

Accessing Academia: The Promise and Perils of Publishing Accessible Academic Books

by

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B.A. (Hons.), Acadia University, 2015

Project Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the
Requirements for the Degree of
Master of Publishing

in the

Publishing Program

Faculty of Communication, Art and Technology

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SIMON FRASER UNIVERSITY

Summer 2023

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Abstract

Access to credible knowledge in Canada's changing cultural and political landscapes is crucial, and academic book publishers play a vital role in shaping public discourse and disseminating high-quality research. Despite the increasing popularity of e-books, publishers have failed to optimize accessibility features in this digital medium, due to the industry's print legacy, a lack of standardized accessibility guidelines, and toothless legislation. Academic book publishers encounter additional barriers in producing accessible books, including content complexity and institutional priorities. However, prioritizing accessibility is essential for upholding the rights of *all* Canadians.

This report explores the intersection of academic book publishing and accessibility in Canada. Using Fernwood Publishing as a case study, it analyzes common practices and barriers to producing accessible content, focusing on the EPUB 3 format. By leveraging technology and challenging legacy practices, academic publishers can enhance diversity in the cultural landscape and offer more accessible content to a broader audience.

Keywords: print disability; accessible workflow; e-book; digital production; EPUB 3; scholarly text

Acknowledgements

First and foremost, I am endlessly grateful to my parents for their unwavering support. Thank you for cheering me on, tolerating my late-night ramblings, and reminding me that there is, indeed, a limit to how much coffee one should consume. Your love and encouragement have been instrumental in helping me navigate this program.

To my incredible academic advising team, I am truly thankful for your guidance and wisdom. John Maxwell, your incisive and candid feedback brought me back from the brink of scholarly chaos more than a few times. Suzanne Norman, your expertise in the field has been an eye-opener, and your keen eye for detail and critical insights played a significant role in shaping this work.

A big thank you to my industry supervisor, mentor, and all-around cheerleader, Anumeha Gokhale, for introducing me to the surprisingly captivating world of academic book publishing, and for trusting me to run with new ideas and follow my passions. I am also grateful to Fernwood Publishing for providing such a supportive and inspiring work environment.

To the inspiring SFU Publishing faculty, your passion and commitment have made a profound impact on my journey, and your accessible approach to academia has made me feel like publishing is exactly where I belong.

To my amazing cohort, your talent and creativity never cease to amaze me, and I can't wait to see what incredible things we will all achieve! Despite the ups and downs of navigating grad school in such precarious times, I am grateful for the lifelong friendships forged while we were commiserating over sleepless nights, recording podcast episodes in closet forts, and inhaling iced coffees.

And most of all, a huge thank you to Jo-Anne for always being there to help me out in any state, no matter how frazzled I got. Your unwavering support and wildly entertaining stories have been an uplifting source of comfort throughout the program.

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List of Acronyms

ABC	Accessible Books Consortium
ACA	Accessible Canada Act
ACP	Association of Canadian Publishers
AI	Artificial Intelligence
ASA	American Sociological Association
ADE	Adobe Digital Editions
AODA	Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act
ARIA	Accessible Rich Internet Applications
BISAC	Book Industry Standards and Communications
C4DISC	Coalition for Diversity and Inclusion in Scholarly Communications
CBF	Canada Book Fund
CELA	the Centre for Equitable Library Access
CNIB	Canadian National Institute for the Blind
DAISY	Digital Accessible Information System
EAA	European Accessibility Act
EDiEUR	Equity Diversity and Inclusion Europe
EU	European Union
GCA	Global Certified Accessible
HTML	HyperText Markup Language
JAWS	Job Access With Speech
LIA	Libri Italiani Accessibili
MLA	Modern Language Association
NNELS	National Network for Equitable Library Service
NVDA	NonVisual Desktop Access
OAC	Ontario Arts Council
ONIX	Online Information Exchange
SEO	Search Engine Optimization
STEM	Science Technology Engineering Math
UX	User Experience
WCAG	Web Content Accessibility Guidelines
WIPO	World Intellectual Property Organization

Chapter 1.

Introduction

Access to credible knowledge has become increasingly important in the quickly evolving cultural and political landscapes in Canada today. Consequently, academic book publishers are a vital voice informing public discourse. They enable better access to knowledge by disseminating high-quality research, but more importantly, they have the power to make meaningful choices that reflect changing social norms, amplify diverse voices, and foster public engagement. Because academic book publishers operate in such close proximity to postsecondary institutions—within which exists a certain level of authority rooted in sociopolitical power imbalances—they are uniquely positioned to challenge historical exclusivity within the academic realm and contribute to a more equitable society.

Publishing efforts have been traditionally focused around print production, but technological evolutions in the past two decades are increasingly undermining this default. Material, printed publications are no longer the only format in which readers can—and want to—consume books. Publishing in a digital medium expands our understanding of the reader experience and presents unique opportunities to enhance accessibility more efficiently and cost-effectively compared to traditional print methods. And although the production process for digital books *is* arguably becoming more user-oriented, thus far, the industry has failed to optimize its inherent potential for improved accessibility.

However, this paper argues that accessibility shortcomings do not primarily stem from apathy. The publishing industry is founded on a long legacy of print practices and perspectives that have become deeply ingrained and normalized throughout its history. To put it into perspective, if we envisioned the entire history of publishing in a 24-hour timeframe, e-book production would have emerged just an hour ago and only gained cultural prominence in the last 40 minutes.¹ While

1. This timeline is based on Gutenberg's invention of the printing press in 1440, the first e-book reader to appear in the market (1998), and the release of Kindle (2007)

publishers have inarguably begun to challenge practices that no longer serve them in the new age of publishing, there is still a substantial amount of unlearning required—and the digital revolution has only just begun. Accessibility in publishing is gradually improving, but even the most well-intentioned publishers are constrained by historical influences, outdated practices, and technologies that do not adequately support more accessible workflows.

The impact of this legacy is perhaps best reflected through the challenging ambiguity that book publishers encounter when integrating accessible practices into their workflows. They are presented with complex and layered accessibility guidelines that come from various sources across Canada and globally. While there are some accessibility standards becoming more widely recognized, they are not yet standardized across the industry. Though they are evolving, and to an extent have become more centred around a single model, there is currently no regulatory body to oversee these developments or authority to enforce them. This muddies the waters for Canadian book publishers and impacts what they can or expect to do, many of whom also struggle with limited resources and expertise to streamline workflows without sufficient support. Without clearly defined accessibility standards or enforcement consequences, even well-meaning publishers can find it difficult to prioritize accessibility amid other immediate, competing priorities.

This confusion is compounded in academic book publishing, where producing accessible books becomes even more challenging. These publishers encounter accessibility challenges in kind while also confronting complications uniquely inherent to producing scholarly texts, such as content complexity, varying reference styles across different disciplines, and institutional priorities. This poses significant barriers to accessibility that exclusively trade-oriented publishers don't experience with the same voracity. Arguably, these issues are so much more pronounced in academic book publishing because the industry as a whole caters predominantly to the needs of trade books.²

While this framework may shed light on some of the accessibility shortcomings in academic publishing today, it remains the reality that this adversely impacts

2. BookNet Canada. 'The State of Publishing in Canada: 2021'. BookNet Canada, 30 May 2023. <https://www.booknetcanada.ca/state-of-publishing>.

readers—and none more so than those who rely on these inadequate accessibility features. In Canada, academic book publishers are afforded a position of authority and endorsed by formal systems validating their role as curators of knowledge. This comes with a cultural responsibility to honour the rights of every Canadian citizen by ensuring the accessibility of the publications they produce. Individuals with print disabilities and visual impairments should not have to jump through hoops to access the content readily available to their peers—barriers to access in everyday life are challenging enough already.

With that in mind, the goal of this report is to examine the critical intersection of academic book publishing and accessibility in Canada, structured to unfold in four stages. First, it will provide an overview of academic book publishing—distinct from *educational* publishing—in Canada and contextualize its influential role within the broader culture, both as university-affiliated and independent presses. Second, it will examine the accessibility landscape in Canada today: the forces that have shaped it, what it means to be ‘accessible,’ and why it can be difficult to neatly define this concept. Third, it will deconstruct the barriers facing book publishers to developing accessible workflows, looking particularly at how complications disproportionately impact *academic* book publishers. Lastly, it will challenge the validity of these barriers, arguing that the lingering influence of legacy workflows is being increasingly undermined by the significant social and technical developments that support optimized accessibility work.

Bearing in mind these developments, the demand for academic book publishers to develop more inclusive, accessible content is becoming less of an option, and more a matter of law in Canadian and global markets. Arguably, the weight of responsibility is even heavier for *independent* academic publishers, who are held to the same expectations—and come up against the same challenges—as university-affiliated presses, but without access to the same resources or cultural capital. In partial fulfilment of the requirements for the Master of Publishing degree, I recently completed a professional placement at one such publishing house—Fernwood Publishing (Fernwood), a small independent academic trade publisher based in Nova Scotia. Consequently, I will draw examples from my experience throughout this report to contextualize discussions with qualitative and quantitative data. It’s important to note that *independent* academic book publishers are the minority in this corner of the

market, and so not every reference will translate seamlessly to the realities of *all* Canadian academic book publishers. Instead, Fernwood will serve as a case study to reflect some common practices, perspectives, and roadblocks to producing, disseminating, and curating scholarly knowledge.

1.1. Scope

1.1.1. Navigating the interplay between accessibility and inclusivity

Accessibility and *inclusivity* are related but distinct concepts in publishing. While *accessibility* refers to the design and delivery of content in a way that allows everyone to access and use it, *inclusivity* considers ways to create, disseminate, and curate content in a way that recognizes and respects the diversity of readers to promote equity and social justice.

While both concepts are vital for ensuring that content is available and usable to a diverse audience, this report focuses primarily on *accessibility* processes, which aim to ensure content is presented in formats that can be easily accessed and consumed by people with print disabilities, visual impairments, hearing impairments, mobility limitations, or language-based learning disabilities. Production and design workflows can optimize *accessibility* by creating alternative formats and designing content in a way that makes it easy to read, navigate, and interact with using assistive technologies like screen readers or captioning.

Although *inclusivity* considerations are secondary in this report, there is an inherent overlap between the two concepts, and they cannot be fully understood independent from one another. Considerations around *inclusivity* are integral to the success of accessible design because they can impact the consequences of design decisions in indirect, but significant, ways. For instance, while it is beyond the scope of this report to explore how to effectively promote diverse voices in book publishing, a central tenet of its thesis is to acknowledge how the diversity of content and readership directly influences the way texts are—and can be—interpreted by the reader. When trying to understand barriers to *accessibility*, it is critical to challenge whether or not our beliefs are *actually* shaped by a comprehensive reflection of the

diverse makeup of society, and consider how reductionist presumptions impact the tools we use and the ways in which we choose to use them.

