



UNIVERSITIES SOUTH AFRICA

SCHOLARLY PRESSES IN SOUTH AFRICA: POSITION AND PROSPECTS

FEBRUARY 2019

1. Introduction

This report is compiled at the behest of the CEO of USAf, who has requested an assessment of the importance of the university presses to the universities and to South Africa's research and scholarly system, and the opportunities and costs of running a university press in the twenty first century. The terms of reference request the report to reflect on:

- Existing studies and reviews of SA's university presses;
- The governance models and staffing of the presses;
- The quality of the processes and content produced by the presses;
- Local and international marketing;
- Where SA academics prefer to publish;
- The prospects for Open Access, and its forms of funding;
- The business models of the presses;
- The future sustainability of the presses.

First, a note on terminology. The SA presses that are attached, loosely or tightly, to universities (or in the case of the HSRC Press, to the HSRC), prefer to call themselves, following PRASA, 'scholarly' presses rather than 'academic' presses as they are more usually known internationally. This is to signal that their principal mission is to publish peer-reviewed scholarly books (and in the case of HSRCP, peer-reviewed research outputs), not textbooks or commercial publications. This is a significantly narrower principal mission than that of international presses that often follow a 'hybrid' or 'mixed' model, which includes school and university text books, academic journals, and other publications on a continuum from strictly scholarly, through 'crossover' publications (which are usually scholarly and often peer reviewed but appeal to a broader informed audience) to unabashed 'trade' publications which will hopefully sell in the marketplace for a profit. This is not to say that the presses discussed in this report do not follow a 'mixed' model, which most of them do; it is just to stress that this is how they mark out their principal mission.

The hybrid model is thus a default one in SA too, for an obvious reason: the more narrowly scholarly the publication is, the more probable that its audience will be specialised and small, the lower the sales, and the remoter will be the likelihood that the publication's sales will cover the production and marketing costs. Purely scholarly endeavours thus necessarily depend on external subvention to survive. In times of austerity, as now, they come under pressure to become more self-sustaining. They are, like all fellow academic presses, caught between the 'cathedral' (their scholarly mission model) and the 'market' (their business model) (see le Roux

2013; 2015c). This will be expanded on below. The point made here is that SA's 'scholarly' presses linked to universities foreground the scholarly mission in their name, and this report respects that position.

For the purposes of this report, the following scholarly presses were identified for review:

- Wits University Press (est. 1922);
- University of Kwa-Zulu Natal University Press (est. 1948);
- UNISA University Press (est. 1956);
- UCT Press (est. 1993);
- HSRC Press (est. 2002);
- AFRICAN SUN MeDIA (est. 2004-2006).

The six listed above fall into two clear groups: those established before the 1960s, which le Roux (2013, 185) in her landmark study calls the 'core' or 'key' presses; and those established after 1990. This list does not exhaust the roster of scholarly publishers operating in the SA publishing space. First there is the niche press Pretoria University Law Press, and other smaller or larger presses in South Africa like Jacana Media and, most recently, newcomer African Minds, a good example of what Adema and Stone (nd, 3) call a 'new wave' of scholarly publishers that 'blur(s) the line between publisher and platform'. Then there are international university presses like Oxford and Cambridge University Presses, and large local and international commercial academic presses like Juta, Routledge, Springer, Brill, and Ashgate Publishing. Indeed, in the recent CREST (2018) report on scholarly publishing in SA, two of the three top publishers of monographs submitted to the DHET for subsidy between 2005 and 2014 were commercial publishers – Juta and Palgrave Macmillan, together accounting for 7% of all monograph submissions to DHET over the period. This indicates that local university scholarly presses have to compete not only with each other for market share, but with international academic presses and local and international commercial presses as well. The fact that all of them survive so far, attests to the quality and service they provide in a tough environment.

This report will proceed by discussing, very briefly, changes in global scholarly publishing; the emergence of scholarly university presses in SA; and will then discuss where the six presses in this review find themselves now; it will conclude with a speculation, mostly gleaned from the presses themselves, of prospects and possibilities for sustainability going into the future. The ultimate aim of the review is to offer an 'outsider' perspective on these shoestring operations, and offer some food for thought for their consideration going forward. The review is based on a reading of the available literature, on interviews with each of the presses, and questionnaires completed by them. Details of the interviews are provided in Appendix 1.

2. Global changes bearing on scholarly publishing

Weingart and Taubert (2017) analyse structural dynamics which cause change in the broader formal scientific communication system of which scholarly book publishing is a part¹. They isolate four such structural dynamics. These include digitisation and the transformation to electronic publication; 'economisation', that is, increasingly treating scholarly books as economic units whose costs are to be recovered; the rise and impact of bibliometrics; and the increased visibility of scientific results to a general public ('mediatisation').

¹ These will only be briefly discussed here; please see Weingart and Taubert 2017 for a fuller account. See also van Schalkwyk & Luescher 2017.

