

# Bibliodiversity

A call for papers

*The ecological, sustainable  
and socially responsible book*

A co-publication

(:?!;) D O U B L E  
P O N C T U A T I O N



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# The ecological, sustainable and socially responsible book: what alternative models can publishing turn to?

At a time when environmental concerns are becoming ever greater and when traditional production patterns are increasingly called into question, does such a thing as an ecological, sustainable and socially responsible book exist? Could we envisage publishing houses and the book industry making environmental worries and social obligations and responsibilities central to all they do? And what would each of these terms actually mean in this context? Would it be better to talk of the "sustainable development of books and publishing", a notion that covers the three dimensions (environmental, economic and social) of a responsible business – given that some of those involved reject this notion and are actually advocating degrowth in the book industry?

## The ecological book: a theory gaining traction while practice drags its feet?

Whether it comes in paper or digital form, the act of producing, promoting and distributing a book uses up natural and energy resources: paper, digital storage space, electricity and fuel etc. As with any other consumable product, its carbon footprint can be measured and must be taken into account.

In 2017, the French organisation Bureau for the Appraisal of Social Impacts for Citizen Information (BASIC) published a report on the state of the book industry in France with regards to environmental concerns<sup>1</sup> and even chanced offering a number of recommendations "for a sustainable sector". More recently, a WWF<sup>2</sup> report also pointed to some aspects of the life of a book that could be managed in a more environmentally-friendly way. Whatever the source, everyone seems in agreement that there is environmental gain to be had in better managing the "end of life" of unsold books, since the vast majority end up being pulped. The small amount of recycled paper used in publishing has also come in for scrutiny. A better recycled paper offer, a reduction in the size of print runs (and, therefore, unsold copies), even printing recycling instructions on books and an eco-contribution to the recycling industry are just some of the ways in which the French book industry could make environmental improvements.

The book world is gradually tackling these issues. It appears that, for some time, it thought itself less concerned than other production sectors, even if credit should be given to the work done by groups - whether or not from the book world – especially the Association pour l'écologie du livre<sup>3</sup> (association for book ecology).

As far as paper is concerned, there is a need to recognise the fact that the recycled version has not managed to make great inroads in France in general. The recycled products offered by paper makers still leave much to be desired (in terms of quality, price and, occasionally, availability), for a sector looking primarily for satisfactory value for money when it comes to printing. As far back as 2015, a study<sup>4</sup> by the French Ministry of the Economy stressed the lack of environmental awareness of publishers. Although some publishing houses now highlight their partial or exclusive use of

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<sup>1</sup> [https://lebasic.com/wp-content/uploads/2017/09/Basic\\_Rapport-Edition\\_version-2019-1-1.pdf](https://lebasic.com/wp-content/uploads/2017/09/Basic_Rapport-Edition_version-2019-1-1.pdf)

<sup>2</sup> Presented by *Actualitté* on 25 October 2019. Online: <https://www.actualitte.com/article/monde-edition/le-wwf-veut-une-chaine-du-livre-plus-ecologique-et-circulaire/97514> (consulted on 08/11/19).

<sup>3</sup> <http://ecologiedulivre.org/>

<sup>4</sup> [https://www.entreprises.gouv.fr/files/files/directions\\_services/etudes-et-statistiques/etudes/industrie/2015-12-Imprimer-en-France.pdf](https://www.entreprises.gouv.fr/files/files/directions_services/etudes-et-statistiques/etudes/industrie/2015-12-Imprimer-en-France.pdf)

recycled paper, it appears many opt for certified paper. A study<sup>5</sup> from the Syndicat national de l'édition's Environment and Manufacturing Commission states that 93% of book publishers use certified paper.

The increase in production (in both titles and volume), the shrinking of life cycles for books in book shops and the cost of storage inevitably generates massive pulping of unsold books or remainders. Yet on-demand printing seems to be making progress and some publishers highlight the need to invest in short runs, even micro runs. While *offset* still has a bright future – big print runs (and advertising them) being an integral part of the marketing strategy for releasing a bestseller – it is possible that the range of solutions could be further expanded to include producing no more than a few hundred copies.

Although the complete dematerialisation of the book offers some environmental advantages, it is not always so economically advantageous<sup>6</sup> and even raises some serious environmental questions. For example, the problem of storing digital books becomes tangled up in the environmental rationalisation of high energy-consuming data centres<sup>7</sup>. The respective advantages – especially regarding production and greenhouse gasses – of reading on an e-reader or a paper version have not been fully established because e-readers are not always "sustainable", leading to the question of the use of finite, non-renewable resources in particular in their manufacture.