1.1.2. Beyond print: zooming in on digital e-book production

Accessibility in book publishing encompasses so much more than how books are used, and optimizing the accessibility of a book requires a holistic approach that extends well beyond production and design choices. Although adopting this philosophy is exceptionally useful to understand the magnitude of what it means for a book to be considered truly accessible, unpacking the numerous forces at play in achieving this goes beyond the scope of this report. Thus, in this context, the terms ‘accessibility’ and ‘accessible publishing’ will primarily refer to the production of books in the digital format. In particular, the measure of accessibility will focus on screen readers and their interpretations of the EPUB 3 file format.

According to the Canadian National Institute for the Blind (CNIB), EPUB is the industry standard for digital content, and offers readers with visual impairments and print disabilities an “enhanced reading experience”³ with the same advantages afforded to readers without a print disability. The emergence of EPUB 3 offered significant accessibility breakthroughs by incorporating key accessibility features into a mainstream book publishing format that were previously restricted to a specialist one.⁴ Notably, EPUB 3 files are also backwards compatible, which means that older readers are not excluded from access, thus adding another important layer of accessibility.

3. CNIB Beyond Print, ‘Making an Accessible EPUB’, CNIB Beyond Print, n.d., <https://cnib-beyondprint.ca/making-an-accessible-epub/>.

4. Laura Brady, ‘Ebook Accessibility: Here’s What You Might Be Missing’, EPUBSecrets, 6 March 2018, <https://epubsecrets.com/ebook-accessibility-heres-what-you-might-be-missing.php>.

Chapter 2.

From Ideas to Impact: Academic Book Publishing in Canada

Academic book publishers in Canada hold profound cultural influence, both informing and informed by the exchange of critical ideas. They play a significant role in shaping intellectual discourse, with the power to captivate minds, the authority to challenge conventions, and the platform to amplify diverse voices. They are well-positioned to act as catalysts of positive change. As such, the pressing need for academic book publishers to develop more accessible workflows cannot be understood independent of the cultural responsibility they bear. These intersecting realities provide valuable context that highlight the importance of accessibility in the scholarly realm. By first distinguishing academic book publishers from their counterparts in trade book publishing, this chapter will examine their role in the broader culture, revealing the profound effect this positioning has on Canadian society.

2.1. Definitions

To effectively frame the subsequent discussions, it is important to first differentiate between trade book publishing, academic book publishing, and a hybrid model combining the two. These three publishing spheres help make up the broader industry, and although they share commonalities in content creation and distribution, their audiences, objectives, approaches, and measures of success vary significantly. Recognizing the ways in which they are distinct offers an important framework for understanding the unique dynamics in academic book publishing and their implications in this report.

2.1.1. Trade publishing

Trade book publishing focuses on producing books intended for a general readership and are not typically written by authors affiliated with academic institutions. These books cover a wide range of genres and subjects, including fiction, non-fiction,

memoirs, self-help, cookbooks, and more. In most cases, trade books seek to reach the public as a whole,⁵ and so publishers work closely with bookstores, online retailers, and other sales channels accessible to the general public. Because trade books are considered for their market appeal and cultural value, their success is typically measured by sales and visible acclaim.

2.1.2. Academic publishing

On the other hand, academic book publishing is centred around producing scholarly works that contribute to the advancement of knowledge and intellectual discourse. It is concerned with the needs of the scholarly community and more targeted towards students and academics within specific disciplines, often resulting in institutional collaborations to ensure the quality and credibility of content.⁶ Because these books are typically authored by scholars, researchers, and academics who are experts in their respective fields, the subject matter can be quite specialized to address specific topics, which are often encompassed by the social sciences. The primary measures of success are rooted in scholarly capital, evidenced by course adoptions or author collaborations, and in their contributions to the academic community and broader intellectual discourse. Thus, these books are primarily distributed through academic channels such as libraries, universities, and other institutions.

It's worth noting that *educational* publishing, while related to academic publishing, is a distinct segment beyond the scope of this report. Both involve creating and distributing books or materials for learning purposes, so sales *can* overlap. But, there are key distinctions in target audiences, depth of knowledge presented, and distribution channels. Academic publishers focus on specialized and advanced topics for higher learning, while educational publishing caters to a broader range of subjects and grade levels in primary and secondary education. The two segments are not mutually exclusive, and publishers can dabble in both markets, but it's more common for them to prioritize one over the other based on their strengths, expertise, resources, and market demand. While many of the arguments presented in this report

5. Mollie Broad, 'Book Publicity: Trade vs. Academic Publishing', 16 November 2015, <https://bookmachine.org/2015/11/16/book-publicity-trade-vs-academic-publishing/>.

6. Broad, 'Book Publicity: Trade vs. Academic Publishing'.

may overlap with the experiences of educational publishers, the focus will be limited to publishers who prioritize academic and scholarly book publishing.

2.1.3. Academic trade publishing

Academic trade book publishers, such as Fernwood, find themselves in a unique position by operating at the intersection between the trade and academic sectors. They typically publish sociopolitical books that appeal not only to scholars and students but also to socially engaged general readers. To succeed in serving this broad readership, they must adopt an inclusivity-focused approach in all aspects—from acquisition, to production, marketing, and distribution. In essence, this hybrid publishing model allows them to present complex scholarly ideas by using more reader-friendly language, simplifying book formats, and reducing price points, all of which make the content more accessible to the general public.

As such, these books cater to two markets simultaneously: they serve as primary or supplementary books in postsecondary classrooms and also attract general readers interested in a particular subject. Because course adoptions afford academic books a longer shelf life, the success of these books is not driven by seasonal demand to the same degree as it is for trade books. However, as with any thoughtfully designed product, academic trade books still need to ride the waves of popular culture in order to find success. Fernwood sales data nicely contextualizes these claims: between 2019 and 2020, 26 percent of Fernwood’s total sales came through trade sales channels, compared with 49 percent of those made through academic channels.⁷

2.1.4. A note about Fernwood Publishing

This report draws from examples at Fernwood that offer some insights and data on academic trade publishers. However, it’s important to note that publishers who adopt this hybrid model represent only a portion of Canada’s broader academic book publishing market. Fernwood wears many hats and faces various challenges including those unique to academic book publishing, but also extending to others more common

7. Fernwood Publishing, ‘FP Lifetimes Sales Analysis’ (Unpublished Internal Document, January 2023).

to independent presses, the latter of which are beyond the scope of this report. While some barriers to accessibility can become more pronounced for independent publishers, many of the arguments discussed also translate well to university presses. Therefore, throughout this report, the term ‘academic book publisher’ will be used synonymously with ‘academic trade book publisher.’ By considering the experiences and practices of Fernwood and similar publishers, it aims to shed light on the broader landscape of academic book publishing in Canada to highlight shared obstacles and opportunities in the industry.

2.2. Dimensions of the Canadian market

It’s difficult to pinpoint the exact number of book publishers operating in Canada due to various factors, including the fluidity of operations in a dynamic market, the occurrence of buyouts and consolidations, and the voluntary nature of memberships to industry associations. Nevertheless, we can gain valuable insights about key players in the market by analyzing the available data from industry organizations. The proceeding analysis considered the following factors:

1. Members of the Association of Canadian Publishers (ACP) listed under the “academic/scholarly” sector⁸;
2. Canadian publishers listed on the *Publishers Global* website using the “book” and “academic” filters⁹; and
3. Respondents in the 2021 *State of Publishing in Canada* report from BookNet Canada (BookNet), which is estimated to represent about 72 percent of the English-language print book market.¹⁰

While the data is not definitive, it suggests that around 25 percent of Canadian publishers focus on the “academic/scholarly” sector as one of their primary areas. This means that one-quarter of all Canadian book publishers are largely responsible

8. ACP, ‘Our Members - Association of Canadian Publishers’, 25 May 2021, <https://publishers.ca/our-members/>, <https://publishers.ca/our-members/>.

9. Publishers Global. ‘Book Publishers of Canada - List of Book Publishing Companies of Canada That Publish Book’. PublishersGlobal.com. Accessed 31 July 2023. <https://www.publishersglobal.com/directory/canada/media/book-publishers>.

10. BookNet Canada. ‘The State of Publishing in Canada: 2021’.

for shaping intellectual discourse and advancing scholarly knowledge in the country. Of course, it would be flippant to suggest that only ‘scholarly’ books are the ones being used in academic settings, or that internationally published titles aren’t integrated into syllabi. The point is rather to highlight the enormous responsibility on academic book publishers to produce credible, high-quality content that recurrently contributes to the development and reproduction of scholarly knowledge. The available data thus gives us a glimpse of the significant influence that academic publishers have in Canada and underscores the importance of their role in supporting academic pursuits and fostering knowledge dissemination.

2.2.1. Subject focus areas

Scholarly communication is intended to benefit the general population to advance the pursuit of knowledge, and thus must be developed in a way that considers society as a whole.¹¹ This is particularly poignant for academic book publishers because they traditionally produce books that cater to social disciplines—namely humanities, social sciences, and history. This tendency is largely informed by format demands: the concise and specialized nature of journal formats often lends itself better to science, technology, engineering, and math (STEM) research, whereas the book format more effectively serves the needs of research in the social sciences. Studies in the latter discipline inherently explore the human experience in some capacity, which rely on narrative-building, in-depth analyses, comprehensive arguments, and contextual explorations. These elements all benefit more from a long-form publication.

It’s also worth noting that at the individual level, academic book publishers often specialize in specific disciplines. Focus areas may vary depending on their mission statement, editorial specialization, institutional affiliations, or market demands. Whatever the influence, carving out a niche in the market allows them to establish expertise, build focused catalogues, and effectively cater to the needs of scholars, researchers, and students in those fields. This highlights the cultural responsibility of

11. C4DISC, ‘C4DISC Guidelines on Inclusive Language and Images in Scholarly Communication’, Association of Learned and Professional Society Publishers, 20 October 2022, <https://alpsp.org/News/c4disc-guidelines-on-inclusive-language-and-images-in-scholarly-communication-october-2022>.

academic book publishers in a significant way: while not mutually exclusive by any means, there is less competitive overlap in academic book publishing compared with trade publishing. This highlights the depth of responsibility that academic book publishers have as arbiters of knowledge, because postsecondary institutions rely heavily on content produced by academic book publishers for course adoption, with fewer publishers—relative to trade—competing to develop this type of content.

2.2.2. Postsecondary demand

Without access to clear sales data across all academic book publishers, looking at student enrollment data can be a good alternative point of reference to grasp the significance and reach these publishers have in the market. The most recent data available was calculated between 2020 and 2021, during which time, 2,117,862 students were enrolled in postsecondary institutions across Canada.¹² *Statista* breaks this data down further by field of study, which presents an opportunity to apply the discussions from section 2.2.1. to draw more precise conclusions about the demand for academic books in postsecondary institutions. Of the 14 defined fields of study for students enrolled in Canadian postsecondary institutions, six represent typical subject areas for academic book publishers, as identified in the previous section.¹³ Without taking into consideration the number of students who take classes outside of their program discipline (e.g., a chemistry major taking a sociology elective), this leaves roughly 1,070,718 students who are potentially in a position where they are expected, or encouraged, to buy at least one book published by an academic publisher.¹⁴

These numbers are not exhaustive by any means, but do provide a helpful framework for consideration. For instance, they don't account for the number of students using course packs or cases where instructors do not assign academic books. On the other hand, they also don't reflect courses where multiple academic books are assigned, or when students opt for second-hand books to save costs.