Van Schalkwyk and Luescher (2017, 5-6) distil these structural changes into four sets of 'technological opportunities' for scholarly presses:

- Print on demand (or POD), which means presses no longer have to produce large print runs and then find places to store these, at least for some of the stock. It also means that presses no longer have to ship stock to overseas booksellers or distributors;
- Online aggregator services like *Books at JSTOR* and *Project MUSE*, and library digital depositories, all of which provide easy access to previously widely dispersed book resources or previously inaccessible resources like theses and dissertations;
- Online book merchants like Amazon;
- Digitally driven publicity, like Web 2.0 platforms as well as websites.

Some presses are already making full use of these opportunities; others exploit some of them only.

Technological change has had a profound effect on the production and dissemination of scholarly books, from the form of conduct and production of the scholarly text to its peer review, editing and production processes. It has had a major impact on the storage of scholarship too. Libraries everywhere are in crisis, with book prices now at a premium as some publishers pass part of their origination costs onto the price of library copies, and librarians are landed with escalating journal subscription costs, all of this to be managed with shrinking budgets. 'Open Access' is an emerging form of dissemination with various variants for making content 'open', from access via repositories ('green' OA) to access at the point of production ('gold' OA). Either way, costs have to be retrieved somehow, since revenue is no longer garnered by sales if the content is 'open'. Business models consequently have to change.

Communication with the public is increasingly expected by the public, by universities and by grant making bodies. This means that public attention becomes something to be competed for, and its effects are not always benign, since the superficial uptake of results from complicated science are frequent, and online communities use publicly available scientific results in perverse ways to boost online attention by preying on real public fears and insecurities: the anti-vaccination movement is one such (see van Schalkwyk 2018).

This all amounts to a series of impacts on the production, publication and storage of scholarly books. Add to this the swelling of the amount of scholarship being published globally, the sometimes onerous requirements of procuring reliable and robust peer review reports, the rising costs of changing technology, and static or dwindling budgets in a time of austerity, which means that the staffing complement of the presses has hardly changed over the last decade. It might then come as a surprise that the publication of books and scholarly chapters, as measured by those submitted for subsidy, has increased markedly. Between 2005 and 2014, the number of books SA universities have submitted for subsidy has increased from 33 to 162 per annum, and the number of chapters from 98 to 964. Consider too that a university press shared the highest number of published books in the period with two commercial publishers, with the fourth spot also going to a university press; and that for chapters submitted, three of the presses were in the top seven publishers (CREST 2018). It is fair to say that the presses are punching above their weight. But it is also true that they are taking strain. The rest of this report explores that dynamic.

3. The emergence of scholarly presses in SA

University presses have been around a long time. The first to be established, Cambridge University Press in 1534, published their first book in 1584 (information from the website of the press). Nevertheless, the majority were established early in the twentieth century. Le Roux (2013) comments that they all seemed to have been founded with the same mission in mind, namely, to publish books of high scholarly quality that commercial publishers were then unable or unwilling to publish, to promote the communication of scholarly work, and to reflect – and augment – the prestige of their parent institution. This last function is both easy to overlook and to undervalue. Because Oxford University Press was the English press that drove the export of their model most forcefully, this common mission template has become known as the ‘Oxford model’ (Le Roux, *ibid*, 73). OUP was also the first press to open in SA, in the early 1900s, but was initially just a distribution facility. Wits University Press (WUP) pipped them to the publication of the first book.

The ‘Oxford model’ has four principal features, and missions of university presses all reflect a version of them. They are said to be similar in terms of:

- The relation between the press and its parent organ;
- A commitment to publishing high-quality, rigorous scholarly work;
- An attempt to balance outstanding scholarship with commercial realities;
- A coherent publishing list, and a well-defined niche. (Le Roux, 2013, 73).

In fact, as this report will reflect, the SA presses differ quite markedly in their press-university relations, and in the ways in which they attempt to balance scholarship and commerce, the ‘cathedral’ and the ‘marketplace’. They are, or have been until recently, unfortunately rather similar in not clearly enough developing what Le Roux called a ‘well-defined niche’ (*ibid*). Nevertheless, they are all, in one way or another, caught up in the ambiguity of being *in* the university, yet not really being fully *of* it. This ambiguity too comes in differing shadings. Le Roux quotes Hall as follows:

A university press is a curious institution, dedicated to the dissemination of learning yet apart from the university structure, a publishing firm that is in business, but not to make money; an arm of the university that is frequently misunderstood and occasionally attacked by faculty and administration.
(Le Roux, 2013, 33).

Although Hall was writing in 1986 about Harvard University Press, it is a remarkably prescient comment applicable to most of SA scholarly presses in the present. They all are, as Genesis Analytics (2006, 22) quotes a source as saying, a ‘low-margin high-risk business’.