As for the mode of transport of printed books, it certainly needs to be reviewed. Books travel across oceans in container ships (after having been printed in Asia) and then in a never-ending ballet of delivery vans (from warehouse to bookshop and back again; from warehouses to online purchasing platforms, and on to the end client, etc.). The flow seems to be increasing while not becoming any greener. On the other hand, what do "short supply chain" and "local" mean in publishing?

### **The social and solidarity book: much reflection, but a reduced visibility?**

A French law passed in July 2014 defines the "social and solidarity economy" (SSE) as "a method of enterprise and economic development suited to all fields of human activity, to which private parties adhere and which fulfil the following, cumulative conditions: 1) pursuing a goal other than the sole one of sharing profits; 2) democratic governance (...); 3) profits employed to maintain or develop the business (...)". So, the first social and solidarity criteria for a publishing company would be to start looking at how it is set up, even its legal status<sup>8</sup>. In the book sector, which is predominantly organised in a capitalist way, some publishing houses are indeed known for having a different legal status - a cooperative or a workers' production cooperative (SCOP in French) for example. Publishers such as Syllepses, L'Association and Croquant in France, The New Press or South End Press in the United States, Tournure publishers (which adds: "solidarity company" as a sub-title) and Écosociété in Quebec, New Internationalist in the United Kingdom, which defines itself as a cooperative co-owned by its workers and more than 3,600 investors<sup>9</sup>, and Txalaparta in

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<sup>5</sup>[https://www.sne.fr/app/uploads/2017/12/SNE\\_Environnement\\_EnqueteConso\\_Papier\\_CP\\_Decembre2017.pdf](https://www.sne.fr/app/uploads/2017/12/SNE_Environnement_EnqueteConso_Papier_CP_Decembre2017.pdf)

<sup>6</sup> On this topic, see this paper/digital comparative paper by Gilles Colleu (publishers: Vents d'ailleurs): <http://alliance-lab.org/couts-du-livre-papier-couts-du-livre-numerique-une-comparaison/?lang=fr>

<sup>7</sup> See in particular: [https://www.sciencesetavenir.fr/high-tech/informatique/numerique-et-ecologie-les-data-centers-des-gouffres-energetiques\\_121838](https://www.sciencesetavenir.fr/high-tech/informatique/numerique-et-ecologie-les-data-centers-des-gouffres-energetiques_121838)

<sup>8</sup> Incidentally, we should note that access via the statute has been the characteristic of the social economy since the end of the 19th century; questioning this access is at the heart of the debate between "social economy" and "solidarity economy".

<sup>9</sup> <https://newint.org/about>

Spain. All these publishers claim to be structured differently from the others - implying they do not have the same goals. But what is the real picture?

This originality – if not in the structure, then at least in the goals – is particularly visible for publishing houses aligning with an ideology, a political party or a spiritual or religious movement. For example, Le Temps des Cerises in France, Beacon or Skinner House on the other side of the Atlantic or LefWord in India. These all primarily serve a cause, a religion or a vision of the world and are, to varying degrees, less interested in profitability targets. Their statutes, their structure and their governance models reflect this prioritising of goals. It should also be noted that anarchist and libertarian publishers – whether of the collectivist or individualist kind – are particularly mindful of the status of their editorial set-up, whether its statutory status or how it is run.

Finally, we come to university and academic publishers which is, undoubtedly, different again; are they part of social and solidarity publishing as such? Or do they come under the public and quasi-public publishing? In any event, they often fall into the *not for profit* category – at least in Europe – and act, or purport to act, for the common good, general interest and education of all.

But the social and solidarity dimension of an editorial enterprise is doubtless not to be found solely in its form - its statutes and its governance. Perhaps it resides also in its production, and even the very way in which books are conceived. This is the case in particular with all so-called "solidarity" co-publications instigated by the International Alliance of Independent Publishers<sup>10</sup> or by its members, some of whom sport the label "Fair Trade Book". It is perhaps the case with "collaborative" publishing initiatives, or where production models rely on "upstream solidarity" – for example, by turning to crowdfunding to enable a book to be published – or where there is a network of committed readers (as with Txalaparta in Spain), whose role includes ensuring some of the print run is sold.

This social and solidarity aspect can also be found, perhaps, in the ways in which the writing can be accessed. So, do all publishers who make their output available through *open access* believe in a new way of *acquiring* knowledge – a way which would not necessarily involve remuneration, a financial compensation? It is true that this system of diffusion relies essentially on the remuneration of authors (and production) by an "absent third party" – those doing the writing often being academics, the production of their books being paid for by their employer (the State) and being part of their job description.