12. Statista Research Department, 'Enrollment of Students in Postsecondary Institutions in Canada 2020/21, by Province', Statista, 30 November 2022, <https://www-statista-com.proxy.lib.sfu.ca/statistics/447802/enrollment-of-postsecondary-students-in-canada-by-province/>.

13. Statista Research Department, 'Canada: University/College Enrollment 2021, by Field of Study', Statista, 30 November 2022, <https://www.statista.com/statistics/447843/postsecondary-enrollments-in-canada-by-instructional-program/>.

14. Statista Research Department, 'Canada University/College Enrollment by Field'.

Student enrollment data provides valuable insights into the potential demand for academic books, but it is essential to recognize the limitations of these statistics to adequately reflect the full scope of academic book usage in postsecondary institutions.

2.2.3. Currency of prestige

When considering *independent* academic book publishers with no university affiliation, the available data indicates that the number of scholarly-oriented book publishers drops to about 7 percent. This figure is consistent with the proportional breakdown of respondents in the *State of Publishing in Canada* report from BookNet in 2021.¹⁵ Delving further into the statistics to contextualize their position within the niche of academic book publishing, smaller publishers only make up around 28 percent of the market.^{16 17} As such, they are entering the arena at a significant disadvantage, facing considerable pressure to compete with university-backed heavyweights who also cater to the scholarly community.¹⁸ In addition to discrepancies in financial and institutional support, university presses represent a perceived prestige to potential authors. They maintain a certain level of institutional capital based on their association with rigid academic processes—namely, peer reviews and fact checking. This association, albeit legitimate, is all-too-often reserved for large presses, fuelling the fallacy that small presses *not* affiliated with an institution exist in juxtaposition and thus don't follow similarly rigorous practices to ensure academic integrity. But this is simply not the case.

Even though the distinction in esteem is both facile and intangible, it leads to tangible consequences. For instance, academic departments will often discount publications from publishers that are not university presses. This not only diminishes the efforts exerted by an academic author throughout their career, but it can also undermine their candidacy for promotion or tenure. For similar reasons, university presses are regarded in such a way that invites more citations of their respective publications compared with independent presses. Scholarly books are published

15. BookNet Canada. 'The State of Publishing in Canada: 2021'.

16. ACP, 'Our Members - Association of Canadian Publishers'.

17. Publishers Global, 'Book Publishers of Canada'.

18. ACP, 'Our Members - Association of Canadian Publishers'.

inside an ecosystem of prestige where citation is currency, and authors cannot deny these material conditions when choosing where to publish.¹⁹

This means that academic authors have a difficult choice to make when selecting a publisher. Depending on the goals and working style of the author, opting for an independent academic publisher can have significant benefits. These houses are highly specialized in their overall focus and are more likely to have a vested interest in the success of their authors. Whereas larger academic publishers often have editors with different specialities who take on projects based on their expertise, in smaller presses with a niche cultural or political vision, oftentimes staff working in other departments are *also* interested in and knowledgeable about the subject matter. Consequently, authors might feel better supported at *every* stage of the process, from acquisition, to production, to marketing and promotion. Moreover, independent publishers typically offer more attention, flexibility, creative freedom, and editorial control to their authors. However, authors need to weigh this appeal against the inherent intellectual and cultural capital associated with institutional affiliation, and assess the potential impacts this choice can have on their career. Although independent academic book publishers arguably offer a more personalized service compared to university presses, they are forced to expend greater marketing efforts—with smaller teams and lower budgets—to compete effectively in the market.

2.3. Between the lines: what it means to be an academic book publisher

Both university-affiliated and small independent book publishers contribute to the diversity and richness of academic publishing in Canada. According to the Coalition for Diversity and Inclusion in Scholarly Communications (C4DISC), scholarly communication can be defined as “the system through which research and other scholarly writings are created, evaluated for quality, disseminated to the scholarly community, and preserved for future use.”²⁰ Academic book publishers are vital to upholding this system. At its core, academic book publishing is both a producer and

19. Fernwood Publishing, Internal Interview with Fernwood Managing Editor Beverley Rach, Zoom, 5 June 2023.

20. C4DISC, ‘C4DISC Guidelines on Inclusive Language and Images in Scholarly Communication’.

an archiver of information, providing a wide-reaching platform to help facilitate the pursuit of knowledge and preserving innovation in material and digital forms. These publishers foster and celebrate diversity within the cultural ecosystem, and help shape a broader discourse that informs, and is informed by, the culture it serves. The cultural implications that come with holding this position are significant and complex.

2.3.1. Providing a platform for reliable intellectual knowledge

Academic book publishers provide a platform for scholars, researchers, and academics to contribute to the advancement of knowledge and critical thinking and are responsible for upholding high academic standards that ensure the integrity of scholarly publications. Thorough fact-checking and rigorous peer-review practices are common across university presses and independent publishers alike and are useful to ensure that both the author(s) *and* publisher are held accountable for their research. These comprehensive processes lend themselves well to the credibility of academic book publishers, signifying that their publications are reliable and accurate sources of knowledge in a cultural landscape where such reliability is increasingly obscured.

2.3.2. Shaping public discourse by promoting diversity

Because academic book publishers reflect changing social norms and cultural landscapes through the works they publish, their acquisition choices are impactful. They are well-positioned to actively promote diversity, inclusivity, and equity by amplifying underrepresented voices, addressing societal issues, and encouraging critical thinking. Notably, by choosing to publish works that challenge established paradigms and explore emerging topics, academic book publishers in Canada contribute to the cultural dialogue in a meaningful way.

2.3.3. Preserving and celebrating cultural heritage

With so much cultural and intellectual capital, academic book publishers can be instrumental in celebrating, disseminating, and preserving cultural heritage, making select works more accessible to the public and ensuring their availability to future generations. This includes publishing scholarly editions, translations, and critical analyses of historical texts and cultural artifacts. As Cree author David A. Robertson

points out, publishers are “in the business of reconciliation, [which] requires us to put books in the hands of kids that teach them about other cultures, other experiences, lived experiences.”²¹ By acknowledging the nature of scholarly publishing and its influence over public discourse, academic book publishers should maintain Robertson’s perspective—and reflect it in their practices—at the highest possible level.

2.4. A closer look at Fernwood Publishing

This chapter has examined the critical position that academic book publishers occupy within the cultural ecosystem, revealing how their commitment to preserving, curating, and disseminating research fosters intellectual and social growth, and directly contributes to the cultural vibrancy of Canadian academia. The goal of this section is to ground these concepts in real life examples, using Fernwood as a case study to contextualize the subject matter, institutional demand, and cultural position of academic book publishers. Independently owned and operated with nine full-time staff members at the time of writing this report, Fernwood—and their imprint, Roseway Publishing—publish between 25 and 30 titles a year, predominantly categorized under the Online Information Exchange (ONIX) audience codes “college/higher education” and “professional and scholarly.”^{22 23} Despite its small size, Fernwood dominates the academic book publishing market in Atlantic Canada, as quantified through an analysis of examination (exam) requests received—where instructors can request full book texts related to the courses they teach to make informed decisions about which books to course-adopt—and sales data.

In the past five years, Fernwood received an average of 1,091 exam requests per year, predominantly (71 percent) for books subcategorized under the Book Industry Standards and Communications (BISAC) parent category “social science”—

21. Ed Nawotka, ‘Publishing in Canada 2022: Canadian Publishing Adapts to New Challenges’, Publishers Weekly, 23 September 2022, <https://www.publishersweekly.com/pw/by-topic/international/international-book-news/article/90395-publishing-in-canada-2022-canadian-publishing-adapts-to-new-challenges.html>.

22. This is distinct from the ONIX audience code “primary and secondary/elementary and high school,” which would typically fall under the purview of educational publishers. more “educational.”

23. Fernwood Publishing, ‘Internal Document’ (Unpublished Internal Document, June 2023).

namely, “Indigenous studies,” followed by “social work” and “discrimination.”²⁴ Exam request trends indicate that these three branches of social science are of the most interest to Fernwood’s customer base, which is corroborated by their sales data. Looking at Fernwood’s lifetime sales (1995–2020) by subject category, “Indigenous studies” dominate total book sales with over 160,000 copies sold.²⁵ It’s perhaps worth noting here that it can be difficult to clearly define conversion rates or draw cut-and-dry conclusions about course adoptions based solely on sales—some classes have six students enrolled, while others have 300. However, even with this ambiguity, there has been a strong correlation (over 60 percent) between the top exam request titles and the top-selling books in the past five years at Fernwood.

2.5. Chapter recap: lessons learned and the road ahead

This chapter discussed the influential role that academic book publishers occupy in Canada and the significant responsibility they carry. Their cultural position has afforded them a certain level of authority over knowledge that, historically, granted academic book publishers power—power that now enables them to challenge norms, amplify diverse voices, and use their culturally endorsed platform to effect positive change. This underscores the moral imperative of developing accessible workflows, extending beyond technical necessity.

Building on this foundation, the next chapter will critically analyze the sociohistorical influences shaping the current accessibility landscape in Canadian publishing. It will delve into the complexities of accessibility as both a concept and practice, examining the considerations faced by book publishers committed to this goal. By providing a critical framework, we gain a deeper understanding of the formidable barriers that hinder even the most well-intentioned academic publishers in their quest to produce accessible books.

24. Fernwood Publishing, ‘Exam Requests Breakdown’ (Unpublished Internal Document, June 2023).

25. Fernwood Publishing, ‘FP Lifetimes Sales Analysis’.

Chapter 3.

Accessibility Overview

In accordance with Bill C-81 (2019), full, equal access to publicly available texts is the right of every Canadian, regardless of ability.²⁶ Yet, this is often not the reality for individuals with print disabilities or visual impairments because accessibility “tends to extend as an addendum”²⁷ rather than a priority. But this is not a useful script to follow: it breeds inefficient workflows founded on practices of exclusion. While Canadian publishers—and the broader culture—have, over time, made strides in developing more equitable practices, there is still a lot of work to be done. For academic book publishers, in particular, this work begins with awareness: the development of more effective and efficient accessibility practices relies on their commitment to acknowledge historical influences shaping current practices, to understand the diversity of the audiences they serve, and to identify the factors that inherently complicate their efforts to produce accessible content.

3.1. Reflecting on history

Throughout history, access to content has been controlled by the dominant class who created it, and this privileged practice has informed the accessibility issues that we still see today. These “complex and mutually reinforcing connections between societal contexts and curatorial paradigms”²⁸ have not historically taken the needs of disability communities into consideration. As such, it’s impossible to reimagine existing systems and processes around accessibility without first understanding the historical context and how it manifests in modern-day workflows.