Wits University Press was the forerunner of SA’s university presses, and was seen as such by the others, especially the English institutions. The first generation of university presses – WUP, UKZN University Press (UKZNUP) and UNISA University Press (UNISAUP) – started off life as publishing divisions, or university ‘print shops’, printing inaugural lectures and other matter for the university. UNISAUP is the only press to have partly retained this function in its original form. In common with many of their global confreres, all three also started off publishing journals. Probably because UNISAUP retained its on-campus print shop model, they expanded their journal publication portfolio as the other two gradually shed theirs. When AFRICAN SUN MeDIA (ASM) was established in 2003/4, it started out as a developing commercial publishing project. In 2007, when ASM became a private company, the university’s print shop was incorporated into the business. SUN MeDIA Bloemfontein was established in 2009, publishing scholarly publications under license from ASM.

Consequently, ASM and UNISAUP can handle volumes that the others, with an outsourced model, do not handle (although POD has partly mitigated this issue). They have also both retained something of a service mandate with regard to their parent institutions, although ASM offers print services on the basis of quotation and tender, and therefore treats SU as it would any other client in the marketplace.

When Rhodes and UCT considered setting up a press, probably in the 1970s, they both wrote to WUP to ask for advice (le Roux, *ibid*, 118, 119). The Wits Registrar replied with a proposal to collaborate. Nothing came of the proposal, and UCT went on to establish its own press in 2003, interestingly on the initiative of a former Wits Press editor, Eve Gray. The collaboration idea was to arise more forcefully in a proposal David Philip put forward in 1971 for a 'Southern African Universities Press', which also did not find fertile ground. Whether this was because of a fear of getting swallowed up, or because they feared that their prestige showcasing function for their parent institution would be impaired, is not clear.

From the beginning, and through the apartheid years, the three presses then extant (WUP, UKZNUP and UNISAUP) were subsidised by university subventions, and the Oxford non-profit model was hardly questioned (le Roux 2013, 262). The presses were mission-driven, and the business model, such as it was, usually came second. These three presses are still the closest to university departments of the six and are still costs centres of their respective institutions. From about the 1980s, university income began to tighten, and the situation has got steadily worse. Pressures have inexorably increased for the presses to become more sustainable. All the presses established from the 1990s on have had to confront this pressure from the outset.

Of the presses, only one can be considered to be a fully-fledged independent business unit, ASM, which is a publishing, printing and design-services company of which SUNPReSS is their scholarly imprint. With their format, and because they are able to publish and offer media services across the spectrum, they are the only private company and are able to run at a profit. Although the HSRC Press (HSRCP) operates on sound business principles, it still receives a subvention from the HSRC courtesy of the Department of Science and Technology. UCT Press (UCTP) is in perhaps the most anomalous position. The press imprint is contentiously owned by Juta, and it effectively runs as an imprint of Juta, with an Editorial Board of UCT staff that steer editorial decisions. The result is that Juta expects UCTP to be self-sustaining, but with a narrow focus on excellent scholarly output. With no market successes to cushion it, it scrapes by with its single publisher left to run it all, although the production and distribution is backed by Juta. The press regards its role, in classical terms, as reflecting and bringing prestige to UCT – for which a modest subvention might have been expected. UCT regards the press as a business concern which it is reluctant to support. The press struggles on with its skeleton staffing and manages to keep its head above water, and publish quality books. It is probably the smallest of the presses, but the possibilities are clearly hardly exploited.

Where then does the income come from to run the presses? There is a diverse number of sources:

- From the universities themselves, either via a direct grant, or indirectly, by the provision of office space;
- From upfront payments from end users like libraries;
- From sales of print and e-book copies;
- From cross-subsidisation from sales of school or university textbooks, crossover or commercial books;
- From copyright sales;
- From subventions from authors. This is increasingly an important source for some presses; authors pay part or all of the origination costs from their research accounts, or raise funds to do so; increasingly the research offices of universities are willing to

pay a modest subvention to their authors if a case can be made that the volume is likely to accrue subsidy income for the university.

- Rarely, from donors, learned societies or foundations.

In 2006, Genesis Analytics (2006, 22) reported a source as saying that presses typically performed as follows: 25% of books made a profit; 25% made a loss; 50% break even. Business models have become increasingly complex, especially with the added complexity of financing Open Access publications. In 2013 le Roux (2013, 264) commented that 'Funding has always been problematic for the university presses'². It has only become more so.

The presses have improved their marketing and distribution networks especially abroad, and most of them engage in co-publishing and partnership deals with presses and distribution companies here and abroad, like the local Blue Weaver, EuroSpan in Europe, and Independent Publishing Group (IPG) in the USA. Percentage of scholarly sales to total revenue differ quite widely, from 5%, through 20% and 30%, to 50% and upwards (one press declined to give figures). It is probable that some of these figures represent total sales, including sales of textbooks and crossover/commercial books. The highest percentage comes from the smallest press in terms of both book productions and staff, UCTP. What is clear is that without at least half the revenue coming from other sources, scholarly presses would not be able to survive on scholarly book sales alone.

