire to increase the representation of African voices in scholarly publishing, especially in the sciences. Eileen Joy spoke in terms of experimental, genre-bending publishing as an alternative to traditional academic publishing, whether Open Access or closed:

> [The punctum founders] felt like the same kind of scholarly books were being produced over and over again, and they're boring. A lot of amazing research is done by university and other traditional academic publishers. That is highly valuable, so I don't want to be misinterpreted. But there is a certain

homogenization of what research looks like when it ends up in a book published by a university press, and how it ends up in the book (Joy 2022).

She spoke of a commonly-voiced desire amongst academics to publish more experimental work that fell outside the traditional niches, and believes that writers ultimately end up distorting their work and thought to fit the publication process. Notably, Joy was not well informed about Open Access at the founding of punctum, but became 'radicalised' during the process of becoming a publisher. Joe Deville also stated that Mattering Press was initially focused primarily on publishing works in science and technology studies in an online format, with only a vague impetus towards Open Access, which became more concrete and better informed as the founders learned more about its underlying principles. Meson press grew out of a research project into Hybrid publishing at Leuphana University Lüneburg, which included funding to set up a press. Whilst co-founder Mercedes Bunz stated that she very much believes that Open Access is the form everybody should publish in, meson did not set out with the same set of strong and defined values: Bunz notes that 'there were all kinds of political views in the bigger research group' (Bunz 2022). Meson thus came about more by happenstance, due to the available funding and the research positions available to be filled as part of the funded research project. As the people filling them were media studies academics, this became the primary focus of the press.

Conversely, van Schalkwyk from the outset was considered to 'make whatever we published more accessible to the entire continent [of Africa]' (van Schalkwyk 2022). Jeff Pooley, director of mediastudies.press, took inspiration directly from the already-extant ScholarLed, which they joined last year. He was already heavily invested in (and published on) Open Access politics:

> I had already been writing about and observing what you could call it the scholarly communication landscape with particular interest. I was also studying barriers to authorship around book processing and article processing charges, as well as the kind of commercial oligopoly that controls most of at least the scientific publishing landscape. So I was very much interested in those issues. I knew punctum books, which is one of the founding ScholarLed members. I knew of Open Book Publishers and meson press as well, and had been following them with interest as a kind of non-profit scholar-led alternative in the book area. So that was the direct motivation, frankly (Pooley 2022b).

Pooley sees mediastudies.press as the praxis that complements these commitments as expressed in his previous writing. He also saw a specific need for a publisher in his field within such a space, as media studies so naturally lends itself to the kind of multimedia affordances and versioning which Open Access electronic publication supports, for example via the platform Pubpub which his press now uses. Alessandra Tosi of Open Book Publishers observed that Open Access publishing had and has not made the same progress in the field of book publishing as it had in the journal arena. Tosi also shared a personal anecdote that informed her motivations, where as a scholar and author of three books prior to undertaking a publishing venture, Tosi found that her monographs on Russian literature had

a naturally limited pool of readers, being quite specialised, and that the pool of scholars who wished to read it were unable to buy it due to the excessive costs of the printed versions. Open Book Publishers was thus committed to an Open Access model from the outset.

Incorporation and its forms

All of the ScholarLed publishers are incorporated, for a mixture of pragmatic and values-based reasons. This necessarily informs their governance procedures. For ease of reference, the corporation types are compared in a table here:

Press	Form	Location
African Minds	Trust	South Africa
Mattering Press	Charitable Incorporated Organisation	UK
Mediastudies.press	Nonprofit Corporation	Pennsylvania, USA
Meson press	Co-operative	Germany
Open Book Publishers	Social Enterprise and Community Interest Company	UK
punctum	Public Benefit Corporation	California, USA