26. Parliament of Canada, ‘Government Bill (House of Commons) C-81 (42-1) - Royal Assent - Accessible Canada Act - Parliament of Canada’, 21 June 2019, <https://www.parl.ca/DocumentViewer/en/42-1/bill/C-81/royal-assent>.

27. PUBLIC Journal, Shawn Newman interviews Amy Rollason PUBLIC Journal, Zoom (transcription), 2 December 2021, <http://www.publicjournal.ca/rollason/>.

28. Michael Bhaskar, ‘Curation in Publishing: Curatorial Paradigms, Filtering, and the Structure of Editorial Choice’, in *The Oxford Handbook of Publishing*, ed. Angus Phillips and Michael Bhaskar (Oxford University Press, 2019), 0, <https://doi.org/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780198794202.013.6>.

Accessibility is not a new concept. According to John Phillip Oliphant, a historian of publishing for the blind, efforts to develop tactile reading systems for the blind date back to the mid-eighteenth century.²⁹ Braille, a reading and writing system still used today, was developed in the 1820s. However, this is just a small part of the story. Louis Braille, who went completely blind at the age of three, invented the tactile system bearing his name nine years after losing his vision. This made braille the only tactile system at the time to have developed out of the *actual* lived experience of someone visually impaired. This arguably made it the most optimal and user-friendly tactile system available. However, blindness was historically linked to inferiority, and this pervasive narrative informed deep-seated prejudices in the culture. As a result, sighted readers felt entitled to decide *on behalf of* visually impaired readers which reading systems were best. This considerably stunted braille's widespread adoption and left many visually impaired readers with difficult, suboptimal tools to access the same information available to the general population.³⁰

While society has arguably made progress in acknowledging and respecting the experiences of blind and visually impaired communities, the historical stigma surrounding them has had a lasting impact on the state of accessibility in Canadian publishing. The publishing industry has developed in relation to the culture it serves and cannot be fully understood without considering the lingering effects of discriminatory practices and perspectives. Critical social theory proposes that the consequences of history impact the systems and infrastructures we engage with today.^{31 32} Given that books have historically played a role in perpetuating class divisions, it is reasonable to suggest that ableist perspectives have become deeply ingrained in publishing practices, influencing our approach to prioritizing and designing accessible content.

29. John Oliphant, "'Touching the Light': The Invention of Literacy for the Blind', *Paedagogica Historica* 44, no. 1–2 (February 2008): 67–82, <https://doi.org/10.1080/00309230701865421>.

30. Oliphant, "'Touching the Light'".

31. Karl Marx, 'A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy', in *Marx Today: Selected Works and Recent Debates*, ed. John F. Sitton (New York: Palgrave Macmillan US, 2010), 91–94, https://doi.org/10.1057/9780230117457_5.

32. Tony Simmons, *Restless Ideas: Contemporary Social Theory in an Anxious Age* (Halifax, Nova Scotia: Fernwood Publishing, 2020).

3.2. The demand for accessible content

3.2.1. Demographics of disability

To fully grasp the importance of accessibility and the consequences of neglecting it, unpacking key Canadian demographics is a useful place to start. The following figures, though not exhaustive, aim to provide a foundational understanding of the Canadian population and thus serve as a backdrop for the proceeding discussion.

- An estimated three million Canadians meet strict criteria for having a print disability.³³
- 15 to 20 percent of Canadians have some form of a language-based learning disability.³⁴
- The most common print disability is dyslexia, which affects around 10 to 20 percent of the population.³⁵
- By 2030, 25 percent of Canadians will be aged 65 or over, and one in nine will experience irreversible vision loss. This will become one in four by the age of 75.³⁶
- Among Canadians with a vision disability, 10.8 percent use one or more technology-based assistive devices.³⁷

3.2.2. Postsecondary student demographics

It is difficult to obtain accurate statistics on the number of Canadian postsecondary students with print disabilities or visual impairments for two main reasons. First, relying solely on self-disclosure is not a reliable measure, as not all students with disabilities choose to disclose this information. Second, not every

33. CELA, 'About Us', n.d., <https://celalibrary.ca/about-us>.

34. Laura Brady and Daniella Levy-Pinto, 'Accessible Ebook Publishing in Canada: The Business Case', *Inclusive Publishing* (blog), 18 June 2019, <https://inclusivepublishing.org/blog/accessible-ebook-publishing-the-business-case/>.

35. Dyslexia Canada, 'Who We Are', Dyslexia Canada, n.d., <https://www.dyslexiacanada.org/en/who-we-are>.

36. Brady and Levy-Pinto, 'Accessible Ebook Publishing in Canada'.

37. Rebecca Choi, 'Accessibility Findings from the Canadian Survey on Disability, 2017', Statistics Canada, 27 October 2021, <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/pub/89-654-x/89-654-x2021002-eng.htm>.

student with a disability requests institutional support or additional learning accommodations. This is further complicated by various external factors, such as accessibility of educational materials and the efficacy of institutional accommodations, which directly affect the level of agency that individuals can exercise in their academic pursuits.

Given the inherent gaps in this demographic data, applying the Canadian disability statistics proportionally to Canadian postsecondary enrollment numbers can be a useful alternative measure of determining the number of readers who would be most impacted by inaccessible book production in Canada. Using this rationale, between 2020 and 2021, an estimated 171,547 students with some form of a print disability were enrolled in Canadian postsecondary institutions. Of these students, 89,183 were pursuing disciplines that align with the typical areas of specialization for academic book publishers.^{38 39} Using these measures for students with language-based learning disabilities, there were an estimated 370,626 and 192,679 enrolled students, respectively^{40 41}.

While this may be a useful exercise to better grasp the reach of academic book publishers, allowing for the proportional application of Canadian disability statistics to student enrollment numbers can be problematic, as fewer people with disabilities statistically attend postsecondary schools.⁴² This disparity can be attributed to various factors, including a lack of institutional accessibility and accommodation, financial barriers, and societal attitudes. So, while the numbers presented are not a definitive measure of readership, their inherent ambiguity reinforces the need for books to be made as accessibly as possible to help reduce the challenges that prospective and existing students with disabilities face in postsecondary institutions.

3.3. (Attempting to) define what makes content accessible

38. Statista Research Department, 'Canada University/College Enrollment by Province'.

39. Statista Research Department, 'Canada University/College Enrollment by Field'.

40. Statista Research Department, 'Canada University/College Enrollment by Province'.

41. Statista Research Department, 'Canada University/College Enrollment by Field'.

42. Adele D. Furrie, 'Post-Secondary Students with Disabilities: Their Experience — Past and Present' (National Educational Association of Disabled Students (NEADS), November 2015), <https://www.neads.ca/en/about/media/Final%20reportCSD2012AdeleFurrie2-3.pdf>.

Print disabilities and visual impairments exist on a wide spectrum, meaning that what constitutes accessibility for one individual may not necessarily be accessible for another. Generally speaking, an accessible book is one that offers “maximum flexibility of user experience for all readers and allows the content to be accessed and manipulated with ease,”⁴³ regardless of ability. However, in practice, achieving true accessibility poses challenges. So, what exactly is hindering progress in this area?

To adequately answer this question, it is first important to provide the necessary context. The following section will thus examine the current landscape of accessibility and unpack how a lack of standardized guidelines and toothless legislations can cause massive confusion that impact what publishers can or expect to do. Moreover, it will summarize the various considerations involved in defining content as accessible, explore additional dimensions of accessibility that apply to all Canadian publishers, and deconstruct the implications of ‘born accessible’ book production.

3.3.1. Delivering accessibility in the current publishing landscape

The purpose of most accessibility work in publishing today is to enable the interpretability of content for screen readers to bridge the gap between what sighted readers and technology-reliant readers are able to take away from the book. However, due to the audio format of screen readers, they cannot fully replicate the traditional reading experience, making this task quite challenging. Even if screen readers were extensively optimized and customized for individual users, it would put readers who rely solely on this technology at a disadvantage from the onset. This is particularly problematic, considering that screen readers are imperfect technologies to begin with. Consequently, despite being beyond a book producer’s control, the limitations and inherent shortcomings of screen readers place more pressure on publishers to deliver e-books that are well designed, fully compatible and integrate robust accessibility features. However, workflows in the current Canadian book publishing landscape do not reflect this reality.

43. Sarah Hilderley, ‘Accessible Publishing Best Practice Guidelines for Publishers’, Accessible Books Consortium, April 2011, https://www.accessiblebooksconsortium.org/publishing/accessible_best_practice_guidelines_for_publishers.

Interestingly, the findings published by BookNet in the 2021 *State of Publishing in Canada* report presented e-book and accessibility statistics in a relatively optimistic light. However, delving deeper into the implications reveals a less progressive reality. To begin, the report claimed that 95 percent of publishers producing e-books used “at least one accessibility feature,”⁴⁴ citing navigational aids, alternative text (alt text), heading hierarchies, and semantic tags as principal examples. However, as the following sections will demonstrate, guidelines for accessibility are layered and complex. Even if we presupposed that all three of these features were used together—which the report explicitly refutes—their combined use would still fail to meet the minimum requirements needed for content to successfully pass through an accessibility validator, such as Ace by the Digital Accessible Information System (DAISY) Consortium.

The way in which BookNet presents these numbers suggests something interesting about the way Canadian publishers understand what it means for an e-book to be accessible: there is still a lot of ambiguity, leaving room for interpretation. However, it would be unfair to place the blame on individual book publishers, particularly because variations in municipal, provincial, and federal legislation and regulation create confusion about who is *actually* responsible for—and to what extent—making content accessible.

3.3.2. Understanding accessibility as User Experience (UX)

An accessible book affords *everyone* an equal opportunity to access the content in a way that best suits their needs. Therefore, achieving true accessibility involves addressing a range of potential difficulties that can be found at the intersection of four interrelated aspects:⁴⁵

1. The technical nature of the product: No file format is accessible by default, but different formats—and the programs in which they are developed—vary in their potential for accessibility. Moreover, the

44. BookNet Canada, ‘The State of Publishing in Canada: 2021’, BookNet Canada, 30 May 2023, <https://www.booknetcanada.ca/state-of-publishing>.

45. Laura Brady, ‘Accessible Publishing in Action’, BookMachine, 1 February 2021, <https://bookmachine.org/2021/02/01/accessible-publishing-in-action/>.

software or tools used to access content are better optimized to interpret some formats (e.g. EPUB 3) over others (e.g. PDF).