4. Scholarly presses in SA today

This section of the report will look a little more closely at five key dimensions of the functioning of the presses. Not every dimension has the same significance for each press. Nevertheless, each press has in some way or another to deal with it.

a) Relations with the parent institution: governance and autonomy

The report showed above that the first generation presses (WUP, UKZNUP and UNISAUP) developed fairly close relations with their parent institutions. This was for a number of reasons. One was that all three were initiated by the university itself which, operating from within the unquestioned 'Oxford model', thought that the press needed to operate with the financial support of the institution. This meant that they were all integrated into the financial and HR systems of the university, where they still find themselves. A second reason was that, again from the dictates of the 'Oxford model', it was assumed that, when it came to judging potential scholarly quality, academics naturally knew best. The presses were there to publish academically determined scholarship and execute academic decisions.

At least from the 1980s on, the presses began to professionalise, and publishers with publishing experience from other presses began to insert their expertise into the running of the scholarly presses. These publishers brought with them know-how about how the publishing industry works, including know-how about how to balance quality and saleability, not a skill that came naturally to academics. With the institutionalisation of peer review, and the gradual acceptance of its importance (not the least for subsidy purposes) by the presses (see Cader, de Villiers and Pieterse, 2015³), some of the professional publishers have been left to get on with it as long as they were not a drain on the university's increasingly stretched budget. For example, at UKZNUP and UCTP, the salaries are covered by UKZN and Juta

² This remains true, although it is also true that 'funding is not the main problem facing African university presses' (van Schalkwyk & Luescher 2017, 47). The authors think it has to do with the outdated 'institutional logic' of the presses, a point this report will return to in the final section.

³ The following university presses are listed as endorsing the peer review 'best practice' prescribed in the document: ASM, UCTP, UKZNUP, UNISAUP and WUP.

respectively, but the publisher is expected to operate a 'break even' or 'zero budgeting' financing model. UKZN manages, by virtue of a hybrid model, publishing also trade and popular books and text books, in addition to the 20 or so scholarly books they publish each year.

The upshot has been that UKZNUP no longer has an academic editorial board, and WUP now just has a management board. UCTP has retained an editorial board to give academic advice to the publisher, but Juta judges whether to publish on potential saleability. HSRCP prides themselves on an independent academic editorial board, who advises the Publications Director on peer review. UNISAUP is the only press that has a large Senate Publications Committee representative of colleges across the university that must give the go-ahead on all publications, and UNISAUP is the only press to be headed, albeit in an acting capacity, by an academic, Dr Meiya Nthoesane.

Looking across the presses then, we can see that the more tightly tied into the host institution a press is, the more constrained is its autonomy, but the greater is its financial security, indeed, the more it is shielded in part from the tough environment of the market. This dual position, of security plus lack of autonomy, has been referred to as 'golden handcuffs'. UNISAUP comes closest to this pole. On the other pole – represented for example by ASM – the press has total autonomy, because it is an autonomous company with a Board of Directors and Shareholders rather than either an editorial or management committee. SU is simply one shareholder, albeit initially a major one with a 55% stake. More recently the SU shareholding was changed to 25% by a sale of share agreement. It is understood that the press will respond to requests from the university for service jobs, but they must tender like all other suppliers. At this end of the spectrum, the press 'belongs' to the university in the most tenuous sense only, a belonging signalled not even in its name: the ambiguous 'SUN', I am informed, does not refer to SU but to the African sun.

Between these two poles we can find various degrees of beholdeness to the parent institution. UCTP's is the most attenuated, since they do not even enjoy the use of university premises. The other three – WUP, UKZNUP and HSRCP – all occupy institutional premises. HSRCP is the most closely associated, perhaps because of its size; the Publishing Director reports directly through the directorate of Research to the HSRC's CEO. The other two report through the respective Research organisational structures of the university. All of them steer their own ship, take their own decisions, but have to show that they are at least covering costs.

One gets the impression, at least in the case of the three university presses (UNISAUP aside), of a situation of benign (perhaps in UCT's case not so benign) neglect. The phrase used to me was 'ambiguous ownership'. All three wish, in fact, for greater attention from their parent institution, for a greater appreciation of what they actually do, for scholarship in general and for the university in particular. They are not all getting it at present. Sadly, the universities are increasingly viewing them as a drain on the budget. This situation is given a further paradoxical twist: in serving the scholarship function, presses like WUP increasingly publish books by authors other than from Wits, about 50% of their annual tally. What obligation should the university then have to support authors from other institutions? The more a press exercises initiative to expand its base, therefore, the more it will place its belonging to its host institution in question. It is only ASM who has no host institution and hence no concerns in this regard.

b) Finding a niche

This report said above that le Roux, writing in 2013, had commented rather sharply on the failure by the presses in the early years to develop a specialist niche. This had the result that the presses ended up 'compet(ing) on a wide range of topics, and for a limited pool of authors' (le Roux, 2013, 192). She goes on to say that it became clear to her that the presses had been 'reactive, relying on unsolicited manuscripts rather than developing a niche on the basis of

analysis of own strengths' (ibid). She concluded that this remained something of a 'weakness among the university presses' (ibid, 194). The picture today may be rather more varied.