Table 1: Forms of incorporation of the ScholarLed publishers

The choice of form was highly influenced by the geographical location and its attendant laws. Some publishers experienced bureaucratic difficulties in obtaining their desired forms. As van Schalkwyk noted, a non-profit form operates as a signal of ethical intention to stakeholders, including authors, readers and potential funders. However, once African Minds was established as a trust, he was obliged to go through an additional process in South Africa to register the publisher as a public benefit organisation. This requires evidence of how the publisher is acting in the public interest, which proved difficult as African Minds is a hybrid publisher which also sells books, and legislators therefore tend to perceive publishers as a profit-making business. African Minds was successful on its third attempt, and must now keep reapplying to maintain that status. This allows them to avoid the tax rate applied to trusts, and use that surplus income for publishing activities. In California, USA, punctum experienced similar difficulties. It began as a limited legal partnership (LLP) between two professors alongside their academic duties but became more professionalised in order to meet the needs of its authors, including copyediting. This led to the departure of one professor, leaving Joy as sole proprietor. Joy then sought to convert punctum to a charity, but the bureaucracy proved impossible. She found, as did van Schalkwyk, that the relevant authorities had no understanding of publishing beyond a profit model, indeed no understanding of open access at all. Punctum eventually incorporated as a Public Benefit Corporation nonprofit (instead of a charity), as Joy and the other directors preferred,

because a charity demands a heavier governance structure which they feel would encumber the running of their publishing venture. As a nonprofit, punctum must pay tax, but has much more freedom in its governance structure and procedures. Open Book Publishers, which is registered as a social enterprise in the UK, elected to become a social enterprise because the process was 'much less legalistic' than for a charity, noting:

> A charity requires a more complex set up. We wanted something quite flexible, but at the same time able to protect this idea of non-profit. So that's why we went with the social enterprise form (Tosi 2022).

This echoes Joy's points regarding the complexity of governing a charity. Tosi stated that for OBP, incorporating as a social enterprise allowed for the protection of the organisation's purpose into the future, as its charter prevents it from becoming a 'money-making enterprise' should it change hands at any point. However, it was also cheaper and less of a bureaucratic strain than to become a charity. Mattering Press did encounter some difficulties in registering a charitable organisation, specifically, convincing the UK Charity Commission that a publisher could fulfil the requirement of benefiting the general public, rather than just a subset of academics. However, they were ultimately successful, and their Open Access mission was integral to demonstrating this. Mattering Press was not specifically aiming to become a charity, and incorporated primarily for the practical purposes of protecting the founders from personal liability, and to obtain a bank account.

Jeff Pooley of mediastudies.press did not find the process of incorporation difficult, something he attributes to his location of Pennsylvania, USA. Of the limited types of corporations available him, he stated that it was 'unquestionable and absolute' that the press take a non-profit form (Pooley 2022b). mediastudies.press state-level registration was supplemented by applying to the Federal Internal Revenue Service for the status of a 501(c)(3) nonprofit, allowing mediastudies.press to register as a tax-deductible public charity. He found the application process 'routine' and 'fairly nice' (Pooley 2022b). Clearly location seems to be a major factor in both the choice of form and the degree of difficulty in incorporation. Meson press similarly found it easy and inexpensive to incorporate as a co-operative in Germany, and did not experience difficulties in demonstrating their purpose. Mercedes Bunz stated that they were not required to demonstrate a public good objective in the same rigorous way some of the publishers above experienced, but merely to explain the purpose of the co-operative. Of course, a co-operative form comes with specific rules about shared ownership, so this would not be suitable for a press founded by an individual. However, as the only press utilising this model they found it both easy and convenient in their particular location.

Elements, resources, and actors

The third interview question specifically addressed the agents, elements and actors' publishers felt were subject to and involved in their governance structure. In sum, the publishers identified the following elements as part of their governance structures:

- financial resources: managing and dealing with available income.

- human resources: the people involved in the labour of publication, from press staff to peer reviewers, cover designers and external advisory boards

- the technological systems and digital infrastructure involved in producing books

- the rules and bylaws of their form of incorporation, as dictated by location.

Any group or person wishing to design a governance structure must consider, at a minimum, these elements and the interactions between them. For example, Joe Deville (Mattering Press) mentioned human actors, meeting technologies such as Zoom, and the governance template provided by the Charity Commission website as elements of Mattering Press's governance. But human resources were the main element mentioned in the publishers' responses (Adema and Stone 2017). All the presses except for meson have at least one advisory board, and African Minds, punctum and Mattering also have trustees. Several publishers expressed difficulty in coordinating and maintaining contact with human actors across different countries and time zones: van Schalkwyk (African Minds) stated that 'the trustees are not very hands-on':

> It's quite difficult to get them even onto email, let into a room to have a meeting. So we only meet twice a year. Even that's quite difficult to pull off sometimes because they have their own commitments. They're not in their seventies or sixties, retired, sitting on boards. They have their own jobs and careers (van Schalkwyk 2022).