2. The capacity of assistive technologies: Technologies such as screen readers, voice-to-text software, and e-book readers vary in their development and performance, meaning different platforms excel—or struggle—with interpreting different features and functionalities.
3. The user's skills, familiarity with, and/or access to technologies: The ability to interact with an accessible book depends on the individual's technological skills, familiarity with the tools, and access to the necessary devices or software.
4. Simple, well-designed interfaces tested with print-impaired users: This aspect remains a significant challenge for Canadian book publishers. In 2021, only 7 percent of publishers reported conducting in-house testing by people with disabilities, and no publishers hired individuals with disabilities specifically to test their e-books.⁴⁶

It is important to keep these interrelated aspects in mind to better understand the challenges in addressing accessibility. The following section will peel back some of the layers involved in achieving an accessible workflow, and how this process is complicated by confusing standards, limited resources, and technological capabilities.

3.3.3. Convoluted compliance standards

Canada has yet to establish a clear accessibility mandate for the publishing industry, but legislative precedents at the provincial and federal levels—including the *Accessible Canada Act* and the *Marrakesh Treaty*—have helped pave a clearer path.⁴⁷ An important point of reference Canadian publishers can turn to is the *Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act* (AODA), which was passed in 2005. Its goal is rooted in “developing, implementing and enforcing accessibility standards in

46. Brady, 'Accessible Publishing in Action'.

47. BookNet Canada, 'Producing “Born Accessible” Books', BookNet Canada, 20 June 2019, <https://www.booknetcanada.ca/blog/2019/6/20/producing-born-accessible-books>.

order to achieve accessibility for Ontarians with disabilities.”⁴⁸ The Act mandates that public sectors and large organizations conform their web content with the World Wide Web Consortium Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG). Because EPUB formats similarly operate within an HTML-based framework, the AODA’s *Information and Communication Standard* lays out clear accessibility requirements that Canadian publishers can adopt.⁴⁹

In addition to referencing the AODA, there are various guidelines that publishers can follow to ensure that their e-books meet the accessibility requirements. The Accessible Book Consortium (ABC) is one such organization, which has developed the *EPUB Accessibility Specification*, a would-be-gold standard for accessibility guidelines that book publishers should be integrating into their workflows. Though not universally known—at least, not widely enough to be accredited *the* gold standard status—or enforceable, the guidelines were developed with extensive input from a distinguished roster of global partners. This roster most notably includes: the DAISY Consortium, a nonprofit organization that advocates for “equal access to information and knowledge regardless of disability”⁵⁰ and champions global solutions for accessible publishing; Equity Diversity and Inclusion Europe (EDItEUR), a European trade standards body for the global digital book market⁵¹; and the World Intellectual Property Organization (WIPO), a global forum for intellectual property and policy, and agency of the United Nations.⁵² This collaborative project outlines best practices for producing accessible, digital books.⁵³ It covers various topics such as the proper use of alt text for images, headings and lists, and descriptive hyperlinks.

While there are many excellent, comprehensive accessibility resources out there for Canadian publishers, the absence of enforceable standards governed by a

48. Government of Ontario, ‘2019 Legislative Review of the Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act, 2005’, ontario.ca, 13 September 2021, <http://www.ontario.ca/page/2019-legislative-review-accessibility-ontarians-disabilities-act-2005>.

49. BookNet Canada, ‘Producing “Born Accessible” Books’.

50. DAISY Consortium, ‘Vision and Mission’, daisy.org, 2023, <https://daisy.org/about-us/governance/vision-mission/>.

51. EDItEUR, ‘Licence to Use EDItEUR Standards’ (GB: EDItEUR, 17 March 2020), <https://doi.org/10.4400/nwgj>.

52. WIPO, ‘Inside WIPO’, n.d., WIPO.int, accessed 16 June 2023, <https://www.wipo.int/about-wipo/en/index.html>.

53. Hilderley, ‘Accessible Publishing Best Practice Guidelines for Publishers’.

single regulatory body has arguably limited the capacity for accessibility considerations and practices to evolve.

3.4. Other dimensions of accessibility

Accessibility isn't just about how books are used, but also about how they get into the hands of those that need them. It's a holistic concept: producing truly accessible books involves creating a publishing *landscape* that is inclusive for all readers, regardless of their abilities. This inherently extends beyond production. While a deep analysis of the numerous factors—and their implications—will not be conducted in this report, it's worth summarizing some of the other considerations that go into making a book truly accessible.

3.4.1. Sales channels and distribution

Once accessible books have been created, the role of sales and distribution channels becomes critical for expanding the reach of that content. Just like book production, digital distributors have the power to address accessibility challenges by harnessing technology. However, this requires a deliberate effort—it won't happen automatically. Major e-commerce websites, including those dedicated to academic portals like *Campus eBookstore*, make decisions that can significantly influence the accessibility of a scholarly text, ranging from the accessibility of their websites to the software they employ for content delivery. Given that these distributors aim to attract a wide customer base, it's reasonable to assume that they may be more focused on developing revenue-generating features rather than prioritizing improved access to content for customers with diverse needs. Therefore, academic book publishers need to be thoughtful about choosing third-party sales channels and distributors to ensure these partnerships strengthen, rather than weaken, the efforts put into producing an accessible e-book in the first place.

3.4.2. Digital discoverability and metadata

An e-book can have comprehensive accessibility features integrated into the file, be widely available through diverse sales channels, *and* be deliverable via

platforms optimized for accessibility, but all these efforts can be rendered ineffective if the book is not easily searchable or identifiable to the readers seeking accessible formats. Therefore, enhancing digital discoverability of accessible books is a crucial aspect of accessibility, as it ensures that these books get into the hands of those who need them. Achieving this requires capturing comprehensive and accurate metadata, including detailed descriptions, subject tags, and information regarding the accessibility features incorporated into the file.

3.4.3. Efficacy of assistive technologies

Leveraging technology can significantly enhance accessibility, but not all technologies involved in delivering accessible books are under a publisher's control. This is particularly true for the various software platforms used for e-book delivery and the screen readers used to interpret the text. Even the most well-designed accessible files can be thwarted by the limitations of these technological platforms, which inadvertently hinder production efforts to make a file accessible. For instance, the commonly used e-reader software Adobe Digital Editions (ADE) offers certain accessibility features like text resizing, but it falls short in providing adequate support for screen readers that leads to misinterpretations of the text. This experience is complicated by the fact that no software is perfect, and if a reader chooses to transition to a new platform, they could encounter a slew of new, different accessibility challenges.

Screen readers similarly have limitations that can undermine thoughtful production efforts. For example, the popular Windows screen reader JAWS (Job Access With Speech) provides significant accessibility support, but it can face difficulties when interpreting certain file formats, files lacking proper structural elements, or files with complex layouts. This can compromise the accuracy of text interpretations and fragment the reading experiences for individuals relying on this technology for comprehension. This report will touch more on the nuanced challenges that assistive technologies present in the following chapter.

3.4.4. Copyright

A final vital aspect of achieving accessibility is addressing copyright considerations to ensure license agreements allow for the creation of accessible formats without hindrance. In Canada, this concern is addressed through Bill C-11—a 2016 Act to amend the *Copyright Act*—which ensures that individuals with perceptual disabilities and nonprofit organizations acting on their behalf can reproduce academic works in formats specially designed for accessibility.⁵⁴ The inclusion of Bill C-11 in Canadian copyright law marked a significant step forward, as it allows publishers to offer equal access to knowledge for individuals with perceptual and/or print disabilities without facing legal barriers or infringing on intellectual property rights. This move has been instrumental in promoting inclusivity and accessibility in the Canadian publishing landscape.

It's also worth noting that copyright is not restricted solely to Canadian titles. Canadian publishers who export their books to the European Union (EU) must take into account the new EU copyright directive that became effective in June 2019.⁵⁵ This directive affects how copyright is managed within the EU and applies to *all* those who participate within the market, not just to member states. Thus, Canadian publishers must comply with its regulations when distributing their books in the EU markets. Understanding and adhering to these regulations is essential for Canadian publishers to navigate the international publishing landscape and ensure their books are accessible to readers in the EU.

3.4.5. Unlocking e-book accessibility: a summary of dimensions

In the book publishing industry, achieving accessibility goes well beyond the scope of production and design. It encompasses multiple facets that impact the accessibility of books for *all* readers and implicates every stage of the publishing process. While this paper primarily explores the intersection where production and

54. Annie Slizak, 'Turning the Page: An Analysis of Accessible Publishing in Canada' (Vancouver, Canada: Simon Fraser University, 2018), https://summit.sfu.ca/_flysystem/fedora/sfu_migrate/18757/etd20040.pdf.

55. European Parliament, Council of the European Union, 'Directive (EU) 2019/790 of the European Parliament and of the Council', Government, EUR-Lex, 17 April 2019, <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/eli/dir/2019/790/oj>.

accessibility meet, it's important to recognize the various dimensions that collectively contribute to the overall accessibility of e-books. Collaboration between departments, distributors, technology platforms, and legal entities is crucial to enhance inclusive practices, embrace robust metadata standards, enhance e-reader capabilities, address screen reader limitations, and navigate copyright considerations. By briefly examining these dimensions, we can gain some insight into the complexities of making a book accessible, and the degree to which publishers can influence the actual delivery and reading experience of digital books.

3.5. 'Born accessible' books

The term 'born accessible' refers to integrating accessibility considerations directly into the primary e-book production process, rather than "taking apart and updating books post-production to make them accessible."⁵⁶ Arguably, the term itself needs a clearer, more standardized definition within the industry—as it currently stands, there is enough ambiguity for publishing houses to interpret it differently to suit their interests. But generally, 'born accessible' entails moving away from treating accessibility as an afterthought, which is still common in many book publishing practices.

This retroactive approach to accessibility may have developed because different individuals or departments typically handle different stages of production, each with their own objectives that don't necessarily align with overall accessibility goals. Given how book publishing is often powered by employees juggling multiple roles and competing priorities, this type of practice has likely been sustained by limited time and funding, both of which are significant factors that many publishers rely on to develop *and* maintain more accessible workflows.⁵⁷ However, embracing the 'born accessible' approach can lead to more efficient and sustainable workflows in the long run. Although it can present an initial learning curve that requires some adjustment from publishers, actively involving the *entire* team is crucial to developing

56. Hilderley, 'Accessible Publishing Best Practice Guidelines for Publishers'.

57. ACP, 'Association of Canadian Publishers Evaluation of the Accessible Digital Books Initiative Prepared for the Canada Book Fund, Canadian Heritage', September 2022.

an effective and sustainable publishing process for creating accessible e-books from the outset.

As Canadian publishers face mounting legal pressures to produce accessible books, optimizing and streamlining workflows now will play a vital role in their future success. A notable source of pressure comes out of the EU, which passed the *European Accessibility Act (EAA)* in 2019, which will enter into full effect by June 2025.⁵⁸ The EAA mandates that e-books, reading software and devices, and related e-commerce include “all features and functionality that those without print disabilities enjoy, not in a special e-book edition but *in the same e-book*.”⁵⁹ The implications of the EAA on Canadian book publishers are twofold. Firstly, any actor involved in the publishing supply chain selling e-books must comply with the EAA standards to participate in the EU market, which includes, among other festivals, the Frankfurt Book Fair.⁶⁰ Thus, Canadian book publishers who are not prepared to publish accessible digital content in less than two years as of this writing will face limitations in the global market, potentially resulting in hasty adaptations and international business repercussions. Secondly, changes in Canadian legislation often reflect developments abroad, and federal regulations will no doubt continue to evolve in alignment with changes in the EU. Thus, failure to incorporate accessibility into publishing workflows *now* will hinder project developments and expose publishers to potential legal risks in the *future*. It is imperative for Canadian book publishers to proactively address accessibility requirements to remain competitive and compliant in the evolving landscape.