SA scholarly book authors are a small pool to begin with, and it is entirely understandable that the presses don't want to narrow it down any further. On the other hand, this puts them into competition with each other and with the big commercial academic publishers. Some presses continue to rely mostly on unsolicited manuscripts sent in for consideration. If you are a press like WUP, this means about 200 submissions a year, seven-eighths of which will get winnowed out. The presses will acknowledge that this means that they sometimes compete for more or less the same authors, but awareness is growing that diversification means survival. Both WUP and UKZNUP say that they increasingly commission manuscripts, as does HSRCP. UCTP sees it as part of its mandate to help novice and emerging academics develop manuscripts, and UNISA more focusedly identifies 'topical' recent PhDs with potential to be turned into books. Only some of this diversification targets particular areas of focus, or areas of strength. Other diversification is by way of publishing books with a wider market appeal; HSRCP's *Best Red* series, for example, has a different business model to the HSRCP imprint, and the two tend to complement one another. ASM seems to be the only press with dedicated niche series, like their '*Research into Higher Education*' and '*Beyers Naude*' series.

It may be concluded that the presses are beginning to develop niche areas, but they are still all contending in what has become a crowded pool; many of them still attend the same international conference, the African Studies Association annual meeting, for example. This is partly because the vast majority of scholarly books have in the past fallen into that broad category. We can expect that pressures for diversification and niche-development will intensify, and digital dissemination such as through Cambridge Core and JSTOR offer greater opportunities for diversification. It may also be borne in mind that SA journals are far more niche-sensitive, and mining some of the specialist journals in the country for potential authors is as yet a not fully exploited resource.

c) *Scholarly books and press branding*

The previous two sections have highlighted the difficulties the presses find in carving out a distinct and targeted niche, and in managing what is at best an ambiguous relationship with the parent institution. These two issues bear also on how the presses 'pitch' themselves so as to make themselves more distinctive and desirable to potential authors. When asked about future sustainability, some of the presses still hope for greater support from their host institutions, or from a funding stream diverted from the subsidies the DoHET pays to the universities for their scholarly book outputs. For various reasons, this is unlikely to happen. The model of a solely scholarly mission-driven press closely integrated into the university is not so much a case of a 'nineteenth-century model' taken into 'the twentieth century' (le Roux 2015b, 307), although there is some truth to that bald judgment. Rather, it seems more like an inability to distil what is distinctive that the presses have to offer, to brand it, and to market it as persuasively as possible.

To be sure, some of them are doing exactly that. WUP is just one example of a press that understands that academics are propelled by the desire for scholarly recognition by their peers, and that this drives them, rather than merely snob value, to want to publish where their intellectual peers globally are publishing – with prestigious international presses. WUP's response is to move beyond traditional co-publishing to global distribution through digital production and dissemination. Others like UCTP and UKZNUP are beginning to follow suit. Yet others, like ASM, do not see co-publishing or international distribution as a 'viable' or 'sustainable' market. It is undoubtedly something worth exploring further, at least for the non-commercial presses that are solely sales-driven.

Of course, many academics – more all the time – who are perhaps starting out and do not yet have a reputation to enhance, or who are perhaps happy with their national reputational profile, must also be catered for. Then there are the niche markets, like Afrikaans authors who, together with authors of Theology and Education titles, make up a sizeable chunk of ASM's catalogue. Others can still get by on their more traditional author pools, like the researchers at the HSRC or at UNISA. The signs are, however, that these pools will not be the ones most likely to contribute to origination costs, and these presses too must have an income cushion. UNISAUP's 44 journals is such a cushion. The hard bottom line is that the presses are in all likelihood going to be pushed more and more into the marketplace and they will have to at least 'break even', and in time, earn their own salaries. How they will do this without becoming completely commercial like ASM is unclear at present. Certainly, ASM thinks that their model heralds the future for scholarly presses.

d) Open Access (OA)

The global fervour around OA might have cooled slightly recently. Its advantages are manifold: knowledge is, in economic terms, a non-rivalrous good, a good whose value is unaffected by multiple use, which means for some people that its access should be open and its dissemination free. OA opens up discoverability, and optimises citation opportunities. It is not surprising that academics might feel strongly that their knowledge should be maximally circulated, although not all scholars feel this way. The pursuit of OA in journal publications has attracted many adherents. With books, especially in the Humanities, it is somewhat different. One publisher points out that books in the Humanities are bought predominantly in print form. This may well be changing now that the new possibilities offered by online aggregator services, online booksellers and digital depositories make it almost as easy to access books online as it is music and movies. For example, the Association of American Publishers reports in its statistics for 2016/17 that 'for the first time, publisher sales to physical and online retail channels were approximately equal'... (Herther 2018). In principle then, the idea of full or at least partial OA and digital distribution is clearly a good thing.