An unwanted effect of this is that van Schalkwyk as director finds himself taking more decisions single-handedly than might be ideal. Clearly there is a balance to be struck between populating boards with up-to-date and relevant expertise and finding individuals with enough time to meaningfully contribute. Jeff Pooley likewise stated that the Advisory Board of mediastudies.press 'to my embarrassment has been relatively neglected, which is something I would very much like to change' (Pooley 2022b). Punctum has an executive Advisory Board and a Library Advisory Board, populated by members of their library subscription program. Joy stated that the form of incorporation was specifically selected to ensure these boards remained advisory only, and would not have legal powers over herself or her co-director (Joy 2022). She also reflected that 'there is no actual process or procedures about how any of these entities might interact with each other', nor methods of conflicted resolution (Joy 2022). Thus far, they have 'never had any conflicts', a sentiment echoed by Tosi of OBP. Tosi stated that OBP's Advisory Board has become more involved over time:

> Initially we would contact the Advisory Board just for specific questions relating to their area of expertise, but we are now having virtual meetings at least twice a year to talk about the general direction of OBP […] In that sense the Advisory Board has gotten much more involved (Tosi 2022).

None of the Advisory Boards have binding legal power over the presses' operations. Whilst the interactions between elements of the presses' governance structures seem to be

functioning reasonably smoothly, in general there seems to be a lack of formality about their operations, especially with regard to time commitments and conflict resolution procedures.

The evolution of governance structures and processes; use of external tools and guidelines

By and large, the ScholarLed publishers mentioned that they did not use any resources, such as the above mentioned toolkits (many of which were not yet available when the ScholarLed presses were first launched), when setting up their governance. The publishers generally described the evolution of their governance processes as 'more ad-hoc' (van Schalkwyk 2022). The exception here was Mattering Press, which adapted a best practices template from the Charity Commission website. Deville stated that this was done primarily for expediency: the fledgling press did not have the capacity to research different forms of governance and adapt them. Contrary to the feelings voiced by Joy (punctum) and Tosi (OBP), Deville did not mention finding the charity governance structure particularly burdensome, utilising this template to ensure that the structure would be acceptable to the Charity Commission. Van Schalkwyk stated that the formalisation of African Minds was driven by the needs of the 'authors themselves', who required more services he initially offered, such as editing and proofreading. Joy similarly stated that punctum's organization process has been 'organic', and expressed some regrets about this:

> I hate to admit that, I wish I could say "Oh, it was all very well thought out, and we did all this consulting, and we met with other similar businesses and tried to get information from them and we drafted a governance charter". But there was none of that. (Joy 2022).

This relates to the points revealed in the literature, that governance can frequently be something of an afterthought for small Open Access ventures, and that more initial planning may save labour and problems later on. The appointment of board members, or trustees in the case of African Mind, was generally described as informal. Van Schalkwyk said that the trustees

> were already in my academic network. It wasn't a process of soliciting or advertising or looking for particular people. In a sense its an arrangement of convenience, and shared interests and values from the early onset [...] I still don't really have a title and other than trustee, and neither do the others [...] other than saying that they are ambassadors for the press, we never really discussed the extent to which they would contribute to the management or success of the press (van Schalkwyk 2022).

Again, and as we will come back to later, whilst this is very understandable for a small venture, it may provide greater clarity both internally and to external stakeholders to define roles more clearly from the outset. Jeff Pooley stated that he 'just chose' the Advisory Board members for mediastudies.press, and admitted that 'the question of governance has been on the back burner a little bit' (Pooley 2022b), given the practical necessities of running the press. However, he has been inspired by the careful work done by COPIM that has gone into the governance charter of the Open Book Collective (Joy, Adema, and COPIM 2022), and