58. Cristina Mussinelli et al., ‘European Accessibility Act Requirements: Are Publishing Standards as EPUB, ONIX and Schema.Org Fully Compliant?’, Fondazione LIA, 10 June 2021, <https://www.fondazione.lia.org/en/research-and-development/european-accessibility-act-requirements-are-publishing-standards-as-epub-onix-and-schema-org-fully-compliant/>.

59. Bill Kasdorf, ‘Make E-Books Accessible Now’, Publishers Weekly, 8 November 2019, <https://www.publishersweekly.com/pw/by-topic/industry-news/publisher-news/article/81705-make-e-books-accessible-now.html>.

60. LIA, ‘“Accessibility Now”. An Event at the Frankfurter Buchmesse’, Fondazione LIA, 14 September 2021, <https://www.fondazione.lia.org/en/cnferences/accessibility-now-an-event-at-the-frankfurter-buchmesse/>.

3.6. Chapter recap: lessons learned and the road ahead

The importance of creating materials in accessible formats cannot be overstated, as it allows book publishers to reach broader audiences by ensuring equitable access to content.⁶¹ However, in the Canadian book publishing landscape, the concept of accessibility is convoluted by historically biased practices and lacks a regulatory body to standardize and enforce guidelines. While the industry *has* adopted useful accessibility guidelines, current publishing workflows will be woefully inadequate to meet the growing demand for accessible publications.

Of course, there has been some positive progress. The past few years have shown a significant increase in the number of Canadian book publishers embracing and integrating accessibility practices to produce more accessible books.⁶² However, even though this growth has been positive—and necessary—for the publishing industry, it has been frustratingly slow. These shortcomings are symbolic of a bigger problem: our current progress is being hindered by stale and antiquated perspectives, shaped by historical influences ingrained in our current workflows. Real growth cannot happen within the confines of a fixed mindset. Until we collectively regard accessibility as an indispensable and unwavering objective in publishing—where publishers who fail to achieve it face consequences—we, as an industry, will remain stuck.

Building upon these observations, the following chapter will explore some of the most prominent obstacles that impede accessibility in Canadian publishing, focusing particularly on those that disproportionately disadvantage academic book publishers. By shedding light on some of the unique additional burdens they encounter, this report aims to gain a deeper understanding of the pain points that monopolize their efforts and hinder their ability to break free from the fixed mindset and lead the industry forward.

61. CNIB Beyond Print, 'Accessible EPUBs', CNIB Beyond Print, n.d., <https://cnib-beyondprint.ca/accessible-epub/>.

62. BookNet Canada, 'The State of Publishing in Canada: 2021'.

Chapter 4.

Barriers to Academic Accessibility

At the beginning of Chapter 3, we explored how practices and perspectives in publishing develop in relation to the culture it serves, which historically has overlooked the needs of disability communities. We can extend this line of reasoning to similarly understand the imbalance of barriers to accessibility that exist *within* the book publishing industry in Canada. Just as a history of ableist perspectives can explain the challenges in developing accessible publishing workflows today, the fact that this industry predominantly caters to trade books can explain why academic book publishers face more challenges integrating accessible production practices.

According to the 2021 *State of Publishing in Canada* report from BookNet, 89 percent of publishers focus on producing trade books.⁶³ Given their dominance in the publishing landscape, it's understandable that accessibility standards and best practices were developed with trade book workflows and content in mind. Consequently, these guidelines fail to acknowledge the content complexities unique to scholarly texts that render accessible workflows in academic book publishing more challenging to achieve.

In addition to the broader challenges experienced by Canadian book publishers as a whole, this chapter will explore the specific barriers to accessibility that *academic* book publishers face. By identifying these additional challenges, we can gain a deeper understanding of the factors that stymie accessibility in academic book production. This knowledge will bring us one step closer to demystifying effective strategies to overcome these barriers.

63. BookNet Canada, 'The State of Publishing in Canada: 2021'.

4.1. Framing scholarly objectives within a digital medium

While academic publications may serve a variety of purposes, “they share a common goal of facilitating [a] study of the works that they reproduce.”⁶⁴ This entails not only translating a body of scholarly work into text, but also carefully considering how that information is organized and presented to readers. While trade books require similar design considerations, they more broadly focus on engaging readers. Academic books are also designed to engage readers, but a core objective for publishers is to prioritize how the text can, or should, resonate with readers’ goal of comprehending the concepts and ideas discussed.⁶⁵

With the recent shift in new media and technologies, publishers can address the readers’ quest for meaning in unprecedented ways. The emergence of digital readers doesn’t just impact how texts can be *displayed*; it changes how they can be *used*. Producing for the digital medium has uncovered new opportunities that expand our understanding about how a published work can be presented and interpreted. So, how do emerging mediums affect the production of academic works, and what challenges or opportunities do they pose for these publishers in enhancing the accessibility of digital books?

When considering the objectives of scholarly texts, the digital medium presents itself as a valuable “pedagogical tool,”⁶⁶ offering new ways to present and connect information. Production editors thus take on the added responsibility of clearly conveying their interpretation of, and intention for, the text through digital markups and organization. This process has the power to optimize paths to reader comprehension and enhance the authority over the books they produce. Neglecting it, therefore, has a correspondingly negative impact over the reading experience. In a digital medium, the reader becomes the user: they expect to be able to manipulate individual elements of the e-book. The interactive nature of a digital book emphasizes

64. Krista Stinne Greve Rasmussen, ‘Reading or Using a Digital Edition? Reader Roles in Scholarly Editions’, in *Digital Scholarly Editing: Theories and Practices*, ed. Matthew James Driscoll and Elena Pierazzo, Digital Humanities Series (Cambridge: Open Book Publishers, 2017), 119–33, <http://books.openedition.org/obp/3406>.

65. Rasmussen, ‘Reading or Using a Digital Edition?’

66. Rasmussen, ‘Reading or Using a Digital Edition?’

the significance of a book's structure and organization, thus underscoring the importance of publishing with this specific audience in mind.

With a deeper understanding of how reader experiences can differ in digital media, we can begin to explore the related challenges that hinder the development of accessible content. The goal moving into the next section is to understand why and how content elements that are commonplace in academic books can impact accessibility efforts.

4.2. Scholarly content complications

Academic books contain a variety of distinctive features that extend well beyond the main body text, all of which work together to aid in the reader's comprehension of a specific subject. These features, such as graphs or endnotes, are commonplace in academic publications but are not as prevalent in general trade titles. Although conducting an in-depth analysis to compare the frequency with which they occur in academic versus trade books will not be included in this report, it's reasonable to assert that academic book publishers consistently struggle with content complications that trade book publishers don't encounter to the same degree. The following sections highlight specific features which, though not exhaustive, provide insights into the additional challenges that academic publishers face when striving to create accessible content.⁶⁷

4.2.1. Style standard variations

There are number of different reference style guides used to support academic writing; how authors choose a style guide is usually dictated by their field. Different academic disciplines have distinct preferences about what aspects of scholarly communication are prioritized, and these conventions are reflected in the standard style guide established by each discipline. For example, the style guide most used in English studies is the Modern Language Association (MLA), whereas in sociology, it is the American Sociological Association (ASA). However, authors are not required to use the style guide recommended by their respective discipline and may choose an

67. Fernwood Publishing, 'Internal Document'.

alternative based on personal preferences or niche standards established by a smaller sector of their field. These nuances in format and citation styles result in a lack of predictability in the production workflow of academic books, particularly when designing a cross-disciplinary edited collection. The intricate nature of these variations consequently makes it difficult to streamline workflows or automate processes.

4.2.2. Citations, notes, indexes, and interactive links

Extensive footnotes or endnotes are commonplace in academic books, which offer additional information for specific passages within the main text or provide readers with a list of sources used by the author in their research. These notes are marked by in-text citations or superscripted numbers. In digital editions, this requires activating each occurrence—in both the text and the reference list—to enable interactive cross-referencing as needed. At best, the production editor has prior technical knowledge, in which case the discrepancies in reference style usage complicate the process of automating cross-reference links. At worst, they can't run a script and potentially face the task of manually linking hundreds of references.

The inclusion of hyperlinks in footnotes and endnotes pose a similar challenge for production editors. In modern academic research, internet sources are frequently cited, resulting in the inclusion of URLs within these notes. A sufficiently researched book may contain hundreds of reference notes,⁶⁸ most of which include website addresses. The implications of this are twofold. First, as with the interactive cross-referencing discussed in the previous paragraph, URLs need to be activated in digital media in order for an e-book to be accessible. Second, websites are not permanent fixtures on the internet, which leaves room for URLs to introduce unexpected production work. Notwithstanding the issue posed by potential transcription errors, as time passes between the start of a research project and the publication of the resulting book, the documented links may become invalid. In such cases, the production editor is tasked with addressing broken links. While this is a common technical problem, the absence of established internal protocols, such as determining

68. Fernwood Publishing, 'Internal Document'.

who should be contacted, or whether the publisher has been authorized to modify references, add considerable time and effort to an already convoluted process.

4.2.3. Glossaries and appendices

Academic books can also include appendices that serve as supplementary sections containing additional information or data related to the subject matter, but which are not essential to the main argument or narrative. Similarly, they may incorporate glossaries or lists of acronyms that provide definitions and explanations of key terms or concepts used in the text. For an e-book to be truly accessible, these content elements require specific considerations around navigation and metadata. For instance, ensuring that glossaries and appendices are properly structured and tagged with appropriate headings and labels, and that the definitions and explanations are accessible to readers with disabilities, such as through alternative formats or descriptions. Additionally, it is important to consider how these sections are linked or referenced within the main navigation to provide a seamless reading experience for all readers. Thus, production editors must not only ensure that they are properly structured with appropriate headings but also that they are tagged with Accessible Rich Internet Applications (ARIA) labels and other embedded navigation instructions in the metadata.

4.2.4. Images and illustrations

Images and illustrations are often used in academic books to help enhance understanding and provide visual examples. Interestingly, despite the availability of clear guidelines for creating alt text, the practice of implementing meaningful alt text is not widespread.⁶⁹ It's important to note that *having* alt text, and *having useful* alt text are not the same thing. If a description omits—or worse yet, confuses—important information then it doesn't adequately inform the reader experience, and thus isn't accessible. This especially presents challenges in academia where contextual meaning and accuracy is crucial.

