



Open Book Futures: Working towards a fairer, more sustainable future for Open Access books.

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Our eNews co-editor **Tom Morley** sat down with Joe to find out more about the Open Book Futures project.

What is the Open Book Futures project?

I guess the Open Book Futures project is many things. First and foremost, it's a project squarely focused on academic books and, more specifically, Open Access academic books. Over the next three years, the project team will be working on the infrastructures, workflows, and collaborations that we think are needed to build a fairer, more sustainable future for Open Access books. And, by 'we' I mean a group of higher education organisations – including my own university, Lancaster University, including new collaborations with my library colleagues, and **Birkbeck College, Coventry University, Jisc, Loughborough University** and Trinity College, **Cambridge University** – and Open Access initiatives: **Directory of Open Access Books (DOAB), Open Book Collective, punctum books, Open Book Publishers, Thoth**. These are what we call the 'consortium' members. But there are wider group of project partners, many of which your readers will be familiar with. These include Continental Platform/**University of Cape Town**, the **Curtin Open Knowledge Initiative (COKI)**, the **Digital Preservation Coalition**, the **Educopia Institute, Knowledge Futures, Lyrasis, OPERAS, Public Knowledge Project (PKP), Research Libraries UK (RLUK), SciELO Books, Scottish Universities Press/SCURL**, and **SPARC Europe**. We are also working with numerous other small and non-for-profit Open Access publishers and infrastructure providers.

But while the project is new, it in many ways is a direct successor to the **COPIM** project (COPIM stands for Community-led Open Publication Infrastructures for Monographs), which finished at the end of April this year. Both projects are funded by **Arcadia** and the **Research England** Development Fund. What the OBF project is doing is building on much of the

groundwork has been already completed by COPIM. Our focus in Open Book Futures is really on scaling and expanding its work.

Why is there a need for the project?

When bidding for funding, I had to go and present to the Research England Development Fund panel. My answer to your question is the same as I gave to them: because there is so much more to do, to support a fairer more sustainable Open Access book publishing landscape.

COPIM has achieved a lot: it helped create two new organisations: the [Open Book Collective](#), which raises sustainable funding via Supporter Programmes for Open Access book publishers and infrastructure providers, and [Thoth](#), a non-profit which provides metadata management services to Open Access book publishers. It also launched a range of resources for publishers, libraries and others interested in a more diverse future for Open Access publishing. These include the [Experimental Publishing Compendium](#), a guide and reference to promote the publication of experimental scholarly books, a range of archiving workflows including [recommendations for ‘good’ and ‘best’ practices](#) for archiving books of various kinds, the [Opening the Future](#) revenue model, which is in active use by two University Presses to ‘flip’ frontlist books to Open Access, and a [Toolkit](#) for smaller and scholar-led Open Access publishers.

These each in their own way provide some of the essential building blocks for a more bibliodiverse, and more equitable Open Access book ecosystem. However, the Open Book Futures project will be extending this work in all kinds of ways. One key aim is to make sure that these kinds of solutions are relevant not just to publishers, infrastructure providers, authors, and libraries in wealthier national contexts, but globally. Another is to ensure that the models and organisations that COPIM has developed become fully self-sustaining, without need for continued external funding.

What activities will the OBF project undertake?

It will certainly be a busy three years. Much of the project is focused on outreach to engage many more presses, infrastructure providers and libraries with what we are building. This will include workshops and outreach events all over the world, both in person and remotely – as many as 40 in total. For example, I have just been talking to colleagues at the University of Cape Town about running an event, likely in South Africa, with publishers from across the African continent early next year. We also recently took part in [a seminar](#), which included publishers, academics, and librarians from across Latin America, as part of SciELO’s 25th anniversary celebrations.

But we will also be building Open Access publishing capacity in all kinds of ways. The Open Book Collective will soon be launching its Collective Development Fund, which will allocate around £100,000 in funding to different Open Access book publishing organisations across the world. By the end of the project, it also aims to deliver of £1million in funding to its publisher and service provider members, based on achieving support from around 200 libraries for its Supporter Programmes. This would help secure the Open Book Collective’s future sustainability.

The project also aims to make sure Thoth becomes a self-sustaining organisation by the end of the project, as well as putting in place a new archiving network, further experimental publishing pilots, new solutions for Open Access publishers to help make their books more accessible, and scholarly publishers using the Opening the Future revenue model, as well as ensuring the continued success of Opening the Future already running at two University Presses. There's a lot more, but that probably is enough to give a sense.

What impact do you hope the project will have?

I am probably overly ambitious about this, but I actually hope that the Open Book Futures project will be transformative. The level of new funding for Open Access publishing that the Open Book Collective hopes to deliver, for example, both through its Supporter Programmes and the Collective Development Fund programme, would be transformative for the organisations involved. Thoth promises to radically democratise the professional management of metadata and dissemination, making it far easier for smaller Open Access presses to widely disseminate their books. The work on archiving and experimental publishing could help reshape what we think Open Access books can be and how they can be preserved. And the overall focus in the project on bibliodiversity, accessibility and global engagement will help ensure that these impacts are not just limited to countries like the UK, the US and in the Eurozone, with Open Access books available to readers with a range of needs, expectations and requirements

But I am also not naïve. Our work exists in a highly competitive environment. It's perhaps a compliment that we can see commercial publishers starting to experiment with the kinds of consortial funding approaches that we – and others – have been exploring in recent years. And the continued purchase by large publishers of Open Access publishing infrastructures is a worrying sign, as this is the very opposite of the community- and scholar-led, non-profit Open Access publishing ecosystem we argue is vital for the future of scholarly publishing (indeed, we have put in place [strong governance structures](#) to ensure this cannot happen to the organisations we have built). However, at the very least, the COPIM project and the Open Book Futures project provides concrete examples of how Open Access can be done differently.

Where can readers find out more?

The COPIM website points towards all the outputs of the COPIM project (copim.ac.uk). We will be reconfiguring it soon, to enable it to also host our work for Open Book Futures. Also, follow us on our social media channels. We are on X, formerly Twitter – for example [@Copim_community](#), [@OpenBookCollect](#), [@Thoth_metadata](#). But increasingly we are encouraging colleagues to engage with us via our Mastodon equivalents, including for the [Copim community](#), [Open Book Collective](#) and [Thoth](#).

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