now intends to return to mediastudies.press' governance. One significant development for them will be the onboarding of two new directors, who are international and come from different racial and gender backgrounds. These have been invited with a more deliberate eye to diversity, as opposed to simply filling a legal requirement for the three Board members initially needed to incorporate the press. This was 'much more checking off a box than thinking in any serious way about governance', but Pooley now aims to change this. On the other hand, mediastudies.press did in fact start out with a set of bylaws which were both necessitated by their incorporation and informed by examples from similar projects, allowing them to 'mix and match' from sets of bylaws that 'were drawn from existing nonprofits' (Jeff Pooley 2022b). This is possibly because mediastudies.press is one of the more recently set-up publishers, and was explicitly inspired by the ScholarLed presses already in existence. Conversely, for the more established Open Book Publishers, Tosi said that 'the idea of an Advisory Board is taken from the Advisory Board structure that journals often adopt' (Tosi 2022). The OBP advisory board was selected to represent a balance of stakeholders, including authors, Open Access experts, and IT professionals. On paper, the structure of OBP has not changed since its outset. However, it has deliberately improved the diversity of its Advisory Board, noting that initially there was not a good gender balance and taking steps to remedy that. They have also introduced younger members as some of the foundational members retired. Tosi stated that the Advisory Board has also become more involved since the establishment of OBP, meaning that although it does not have legally binding power over the directors, in practice there are more diverse influences over the running of the press. Meson has also maintained the same governance structure it had at its outset. The three co-founders who form the co-operative did consider adding a fourth at one point, but unanimously decided not to, as 'There seems to be a shared understanding in decision making, and we all think it's fairly easy to communicate with each other and that another person would shift the balance' (Bunz 2022). This no doubt eases the labour of running the press, but we might wonder if there is a danger of assuming consensus here, or more accurately, achieving consensus via lack of diversity in co-founders. On the other hand, this does come back to the question of alignment between governance structures and the fulfillment of the presses' mission.

Current mechanisms and procedures

Our interviews also addressed the current procedures and mechanisms for governing the presses. Some were more structured than others with regard to elements such as board meetings. African Minds trustees meet three times a year, which van Schalkwyk stated has become easier with the advent of online communication. Schedule co-ordination is important because African Minds has only three trustees (the process for appointing a new one, in South Africa, is complicated and lengthy). As noted above, there is no real conflict resolution in place, but van Schalkwyk stated that because all the trustees are academics, conflict resolution via discussion is natural to them, without resorting to a vote. Rather, they have decided to invite new people onto the Board in an advisory capacity, to 'broaden the conversation', without legally binding votes (van Schalkwyk 2022). Van Schalkwyk speculated that an updated Advisory Board might be one means to influence conflict

resolution between the trustees. Joy stated that only herself and the co-director of punctum, who are both trustees, make the decisions regarding the press. Again, there is no particular method for deciding an insoluble conflict here, and no voting mechanism for the advisory boards. Punctum books is essentially, and by their own admission, a benign co-dictatorship, with Joy stating that '[co-director] Vincent [van Gerven Oei] and I are ultimately in charge of everything', though they do ask the Advisory Board for input on decisions they are struggling with. She describes this as an incredibly loose governance structure, almost a 'non-governance structure' (Joy 2022). Although it is currently working, she did decide throughout the course of the discussion and her work on COPIM that punctum might benefit from a more formal structure, including a constitution and perhaps voting rights for library and other advisory board members. Mediastudies.press directors meet weekly, the most frequent schedule of all the publishers interviewed. Their Board of Directors has met at least once a year since founding in 2019, and their bylaws have provisions for changeover of board membership, such as in the case of resignations. In these meetings, policy level issues are discussed and approved on a consensus basis, such as whether to accept BPCs when an author or their institution has funding. Whilst the Advisory Board has not yet resorted to a vote, Pooley said that they would if necessary, and that provision for that is made in the bylaws on a one vote per member basis (though again, a vote by the Advisory Board would not be legally binding upon the Directors). Tosi stated that there is no voting provision for the OBP Editorial Board and Advisory Panel, and that moreover, the different roles within the OBP management structure are quite discrete with little communication between them. According to the OBP website, these roles include pragmatic ones like web designers and outreach coordinators, but Tosi stated that OBP also uses particular boards to organize the publication of discrete series of books. The OBP governance structure thus functions via relatively self-contained circles who are aware of each other, but actually have quite minimal influence on each other. As Tosi put it, 'the Series boards are focused on their own series and their subject experience' (Tosi 2022). Tosi felt that this was ultimately working quite well, with 'no conflict', but did consider that in the future there should be more discussion and communication between the human actors that make up OBP's governance, including the creation of an overarching or umbrella Board.