69. Brady, 'Ebook Accessibility: Here's What You Might Be Missing'.

Because subject expertise is important, assessing the quality of image descriptions post production can be challenging. As such, the onus of developing alt text should ideally fall to author(s) and editor(s) during the production phase. However, the practice of delegating alt text responsibilities is not typically well-integrated into publishing workflows and can be difficult to streamline for two reasons. If the burden falls on the developmental or production editor, it adds to their already demanding workload without necessarily benefiting from the expertise required to provide accurate detailed descriptions that are vital for reader comprehension. Conversely, it can be risky to rely on authors because they may not grasp the intricacies of book production, leading to delays or incomplete submissions. As accessibility expert Amy Rollason observes, “there are always going to be authors who don’t return copy edited files or don’t get back to you in time for the proofs.”⁷⁰ Moreover, authors may not adhere to best practices for writing alt text, as there is currently no training incorporated into graduate or post-graduate programs that provide guidance on how academics can support these important publishing processes when writing a book.⁷¹

4.2.5. Tables and charts

Academic books may also include tables and charts that present complex data to visually aid in reader comprehension. Unfortunately, accessibility considerations around these conventionally printed elements present somewhat of a catch-22. On one hand, baseline accessibility practices avoid the use of image formats in place of text. Exporting tables or graphs as PDFs, for example, renders them abstruse to screen readers and deprives visually impaired readers of the comprehensive details available to sighted readers. On the other hand, InDesign is not optimized to effectively replicate print-based forms in accessible digital formats. For instance, the HTML from an exported table is “overwrought”⁷² and difficult for screen readers to logically read, even when they have been formatted cleanly and correctly.

70. PUBLIC Journal, Amy Rollason on the Work of Working Accessibly.

71. PUBLIC Journal, Amy Rollason on the Work of Working Accessibly.

72. *InDesign Table Export*, accessed 21 June 2023, <https://www.linkedin.com/learning/epub-accessibility-using-indesign/indesign-table-export>.

Some features simply aren't going to work in a reflowable reading environment, which ultimately circles back to the conclusions established in Chapter 3. Until we collectively shift our perspective about what book publishing means—or, *can* mean—the print-first mentality will continue to present workflow issues that are utterly avoidable. Rather than taking the time to re-create traditional print design elements, like tables, this incompatibility between design and reading format should inspire publishers to look beyond conventional practices to reimagine what is possible in a digital medium.

4.3. Resources and training

While it's important to establish the specific challenges facing academic book publishers, it's also useful to deconstruct the broader landscape of challenges that hinder accessibility in the Canadian book publishing industry. It is imperative that we recognize and address the additional barriers that impact all publishers, and how these factors compound with the distinct challenges faced in academic book publishing. Financial constraints, a lack of expertise, legacy workflows, and technological know-how are key aspects that impede the realization of truly accessible publishing practices. Although a comprehensive analysis of these factors is beyond the scope of this report, it is vital to address their significance in our pursuit for inclusivity and equity. By gaining a deeper understanding of these barriers, we can collectively work towards dismantling the obstacles that limit access to knowledge and information for individuals with disabilities.

4.3.1. Financial constraints

Financial needs are a significant barrier for many publishers when developing accessible workflows. In fact, in a recent (unpublished) survey of recipients of government funding to support the sustainable production and distribution of accessible digital books, 91 percent of respondents indicated that continued support would be important or essential to continue.⁷³ While concerns related to budget constraints are not without merit, publishers who lack a clear understanding of the

73. ACP, 'ACP Evaluation of the Accessible Digital Books Initiative Prepared for the CBF, Canadian Heritage'.

requirements for developing and streamlining accessible practices may perceive the process as a more daunting and costly upfront investment than it may be in reality. This obscures their ability to recognize the long-term advantages that not only save money but also bolster their presence in the market.

4.3.2. Lack of expertise

While the perception of challenges can be more overwhelming than the actual reality, the integration of new technologies into existing publishing practices has not been seamless in recent years, and publishing professionals today all operate with varying levels of expertise. For some, understanding complex processes like XML-based workflows may seem straightforward, while for others, it can feel like grasping the basic principles would require developing an entirely new foundation of knowledge. This challenge can be amplified further in smaller publishing houses, where accessibility work is often handled by a single individual who may not have sufficient time or support from management to fully develop the foundational knowledge needed to meaningfully integrate more accessible practices into their workflow.⁷⁴

Furthermore, the financial constraints discussed in section 4.3.1. can deter publishers from developing important collaborative relationships with disability communities that invite user expertise into the workflow development. Accessibility audits conducted by individuals who *actually* use the technology are crucial, but the high cost of outsourcing such expertise is often not built into the budget, which is arguably indicative of how lingering effects of historical ableism have informed modern-day practices and budget allocations.⁷⁵

4.3.3. Legacy workflows

The preceding discussions around financial constraints and lack of expertise lead us to a broader consideration: accessibility should not be treated as just a production process, but rather as a core value that guides decision-making throughout the entire book development cycle. To truly achieve accessibility, book publishers

74. PUBLIC Journal, Amy Rollason on the Work of Working Accessibly.

75. PUBLIC Journal, Amy Rollason on the Work of Working Accessibly.

must adopt a holistic approach that requires asking themselves a difficult but necessary question: “What is the block stopping us from producing this book?”⁷⁶ This inquiry goes beyond simply auditing the production workflow. Book publishers need to consciously acknowledge that new technologies and media have become a permanent fixture of the industry; if they don’t adjust accordingly, they will get left behind.

At this point, I’d like to revisit the concept of ‘born accessible’ publishing because it presents a middle ground between starting from scratch and navigating the perceived challenges of adapting workflows to develop more accessible e-books. The key takeaway from ‘born accessible’ publishing is straightforward: shelving accessibility considerations until post production leads to unnecessary redundancies; therefore, revamping internal workflows presents the most effective and efficient way forward. However, it’s important to reiterate that the publishing industry inherited its production processes from a long-standing tradition of print. The familiarity and comfort of these legacy workflows contrast sharply with the daunting and novel challenges that come with producing content for a digital medium. To some, this might feel like an overwhelming juxtaposition, which can lead to resistant attitudes—especially among industry veterans when it comes to embracing new technologies. While this explanation does not offer a valid excuse to opt-out from evolving, it does provide useful context to understand why retrofitting existing workflows, rather than conducting a complete overhaul, might be more effective in practice—even if it’s less efficient on paper.

There is definitely an argument to be made for the potential hours saved if InDesign were to be pushed out from the centre to the periphery of the workflow and used exclusively for print design and production.⁷⁷ However, as discussed, many publishing professionals can feel overwhelmed by the prospect of developing accessibility workflows due to a lack of understanding about the tools or processes. People can’t always see the forest for the trees and can be hesitant to address concerns about venturing into new territory, especially if they don’t feel any external pressure to do so. So, while building an e-book from scratch is technically cleaner and

76. PUBLIC Journal, Amy Rollason on the Work of Working Accessibly.

77. John W. Maxwell et al., ‘XML Production Workflows? Start with the Web’, *Journal of Electronic Publishing* 13, no. 1 (1 March 2010), <https://doi.org/10.3998/3336451.0013.106>.

more efficient, it would be a significant departure from current practices. Those unfamiliar with the terrain would only be able to see innumerable trees blocking their way forward. Thus, optimizing InDesign for improved accessibility within a ‘born accessible’ workflow can present a more agreeable and realistic alternative for improving accessibility in book production.

4.3.4. Perceptions of technological know-how

The book publishing industry often operates with limited resources and employees doing two or three jobs at once. As such, the reality is that e-books—and particularly accessible e-books—only receive “passing attention.”⁷⁸ The lack of expertise discussed in section 4.3.2. can obscure people’s awareness about the skills they think are required, which consequently makes them feel out of reach. However, many of the processes that go into making a digital book accessible can actually be achieved using InDesign in the production layout stage. Yet, many publishers contend that they don’t know enough about “the subject or technologies involved to successfully produce more accessible books.”⁷⁹ In reality, making a few simple tweaks in the production workflow can significantly improve the accessibility of an e-book file. Even if it doesn’t meet all the criteria of an e-book accessibility validator, small decisions that require little to no learning curve can save hours of work in future e-book remediations, and, reduce the accessibility work that needs to be outsourced.

Admittedly, InDesign is not exactly up to the task when it comes to producing accessible EPUBs, but a little intention can go a long way in helping to optimize the program. For example, distinguishing between the different italic type treatments—emphasis, citation, or language shift—can be accomplished by applying distinct character styles in InDesign, all with the same visual effect. Applying these italics accordingly during the production phase—a task already performed by typesetters—would eliminate the need for EPUB developers to search for and replace styles post production. Although this particular example may only provide a minor time-saving benefit, cumulative workflow adjustments that don’t demand extensive coding expertise can have a substantial impact.

78. Brady, ‘Accessible Publishing in Action’.

79. Slizak, ‘Turning the Page’.

4.3.5. Layout tool limitations

The previous section critiqued citing a lack of technological know-how as a valid reason for publishers to opt-out from producing more accessible content, particularly given the widespread adoption of InDesign. However, it's important to distinguish between the capacity for production editors to use InDesign more effectively to improve accessibility, as argued in the previous section, and the actual efficacy of the program in an accessibility-first mindset. While InDesign is a good layout tool with many areas available to a designer or typesetter to improve accessibility, accessibility expert Laura Brady contends that, "it's not a good ebook creation tool out of the box [and] requires a lot of tweaking of the controls, and some diving into the HTML and CSS"⁸⁰ to produce a really fit digital, reflowable book.

The key point to grasp here is that despite perceptions, barriers to accessibility are not exclusively a technical problem: people possess the necessary skills to undertake some of this work. The real challenge lies in the workflow itself. Yes, tweaking existing practices can improve the accessibility of files, but many of these barriers only arise because the files are initially designed for print, and then retrofitted for digital media. By prioritizing design for the digital medium from the onset, we could eliminate many of the accessibility issues encountered in current publishing workflows. However, as detailed in section 4.3.3., achieving this requires a significant shift in perspectives across the Canadian and global publishing industries alike.

4.4. Content delivery limitations

Concerns related to resources and technological know-how within the industry are not completely baseless, but perceptions of them are more challenging to overcome than the issues themselves. As the book publishing industry continues to evolve, we can overcome these challenges together by supporting one another, sharing knowledge, and allowing space to learn and grow. However, there are also barriers to accessibility that are not as neatly within the control of publishers and will require collaboration and systemic change for *real* progress to occur.

80. Brady, 'Accessible Publishing in Action'.

4.4.1. Accessibility of distribution platforms

The accessibility features available, and the level to which they are optimized, vary across different content delivery platforms. This introduces a significant layer of complexity to e-book production workflows in publishing. Various factors such as operating systems, browser types, and software program design can undermine the accessibility features designed into an e-book file. No matter how well-designed an e-book file may be for accessibility, the publisher will have limited control over the final delivery interface chosen by the reader, which can either enhance or undermine efforts made during the production process.