From a publisher's point of view, however, OA is also a business model. The question becomes – who pays for OA publications to be produced, since there is no sale income to offset costs? There are models in use where an end user like a library pays the production costs. Or the costs can be required from the author, or her funder, prior to accepting the manuscript for production. In certain research grant applications, it has become standard practice to put these costs into the grant budget (van Schalkwyk and Luescher 2017, 50). For these authors, research grant funding is one future for OA. Another model expects the university to pay, and at least one publisher expressed the belief that UCT, Wits and Stellenbosch already fund OA for their presses. But another problem arises here with this model; if self-sustainability becomes the goal, then the press will have to recover not only the production costs, but all the other associated costs like staff salaries, office running costs, marketing and promotion. One publisher estimates that this doubles the cost of production, and would realistically cost between R250,000 and R300,000 per title. If a chunk of the DoHET subsidy for a monograph were paid to the publisher instead of to the university it would cover these costs, but the present likelihood of that is remote.

So far, it has been the full or 'gold' OA model that has been discussed above. WUP and HSRCP have ventured into this terrain, both with an established track record in this regard. Most other presses are more cautious, and opt instead for a 'green' version of OA. This can mean depositing a pre-print copy into an institutional repository, where such copies are discoverable but usually not searchable – that is, they have usually not been optimised for search-engine functionality. Another option used by a number of presses is to offer free e-book availability, but only after an embargo of a year. UCTP, ASM and UKZNUP offer this facility, sometimes with the proviso that the author must pay upfront for production costs at least. The licensing of OA books remains a contentious area in the USA (Herther 2018). A

final disadvantage is that American distributors are reluctant to take on OA books because there is no sales income derivable. All in all, unless a steady income stream dedicated to supporting OA is provided, OA is unlikely to solve the more immediate problems of sustainability that face the presses.

e) *African scholarly presses and the question of quality of the SA presses*

There are two linked issues which have not yet been touched on. The first is the question of other African scholarly presses. There are a number of these, but none of them is doing very well. Van Schalkwyk and Luescher (2017) mention five. The ones mentioned by the presses include American University of Cairo Press, Mzuzu University Press and the University of Namibia Press and these are the ones said to be still active (van Schalkwyk and Luescher 2017). Weaver Press in Zimbabwe is also mentioned. Although the quality of these presses is thought to be good, one publisher noted a recent 'weakening of performance', and van Schalkwyk and Luescher report that many have become 'dormant'. There does not seem to be a great deal of contact with these presses. This might be a bit of a lost opportunity. Zell (2018) notes that in the 2017/8 year, three large international meetings have been held to discuss African presses, and that ADEA has a Working Group on 'Books and learning materials'. This might be a channel to cultivate, as might the recently established African Research Universities Association (ARUA).

The last dimension to be discussed is the one of quality. This is difficult to assess directly. The CREST report developed an ingenious indirect method, which compared the rankings of the presses on the SENSE and NSD Norwegian Research Council rankings with the successful gaining of subsidy on the basis of the last ASSAf panel judgments in 2014. Happily, the rankings of the SA presses and the ASSAf recommendations converged satisfactorily, leading the authors to conclude that quality as judged by the ASSAf panels and the SENSE and NSD rankings correlated satisfactorily. In fact, there has been no suggestion from any quarter that the quality of the books produced by the presses is not up to standard; the presses know that their books will not attract subsidy if they are not up to standard, and authors will look elsewhere for a publisher. It is probably the case that the presses offer a far more thorough and professional editorial service to authors than do many of the large presses with international cachet that routinely outsource their editorial tasks.

5. Options to enhance sustainability

As many of the presses acknowledge, a main problem, if not *the* main problem bedevilling sustainability, is the question of *scale*. The presses are all just too small. The presses have usually no more than two editorial staff, which puts an absolute cap on the number of books each press is able to produce and distribute in a year. The presses all express some desire for greater financial support from their parent or host institution, but realistically, these institutions are inclined to scale back the level of financial support rather than to amplify it.

What then are the possibilities to secure greater sustainability? These fall into two broad categories: *commercialisation* and *collaboration*.

1) *Greater commercialisation*

Commercialisation possibilities range from relatively minor ones to major ones. The minor ones are already in operation but could be significantly extended:

- Hybridise and diversify the publishing programme still further with publications that are able to provide a cross-subsidisable basis for expansion – journals, textbooks, proceedings, for example. It could be argued that universities that are reluctant to allow

their presses to publish more marketable books and products in order to cushion the publication of scholarly manuscripts ought then to support the press more adequately instead;

- Modify or do away with the 'zero rated' budgeting model, that entails that any profits over and above recovery of costs that a press might make in a given year be paid back to the institution;
- Institutionalise the regular payment of author processing charges (APCs). This still begs the question as to where authors would fund these from;
- Full commercialisation: form a private company and 'go it alone', but still retain a mission to publish scholarly books. This is ASM's model, and they claim it is successful. They also offer to assist any press that wishes to go this route.

Notice that all of these possibilities progressively break not only from the 'Oxford Model' but also from a close and privileged relationship with the parent university, from being shackled to a 'nineteenth century' model in le Roux's terms, from the 'golden handcuffs'. They also embrace a more or less commercial model. In Luescher and van Schalkwyk's (2018) terms, they are progressively exchanging an 'editorial' model for a 'market' model.