Mercedes Bunz of meson also stated that there is no formal mechanism for conflict resolution between governance actors, and that the cofounders are relatively focused on their own interests and specialties. She stated that they have never had a difference of opinion that could not be resolved through discussion, never required a vote, and never required an Advisory Board.

Mattering Press is so strongly invested in reaching agreement by consensus that Deville stated a fundamental disagreement between the trustees would 'probably break up the press' (Deville 2022). Mattering does use an Advisory Board, but all decisions are ultimately reached through a process of consensus seeking and again, they have never voted. Deville expressed that whilst their might be some provision for voting in the founding charter, he cannot imagine that the trustees would ever need it. Yet interestingly, Deville stated that he believes 'there has always been an implicit rule of the majority' at Mattering; yet also, that if a minority of the trustees felt strongly on an issue such as publishing a particular manuscript,

the others would not prevent them (Deville 2022). It seems, then, that the ScholarLed publishers are largely relying on discussion to reach consensus when it comes to governance decisions, and do not necessarily have contingency plans in place for if agreement cannot be reached. Whilst this seems to be working fairly well at the moment, we might posit that a more diverse decision-making group might lead to less agreement, and the creation of conflict resolution mechanisms is another area in which the research reports and toolkits created by the COPIM project might assist.

Transparency and self-assessment

We have observed that whilst all the publishers' websites gave some basic information regarding governance, interviews were required to get a clearer picture of their processes, especially the interaction between elements. There was a lot of variation in the types of policies the publishers made available, and the emphasis they placed on them. Van Schalkwyk mentioned he could not remember what governance-related policies African Minds made available and added, 'the mere fact that I can't remember tells you that they don't play a very big role in how we operate' (van Schalkwyk 2022). African Minds does have a founding document, but van Schalkwyk told me he does not regularly consult it, adding that 'in terms of the running of the governance of a business, there isn't really anything that we refer to regularly'. Punctum is quite thorough with regard to transparency. As Eileen Joy put it:

> We make our editorial process more transparent than almost any press I'm aware of, University or Open Access. We have an unbelievable amount of information on our website for authors, telling them everything they could possibly need to know, and the same with libraries: our end of the year financial statements, e.g.. Where does our income come from? Where does it go? Who are our staff? How much are they paid? What are their benefits? What do Vincent and I pay ourselves? How much did we get in print sales? What are the production costs, including overheads, of each book and how specifically do we raise the money for each book, and where does that money come from for each book? How is it apportioned? All of that is released once a year in an online transparent statement and we put that on PubPub and we send it to our librarian advisors (Joy 2022).

For a press with a commitment to transparency, this is a good example of alignment between aims and procedures. Jeff Pooley likewise stated that for mediastudies.press there was a 'commitment from the beginning to be transparent even to the level of finances' (Jeff Pooley 2022b). The mediastudies.press site contains a list of Open Access principles formally adopted by the Board of Directors: Pooley created this himself with reference to policies created by other initiatives, as noted above. It is adapted and amended as the Board makes decisions. This is another example of good practice and ongoing self-assessment. Tosi also stated that OBP makes their financial accounts available, and notably she associated this verbally with OBP's 'vision' during the course of our discussion:

> The financial accounts are publicly available. We have a lot of information about how we operate on our website, and about our vision and who we are. We have a

breakdown of our financial model and our accounts, which are available on the Companies House website anyway. We have several blogs explaining how we work and our business model: how we break even financially, how many titles we produce, and our costs (Tosi 2022).

All the publishers' websites have pages listing their staff/volunteer membership, which may take different titles such 'team', or 'people'. If, like Pooley mentioned in relation to mediastudies.press, other small publishers wish to commit to a more comprehensive governance schema and display it more transparently on their website, it might be similarly recommendable to take a slightly more systematic approach to self-assessment, with regard to checking actions against mission-aligned policies at regular intervals.