Lastly, the social and solidarity commitment of a publishers could surely also be assessed on its business practices – regardless of the legal form of its structure or its catalogue. Does the publisher hire service-providers (such as printers) who have also adopted a sustainable approach? What environmental commitments has it made? Does it support its peers and other book professionals - especially book stores, some of whom are also similarly committed?

So, we can assess the social and solidarity dimension of a publishing house on its form (statutes and governance), on its production methods (the make up of its catalogue and how its portfolio is diffused) and on its practices.

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<sup>10</sup> For more on this and other matters, see the Alliance's latest Declaration: [http://www.alliance-editeurs.org/IMG/pdf/declaration\\_internationale\\_editeurs\\_et\\_editrices\\_independants\\_2014\\_web-2.pdf](http://www.alliance-editeurs.org/IMG/pdf/declaration_internationale_editeurs_et_editrices_independants_2014_web-2.pdf)

## A call for papers<sup>11</sup>

While the logic and impact of the production and distribution of books are more and more often called into question, we are also seeing the emergence of publishing initiatives or publishing houses – as well as other players involved in the book industry – that strive to rise to the environmental challenge by offering alternatives for the various book industry trades.

What are the most stand out initiatives of these two versions of the book industry trades? How could they connect to create a book that is "ecological, sustainable and socially responsible"? What would be on the spec sheet? Would a publisher with a responsible business strategy who displayed social solidarity and was committed to the environment have a future in publishing? How do those working in the book industry view the changes their jobs are going through regarding these "new" concerns?

What this edition of *Bibliodiversity* aims to do is to provide a clearer definition – drawing on academic writings and the experiences of those working in the book industry (see *Guidelines for Authors* below) – as to what exactly is an ecological, sustainable and socially responsible book.

Étienne Galiand, November 2019<sup>12</sup>

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## Publication planning

- We would appreciate it if you could submit **your contribution suggestions** to the editorial team **no later than the beginning of February 2020**.
- Articles can be submitted up to the **beginning of April 2020**. These deadlines are necessary to leave time for double blind proofreading, copy going back to authors for possible changes, typographical corrections and for the work to be laid out. Thank you for your understanding.
- The publication (in paper and digital form) of this work is scheduled for **June 2020**.

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<sup>11</sup> See the *Guidelines for authors* on the next page.

<sup>12</sup> Thanks to Laurence Hugues, Luc Pinhas and Thierry Quinqueton for their pertinent remarks for this request for contributions.

# Guidelines for authors

## A contribution suggestion

- This outlines the suggestion, the issue, the theoretical and methodological framework, the field and the main results of the analysis. The main body of the suggestion (excluding the bibliography) should run to **about 4,000 characters including spaces**.

## An article

- Articles should run to about **25-30,000 characters including spaces**.

## Biography

We request that our contributors send us their biographies. A biography should be fairly brief (**about 800 characters including spaces**) and include the author's key qualifications and career moves.

## Photo

Contributors should submit a photo of themselves. This should be recent and come in a .jpeg or .gif format with, if possible, a minimum of **de 300 dpi**.

## Synopsis

Writers are invited to submit a synopsis to the editorial team of their contribution, highlighting the key points of their reasoning and their main conclusions. This text should run to **about 1,000 characters including spaces**. The synopsis may be translated into English.

## Bibliographical references

- With regards to presenting bibliographical references, *Bibliodiversity* basically abides by the ISO 690 international standard ([http://fr.wikipedia.org/wiki/ISO\\_690](http://fr.wikipedia.org/wiki/ISO_690)).
- Only bibliographical references quoted and referred to in the text (including in graphs and graphics) will be included in the end article. Within the body of the text, by "referred to" we mean mentioning the name of the author and the year of publication. At the end of the article, these references will be listed in alphabetical order, without being numbered.

## Publication language

The article must be written in French.

## Visual elements

We encourage the use of visual elements, such as graphics, figures, graphs, photos and book covers to illustrate your writing.

## Changes made by the editorial team

In order to ensure *Bibliodiversity* is a quality periodical, the editorial team is sometimes forced to reduce the length of texts, reconsider the layout of sections, rewrite some of the content and alter all or part of the titles. Naturally, should the sub-editing prove extensive, the new article is shown to the original author. The purpose of any sub-editing is to support the words of the author while taking the reader's interests into account as well.