2) *Greater collaboration*

Collaboration options, like those for commercialisation, range also from minor to major. The principal idea behind collaboration is not only collegiality, but the realisation that pooling resources is an attempt to avoid costly duplication. The common platform for agreements and cooperation afforded by ASSAf's *National Scholarly Book Publisher's Forum* is already in place. So are a number of 'cooperation agreements' signed between some of the presses. However, as one publisher admitted, 'a sense of competition inhibits closer cooperation'. This is not because university publishers are naturally mistrustful people, but rather because the presses are bound into the tacit competitiveness between the universities, because their institutional logic is still wedded to that of their parent institution. Some degree of the unbundling referred to above would be a necessary precondition for more progressive forms of collaboration:

- A relatively weak form of collaboration would be sharing potential reviewer data bases;
- Another would be an agreement to share information on technological advances as and when they become known; this probably already happens through the National Scholarly Book Publisher's Forum, and the Publisher's Association of SA;
- A more directly functional sharing tool, a digital platform for SA published research, which would create the first online 'index of SA books', is under construction by WUP with a grant from the NIHSS. WUP has the only dedicated 'digital publisher' on their editorial team;
- A rational division of labour, whereby one press would do all the journals, another all digital marketing and so on. This has only been generally suggested, and neither the details nor the legal implications are at present clear.
- A more ambitious model would be to agree to a consortial marketing and distribution structure. This would mean one dedicated team for trade, library and institutional sales, with shared promotional activities. This would require at the least a different fiscal model for the presses, since this kind of cooperation is not easy to fund from a university-linked financial structure. There may also be issues around Competition Law that would have to be checked, as one editor remarked. Of course, the individual presses would retain their original imprint and branding;
- The most ambitious model suggested is the idea of a central 'Super Press', which would centralise all the functions of editing, design and layout and digital production

processes, journal subscriptions, printing and binding (if necessary), and online sales⁴ and marketing. This would directly address the issue of economies of scale, but would require the most radical unbundling from the 'editorial' institutional logic, and would spell the end of the 'Oxford model'. Nevertheless, that need not necessarily impair the prestige and reputational mission of the scholarly presses; some of the most prestigious scholarly presses globally are commercial.

From the perspective of Luescher and van Schalkwyk (2018), both commercialisation and the more radical form of collaboration propose a shift from an 'editorial' logic to a 'market' logic only. In their view, this oscillation, in the context of the dramatic technological changes not only of those sketched above but also of those certain to come, will not solve the predicament. For them, a change of institutional model is required to one which they call a '*knowledge commons*' logic. If the first press 'revolution' entailed a shift from an editorial to an entrepreneurial or market logic, the second one, they reason, may entail a shift from market capitalism to a form of social capitalism, and they wonder whether African scholarly presses are

... likely to become part of the sharing economy: a technologically enabled synthesis of capitalist and socialist economics, which expresses itself in the development of knowledge commons; one that views publishing as a collective social innovation enterprise rather than a business; one that organizes in self-organizing peer-to-peer networks, who invest their cultural capital in the global open access knowledge commons with the aim of collectively producing shared knowledge and value, thereby 'socializing' problems and solutions. (ibid, 290).

OA is, of course, a harbinger of the sharing economy.

The jury is surely out on whether this new knowledge economy within which the presses might find themselves is a fanciful notion, one that can only be joined by the new tech-savvy boutique presses, or is genuinely a model for the future. For a university sector not yet reconciled to the notion of profit central to the market logic, the profitless sharing economy may be five bridges too far. Nevertheless, its value lies in alerting us to the strictures of a purely market model, one which digital developers, entrepreneurial librarians and the 'new wave' of online publishing platforms referred to above are creatively working to overcome in an online environment that looks remarkably like a classic global sharing network predicted by Castells (Castells 2009; see for example Herther, 2018).

⁴ A more detailed version of such a proposal, from Ms Veronica Klipp from Wits University Press, is offered in Appendix 2.

Appendix 1

Interviews with the presses (as arranged by USAf)

17 September	UCT Press	<i>Ms Sandy Shepherd, Publisher</i>
19 September	UNISA Press	<i>Ms Tshego SehloDIMELA, Project Editor Ms Hetta Pieterse, Commissioning Editor</i>
19 September	Wits University Press	<i>Ms Veronica Klipp, Publisher Mr Andrew Joseph, Digital Publisher</i>
20 September	UKZN Press	<i>Ms. Debra Primo, Publisher</i>
27 September	AFRICAN SUN MeDIA	<i>Ms Justa Niemand, CEO and MD Ms Emily Vosloo, Publishing Manager Mr Nirode Bramdaw, Shareholder</i>
3 October	HSRC Press	<i>Mr Jeremy Wightman, Publishing Director</i>

Appendix 2

A Super Press model

This model takes into account ‘dynamics of change’ affecting scholarly publishing, including digitisation, economisation and formal observation of the scholarly communication (such as citation and usage analysis).⁵ In this model, the presses are no longer cost centres of a university, but cooperate in a commercial structure, a kind of ‘super press’. Its features and benefits would include:

- a. A centralised production, marketing and dissemination structure that produces XML based outputs for print and digital publication
- b. Digital distribution with a strong focus on international markets would do away with a distinction between local and international in which print models are trapped
- c. If the ‘local is international’⁶, authors’ need to choose between territories would become obsolete
- d. Digital distribution along with metadata of international standards for discoverability would maximise income from a globalised academic market. A prerequisite would be adequate capacitation to ensure the super press keeps up with the rapid technological innovation that characterises academic publishing
- e. Centralised production for all presses would allow for an increase in outputs. It is instructive here to look at data published by the AUP, which shows that output per full-time employee for small presses was 3.4 titles (WUPs on average is 3.1). Yet local university presses collectively only produce around 60 titles p.a. with, in some presses, a very large staff complement⁷
- f. University presses could continue to publish under their name / imprints and compete against each other for prestigious authors while not ignoring the need for a transformed author base that also offers opportunities to early career academics
- g. The burden of funding would be shifted to the academy as a whole, either through a system such as the book awards described above, or through top-slicing of DHET book subsidies to help with subvention of publication costs. Even as a ‘super press’ it may be unreasonable to expect South African university presses to become profitable, since it would most likely not exceed production levels of, for example, a medium sized press in the US that publishes between 80 and 120 books
- h. This model would incorporate joint marketing and promotion of all imprints, exploiting both print and digital opportunities
- i. Given the problem of the small size of individual presses, the success of a super press would depend on proper capacitation, with room for ongoing staff development
- j. It has often been suggested – and indeed WUP follows this strategy to some extent – that greater diversification of the list would allow more successful trade or prescription titles to cross-subsidise scholarly titles. However, with low staff levels this strategy is difficult to implement. A centralised super press with greater capacity would make the active commissioning of trade books and academic textbooks possible.

Veronica Klipp, Wits University Press

⁵ Weingart, Peter and Taubert, Niels (eds). 2017. ‘Changes in Scientific Publishing: A Heuristic for Analysis’, in Weingart and Taubert, *The Future of Scholarly Publishing: Open Access and the Economies of Digitisation*. Cape Town: African Minds.

⁶ Jospeh, Andrew. 2016. ‘Scholarly publishing in South Africa: the global south on the periphery’, *Insights* 28(3), p. 66.

⁷ We do not have accurate figures on either the total output or number of staff employed by university presses.

References

Adema, J. and Stone, G. (nd). Changing publishing ecologies: A landscape study of new university presses and academic led publishing, JISC, published online under Creative Commons license.

Cader, R., de Villiers, P. and Pieterse, H. (2017). Best practice for peer review of scholarly books. Compiled on behalf of the National Scholarly Book Publisher's Forum, Pretoria, ASSAf.

CREST (2017). A study of scientific journal and book publishing in SA: 2005 – 2014, Centre for Research on Evaluation, Science and Technology, Stellenbosch.

Genesis Analytics (2006). Factors influencing the cost of books in South Africa, Pretoria, South African Book Development Council.

Fyfe, A. et. al. (2017). Untangling academic publishing: A history of the relationship between commercial interests, academic prestige and the circulation of research.
<https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.546100>

Herther, N. (2018). Publishers still unsettled over the future of ebooks. Available at Against-the Grain.com

Joseph, A. (2015). Scholarly publishing in SA: The global South on the periphery, *Insights*, 28(3), 62 – 68.

Klipp, V. (2017). The costs of losing local research to global publishers, *World University News*, 475, 22 September 2017.

le Roux, E. (2013). Between complicity and resistance: A social history of the university presses in Apartheid SA, unpublished PhD thesis, University of Pretoria, Pretoria.

Le Roux, E. (2015a). Open minds and closed systems: An author profile of SA's university presses, *Critical Arts*, 29(6), 746 – 765.

Le Roux, E. (2015b). Publishing SA scholarship in the global academic community, *Notes and Records of the Royal Society*, 69, 301 – 320.

Le Roux, E. (2015c). Between the cathedral and the market: A study of Wits University Press, 176 – 197, in C. Davis and D. Johnson (eds), *The Book in Africa: New directions in book history*, London, Palgrave Macmillan.

Luescher, T. and van Schalkwyk, F. (2018). African university presses and the institutional logic of the knowledge commons, *Learned Publishing*, 31, 288 – 298.

Shils, E. and Roberts, J. (2004). The diffusion of European models outside Europe, 163 – 230, in Rugg, W. (ed), *A History of the University in Europe*, vol. 3, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press.

Van Schalkwyk, F. and Luescher, T. (2017). *The African University Press*, Somerset West, African Minds.

Van Schalkwyk, F. (2018). New potentials in the communication of open science with non-scientific publics: The case of the anti-vaccination movement, unpublished doctoral thesis. Stellenbosch University, Stellenbosch.

Weingart, P. and Taubert, N. (eds.) (2017). *The Future of Scholarly Publishing: Open Access and the economics of digitisation*, Somerset West, African Minds.

Zell, H. (2018). African book industry data: the state of African national bibliographies, *The African Book Publishing Record*, 44(4), 1 – 44. <https://www.degruyter.co/view/i/abpr>