Relationships with institutions and organisations; influence on governance of the presses

All the publishers interviewed considered themselves to be 'independent'. Some expressed this in emphatic terms which stressed it as a matter of principle, whilst for others, it was more a result of happenstance. Joe Deville said that the founders of Mattering Press did not think any university would be interested in affiliation, so did not pursue that path. Van Schalkwyk says that African Minds is 'completely independent', and when asked if that decision was taken deliberately, elaborated:

> I don't think it was a deliberate decision. I think it was more a decision that was forced upon us. We had discussions about linking up with universities. Maybe getting a group of universities together to form a press, even with one university becoming *their* press, in the very early days. But that just never went anywhere, as much as we tried. It was just becoming too complicated. That might actually have convinced us and that to maintain our independence gives us more flexibility. I think that's still the case. When we interact with the university presses, the independence and flexibility is, is something that we value more. But of course we don't have institutional support that they do in terms of other resources (van Schalkwyk 2022).

University presses will typically receive financial, technical and/or infrastructural support from their institutions (Adema and Stone 2017).

Van Schalkwyk expressed that connecting to the other ScholarLed presses has been a good experience, because they have more common ground both in terms of their operation and staff size than university presses. On the other hand, several publishers reflected on the fact that whilst they are not formally affiliated with any university, and enjoyed the independence and flexibility that gives them in terms of what to publish and how (Adema and Stone 2017), they do have relationships with other bodies which influence their governance. Simply being a member of ScholarLed, of course, requires espousing and abiding by the ScholarLed principles. ScholarLed has a constitution and a formal governance structure in which the publishers participate, and this exerts some informal influence on how they govern their own presses.

Eileen Joy noted that punctum co-director Vincent van Gerven Oei is 'on the board of OASPA', thus punctum has 'a direct connection to them in a way that's influential in both directions' (Joy 2022). As noted above, punctum also has relationships with the library members of their subscription program who sit on their Advisory Board, plus a separate formal relationship with the University of California Santa Barbara Library. This library gives punctum assistance by providing office space, technical services, and opportunities to present at conferences, whilst Joy reciprocates by hosting workshops at the university. Finally, punctum has an informal relationship of mutual assistance with open source tool developer Coko Foundation, with whom they co-host workshops.

Jeff Pooley likewise stated that whilst mediastudies.press is not formally associated with any institution, they publish the journal *History of Media Studies* alongside their program of books. This journal is funded through Lyrasis, a North American Consortium supporting libraries, museums, and cultural organization, including funding Open Access publications. Pooley reflected that receiving funding entails expectations and commitments, specifically in the case of the journal, not charging APCs and remaining nonprofit. For example, an annual report accounting for spending must be provided. Mediastudies.press is also a member of OASPA, and various other publishing-related projects such as Crossref and the Directory of Open Access Books. The latter two organizations have membership vetting processes which include governance aspects such as bylaw. Tosi stated that OBP 'treasures' its independence, and doubts it is the sort of operation a university would support (Tosi 2022). She felt that whilst being located at Cambridge conferred great benefits and access to resources that assisted in their running of the press, a formal relationship with the university including funding would be too constraining.

Mercedes Bunz observed here that meson perhaps has somewhat more freedom with regard to funding than other presses, because they do charge publication fees. In Germany, publication fees are considered standard. Bunz stated that in Germany

> [it] is quite normal that people take an author processing fee even without Open Access […] in Germany it was quite normal that everyone who did a PhD had to pay a few thousand to publish their book. So we have it fairly easy because we don't need to look out for funding [from other relationships and institutions] (2022).

The responses to this question, then, were quite mixed. A formal relationship with a university was generally considered a negative for the ScholarLed publishers, even if they had previously sought one. The expectation and constraints involved were seen to outweigh the financial and operational assistance. Memberships in like-minded initiatives and networks were considered useful, and with these came both formal expectations for governance (such as being part of ScholarLed itself) and more informal reciprocal working relationships, such as punctum's exchanges with the Coko Foundation. Naturally, any relationship where financial support is involved comes with accountability and transparency to that funder. Thus, whilst networked relationships generally seem to be beneficial to Open Access publishers, alignment with mission and values of collaborators seems crucial.

Perspectives on current governance: aims for development

In the final part of the interviews, we asked the publishers how they felt about the current governance of their press in relation to its aims and mission, and whether there was anything they would like to improve and develop. Van Schalkwyk stated that whilst his position gave him a lot of autonomy on the day to day running of African Minds, he wished to broaden the representation on the Board of Trustees and involve the other trustees more fully in the governance process. This was a common sentiment. Eileen Joy reflected that our talk had brought up the need for more formal policies with regard to governance process and legal eventualities:

> But what would we do [for example], if we were faced with a lawsuit from an outside person about one of our books containing plagiarized work that belongs to them, and it would technically be copyright infringement? That could be quite frightening, especially if they have deep pockets for lawyers. We see this happen all the time with corporate publishers who themselves instigate lawsuits against shadow libraries or against people who they think have infringed their copyrights. And they have the money and the lawyers to pull it off, so we probably should think about that as part of this conversation […] We don't have a procedure for that, and we probably should. (Joy 2022).

Like van Schalkwyk's reflection on trustee involvement, she considered that the Executive Board of punctum should be more involved and more formally involved, via documentation. Roles and responsibilities should be more clearly set out, including for eventualities such as a director being unable to fulfil their role any longer. Whilst, as noted, punctum has not yet encountered any irresolvable conflicts, Joy reflected that a documented procedure for dealing with one should be created, including arbitration in the case of a dispute that could threaten the press. These are all important issues which any Open Access publisher would be wise to account for formally, even if the press begins in a spirit of collegiate informality. Giving the Executive Board more formal power, Joy reflected, would also require 'a document that says our Executive Board is exempt from any liability that we might have legally' (Joy 2022). Conversely, more formal documentation around punctum's relationship with its salaried staff was considered. Not all ScholarLed presses have salaried stuff, but for those that do or will, the creation of an employee document outlining rights, responsibilities and expectations would be beneficial. Joy also stated a desire to 'be more responsive to the community of researchers that publish with us', emphasizing punctum's fundamental commitment to its authors. Jeff Pooley likewise mentioned that the Advisory Board's role needed more clarification:

> The Advisory Board is mentioned in the bylaws in paragraph form, but it's not specifying much, and that is another piece of the governance that is just quite hollow at the moment. My intention is to at least be sending updates and then having a meeting once a year at least where questions of scope and policy are raised, but that has never happened actually. I mean updates have been sent but no meeting of the Advisory Board has ever occurred (2022b).

This creates a 'gap between the mission and the kind of ethos that is driving the press', which would favor a more diverse and representative form of governance. At the time of interview, mediastudies.press Board of Directors was in Pooley's words 'strikingly non diverse in geographic and gender and racial terms which kind of cuts against our values' (2022b). This has since been somewhat improved by the addition of two new members, and engaging the Advisory Board more formally could improve upon it further. Pooley was also interested in adapting some of the ideas that have been developed within COPIM in relation to the OBC's governance model (Joy, Adema, and COPIM 2022), specially mentioning the notion of Stewards. Tosi was happy with the fundamental structure of OBP's governance, but did mention that she would like to involve authors more closely within the process. As always, time is a barrier to participation, both in terms of the authors own time and the efforts of the small press's staff. Mercedes Bunz sees this as a fundamental problem with a scholar-led press: 'that there's not enough time to work on the infrastructure [...] Small publishing houses drown in tasks anyhow' (2022). Nonetheless, she remained overall 'quite happy' with the alignment between meson's mission and aims and its governance structure, observing that 'open access has come to become more normal compared to when we started out and when you had to explain to people constantly, particularly to people publishing in the US, what this was about and that has become much better'. The fact there is 'is a little bit more funding available for authors to be supported to publish with us' is beneficial for meson. Bunz described a casual and informal email exchange between the co-founders as an example of their governance working in practice:

> The governance overall I think is good. It really looks like this: I just got an e-mail today from Marcus saying "What do you think? We have this book? Here's the summary. Here's the material. What does everybody think?" Then we start a thread, and make a decision and at some point (Bunz 2022).

Still, it is worth noting that meson has no real procedures for dealing with a fundamental disagreement between co-founders, if one did arise. All the co-founders come from a relatively similar academic background and are used to the process of discussion and consensus-seeking common to academia.

This works for a press like meson, but would probably be unsuitable for one such as punctum, which values genre-bending works highly and maintains a status as a self-proclaimed 'outstitutional press', in a more skeptical relationship with the academy. Joe Deville stated that he wishes to improve many areas of Mattering's work, especially the website, and their use of metadata, and admitted that governance would come quite far down the list of priorities. This is not because the trustees do not think it is important, but simply because the pressing matter of producing and distributing readable books takes up so much (unpaid) time and labour already, echoing Bunz's sentiment that small presses 'drown in tasks'.

Conclusions: Towards Better Practices

The shape of 'better' governance for a small-to-medium Open Access press will depend upon its context, values, missions, aims and size (Hart, Adema, and COPIM 2022). Nonetheless, we have identified some common areas of concern for these publishers and ways for open access book publishers to overcome these barriers going forward and to help them develop and implement better governance structures and practices.

Firstly, we would reiterate the point that the implementation of more formalised government structures or practices when setting up a press can pre-empt some of the potential problems publishers could run into later. As we noted above, there are some checklists and guides already available to help publishers with this implementation. The Educopia guide Governance in Formation: Identifying Priorities for Action and Making Decisions would be a productive place to start, as it provides templates and prompts for planning, and examples of self-audit activities to be undertaken at appropriate times. Publishers might also make use of Educopia's FOREST framework, which is 'intended to help scholarly communication organizations and communities to demonstrate, evaluate, and ultimately improve their alignment with key values', including representative governance. Hart and Adema's previous report for COPIM (Hart, Adema, and COPIM 2022) may also be useful here.

Secondly, presses might want to consider incorporating. Publishers should start by finding out which forms are available in the country or state they wish to incorporate in, via their government website. For example, the UK government website has guidance on the forms available here. The UK Charity Commission also provides governance templates, as used by Mattering Press. If the form is appropriately chosen, incorporation provides some legal protection for the individuals involved in the running of the press as well as signaling a non-profit or charitable status to stakeholders. It may also be a requirement for certain practicalities such as opening a bank account. Incorporation has provided the ScholarLed publishers with several benefits such as protection of the individuals involved in case of legal problems, tax exemptions, and a clear statement of values to interested stakeholders.

Thirdly, publishers can minimise confusion and labour duplication by striving for clarity with regards to the elements of their governance structure, both human and non-human, and the relationship of each element to the others. The publishers interviewed identified human actors as the most important element in their governance structure, but also mentioned technologies, financial resources, and rules and bylaws. If different Boards are to be created, what is the specific role of each, and what influence do they have over each other? How are they to communicate, and how often? What accountability do they have? How are disputes to be resolved? Some of the templates made available by the CommunityRule governance toolkit may be usefully adapted as a visual aid for this. If the publisher chooses to incorporate, the form of incorporation will influence this. We noted that the ScholarLed publishers utilise Advisory Boards, but have chosen not to vest them with legal powers over the presses' founders or directors. Publishers should consider what degree of legal power, if any, they wish to assign to their boards. Several of the publishers recognised that at present,

they lack concrete means of dispute resolution, and this could be remedied by the creation of some new documentation, whose specifics will depend on the form of incorporation chosen.

Fourthly, publishers might wish to consider the balance of representation of the human actors involved in the governance structure if diversity and bibliodiversity is their goal. A more diverse set of actors may lead to less simple consensus, at which point procedures for conflict resolution will be needed. We recommend that publishers regularly consult their governance documents to check for alignment between procedures, aims, and values, and to recognise areas for improvement.

Finally, if transparency is an aim, publishers should seek to keep their websites updated with clear guides to their governance structures and procedures. Though all the publishers made a certain amount of information available on their website, the clarity and depth could be improved, particularly with regard to the interaction of different elements of the governance structure.

The primary barriers to all of the above are likely to be time and labour. In addition to the resources provided in this report, it will be be one of the aims of the Open Book Futures project, which is COPIM's successor, to assist publishers in moving towards these goals, whether through the creation of guides, knowledge sharing, or the input and assistance of more experienced publisher members. In line with our aims and values as a collective, we hope that our communal, mutually supportive, and anti-competitive approach to Open Access publication will assist small to medium Open Access publishers in creating and maintaining better governance structures for an equitable and diverse future.

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