The accessibility of meticulously designed files can also be compromised by publishing decisions made in unrelated departments that influence the content delivery systems available. For example, a publisher might establish licensing restrictions that only operate on select platforms that are not optimized for accessible reading. While best practices for accessibility would suggest “[not] to work with partners who make your product worse,”⁸¹ the decision-making process in publishing is multifaceted and often influenced by external factors. It could be a requirement of the publisher’s mandate or funding conditions to direct users to open-source e-reading software, which can hamper accessibility efforts by constraining the platform choices available to deliver the content. This is particularly true of academic book publishing, where conditional funding and institutional partnerships are more prominently involved.

4.4.2. Screen reader language models

As discussed in earlier chapters, academic book publishers produce sociopolitical and culturally valuable content, which means their books often incorporate terminology in different languages. In those cases, additional production efforts are required to ensure accurate interpretation by screen readers, which can often still be thwarted by the technology delivering the content.

As a jumping off point, production editors may be knowledgeable about the appropriate type treatment for language occurrences, but they may lack awareness

81. McNaught et al., ‘Evaluating E-Book Platforms’.

about the extra steps required to effectively convey this information to screen readers. For instance, while foreign languages, citations, and text emphases are typically all presented in italics, screen readers cannot decipher these different meanings based on type formatting alone. Thus, to ensure accessibility, it becomes essential to apply three distinct character styles: ``, `<i>`, and `<cite>`. Despite applying identical italic type treatments, each style is accompanied with specific screen reader instructions that, ideally, will convey the intended meaning.

Furthermore, screen readers require instructions about *what* language to read and will adhere to the assigned language rules unless provided with new guidance when encountering foreign language elements in the text. Thus, properly marking language attributes in HTML whenever there is a shift is important for accessibility. While this is simple in theory, it is quickly complicated in practice. To begin, screen readers inevitably face challenges when encountering glyphs or diacritics that are not present in the primary language of the text. For example, the circumflex diacritical mark in the French term *raison d'être* indicates vowel pronunciation, but since English lacks this specific diacritic, a screen reader instructed to interpret English text is not equipped with orthographical instructions to accurately pronounce it. As a result, screen readers must take a guess regarding its interpretation, the limitations for which will vary depending on the software developer.

Properly marking language attributes in HTML is crucial for accessibility; frustratingly, even when foreign language occurrences *are* correctly marked, screen readers can still misinterpret the text. It's worth mentioning that French serves as a relatively innocuous example, given its status as a lingua franca, which increases the likelihood of its orthographical rules being identified and interpreted by screen readers. Nevertheless, screen readers can still struggle with language elements from widely spoken global languages. This issue becomes infinitely more pronounced when dealing with less widely adopted languages, such as Indigenous dialects in Canada. Unlike the educated guess that a screen reader could make to interpret French accents, interpreting words like *Sḵw̓x̓w̓ú7mesh Úxwumixw* from the Coast Salish language would pose significantly greater challenges.

Given that sociopolitical content is one of the defining features of scholarly texts, this issue is particularly problematic in academic book publishing. There is a

growing demand for Indigenous voices and perspectives, as evidenced by self-reported data and book sales.^{82 83} However, screen reader support for Indigenous languages currently remains very limited.⁸⁴ Dr. Caroline Running Wolf, co-founder of the nonprofit organization *Buffalo Tongue* that builds software to preserve Indigenous languages, aptly points out, “AI [Artificial Intelligence] is built by engineers that do not represent a cross-cut of society.”⁸⁵ This deficiency not only raises cultural concerns but also hampers comprehension in academic books that emphasize the meaning, practice, and celebration of Indigenous terminology. As assistive reading technologies show us, a lack of representation in product development is reflected back into the broader culture. Arguably, the same can be said about the lack of accessibility in publishing.

4.5. Chapter recap: lessons learned and the road ahead

The necessity for book publishers in Canada to produce accessible content may seem self-evident, but as this chapter explored, there are several factors encumbering progress in this area, some of which uniquely challenge academic book publishing workflows. These barriers stem from the intricate and specialized nature of academic content and the lingering influence of production workflows shaped by trade book and print publishing norms. Additionally, academic book publishers often face resource limitations and conditional funding requirements, making it challenging to allocate dedicated resources for accessibility initiatives. This can also be further compounded by a publisher’s lack of expertise and technical know-how, both of which are necessary to develop well-designed academic books that cater to the diverse needs of readers.

Given these complex challenges, it is imperative that academic book publishers integrate accessibility into *all* aspects of the publishing process, including through their engagement of freelancers and suppliers. However, even when book publishers

82. BookNet Canada, ‘On Diversity: A Survey of Canadian Readers 2021’, BookNet Canada, 12 May 2023, <https://www.booknetcanada.ca/on-diversity-a-survey-of-canadian-readers-2021>.

83. Fernwood Publishing, ‘FP Lifetimes Sales Analysis’.

84. Accessible Publishing, ‘Frequently Asked Questions – AccessiblePublishing.Ca’, *AccessiblePublishing.Ca* (blog), n.d., <https://www.accessiblepublishing.ca/frequently-asked-questions/>.

85. Jessica Ruf, ‘Digitizing Indigenous Languages: Scholars Use Technology To Preserve Their Native Languages’, *Diverse: Issues In Higher Education*, 12 November 2020, <https://www.diverseeducation.com/demographics/native-americans/article/15108122/digitizing-indigenous-languages-scholars-use-technology-to-preserve-their-native-languages>.

adopt a holistic understanding of accessibility and put careful thought into enhancing e-book files, publishers do not have control over the various content delivery platforms. These can “dramatically affect”⁸⁶ the accessibility of an e-book file, regardless of the considerations built into it. Because not everything is in their control, it is crucial for book publishers to harness the opportunities that *are* in their purview. By prioritizing accessibility in current digital production workflows and acknowledging the social and technical aspects of accessibility, academic book publishers can wield their cultural authority and move the progress dial forward.

This chapter highlighted the unique challenges that academic book publishers face when integrating accessible practices into their workflows. It is critical to remember the implications of this struggle: the negative impacts of these barriers are most significantly felt by Canadian postsecondary students with print disabilities and visual impairments. As such, the forthcoming final chapter will advocate for the continued persistence of academic book publishers in overcoming these added challenges and will unpack some of the considerations that can be made to enhance accessibility workflows. Those who are bound by curriculum requirements don't have the luxury of walking away. When content isn't made accessible to them, they are too often faced with time-consuming and frustrating experiences to obtain accessible versions of their required course material. Academic book publishers must persevere in their quest to build more accessible workflows because their readers, regardless of ability, deserve better.

86. McNaught et al., 'Evaluating E-Book Platforms'.

Chapter 5.

Breaking Down Barriers: The Future of Accessible Book Publishing in Academia

Within the realm of academic book publishing, this report has undeniable and substantial barriers to achieving greater accessibility. However, as book publishers in Canada continue to adapt to evolving cultural and technological landscapes, we're witnessing the emergence of promising developments that undermine the impact of legacy practices on accessibility. As such, this final chapter explores why it is imperative for academic book publishers to persevere in their efforts to enhance accessibility through a comprehensive investigation of the support and motivating forces in the current Canadian landscape. Legislative and technological developments are making it easier to evolve. Moreover, we can consider the transformative power of leveraging market demands, partnerships and institutional initiatives, and technological advancements to create inclusive reading experiences for individuals with print disabilities and visual impairments.

5.1. No more excuses

Academic book publishers in Canada undoubtedly confront challenges in their development of more accessible content, but it is crucial that they persevere. Not only is the commitment to equal access to scholarly knowledge an ethical imperative, it's also important to recognize that the relative magnitude of challenges we often encounter is diminishing. In recent years, there have been significant transformations in both the industry and the overarching culture that are effectively dismantling longstanding justifications for overlooking accessibility and undermining excuses that limit the acceleration of progress. These developments include industry accreditation programs, government funding initiatives, and the emergence of user-centric technologies. Together, they present compelling reasons for publishers to prioritize accessibility and strive for more inclusive workflows.

5.1.1. Industry accreditation

One noteworthy development gaining traction in Canada—and abroad—is Benetech’s Global Accessible Certification (CGA), which is becoming an increasingly popular program available to publishers in their quest to produce more accessible content. Benetech, a nonprofit organization dedicated to empowering individuals with disabilities through technology, has spearheaded the development of accessibility standards for digital content.⁸⁷ Their certification program aims to ensure that digital publications meet rigorous accessibility criteria, and the growing list of publishers who have earned the certificate is a testament to the industry’s growing recognition of the importance of accessible publishing.⁸⁸ The availability and adoption of the Benetech certification has had a transformative effect on the accessibility landscape. Not only has it provided publishers with a clear framework for evaluating and improving their accessibility efforts, but it has also effectively challenged the status quo, validating the experiences of readers who rely on accessibility features. Book publishers, and *especially* academic book publishers, have the power to effect change and break down the barriers that hinder accessibility, and accreditations like this will only become more ubiquitous with time.

5.1.2. Government funding

Changes in government funding to better support accessible book production are another significant force for dismantling barriers. By expanding access to capital, publishers now have more means to allocate dedicated resources to accessibility tools and initiatives, alleviating the financial constraints that previously hindered progress in this domain. For instance, substantial grants, subsidies, and funding programs administered the Canada Book Fund (CBF) and the Canada Council for the Arts offer substantial financial support to publishers who demonstrate a commitment

87. Benetech, ‘Frequently Asked Questions’, BornAccessible.Benetech.org, n.d., <https://bornaccessible.benetech.org/faqs/>.

88. Benetech, ‘Certified Publishers’, BornAccessible.Benetech.org, n.d., <https://bornaccessible.benetech.org/certified-publishers/>.

to incorporating accessibility features into their publications.^{89 90} Publishers can use these funds to invest in specialized software and training programs for staff, and to engage accessibility experts to ensure their books meet the highest standards of inclusivity. The CBF funding term ends in 2024, and although specific details beyond this time may still be under consideration, funding recipients have clearly voiced how vital this support is not just to the development, but also to the ongoing maintenance, of improving accessible workflows.⁹¹

One possible way of supplementing this concern might be found at the provincial level, where some provinces have implemented their own funding programs to support accessible publishing. For example, the Accessible Digital Content Grant from the Ontario Arts Council (OAC) provides financial assistance to publishers who produce accessible books, helping cover the costs associated with creating alternative formats, implementing accessible design features, and conducting accessibility audits.⁹²

5.1.3. User-centric technologies

Last—but certainly not least—the demand for more advanced and user-centric technologies plays a pivotal role in propelling accessibility in publishing forward. Technological advancements in recent years have ushered in a new era of possibilities for enhancing reading experiences which encourage publishers to embrace accessible workflows with improved technologies and more streamlined integration. Particularly, screen reader developments are addressing many of the limitations discussed in the previous chapter, employing more advanced text-to-speech technology and supporting a wide range of formats to maximize the potential for customization of reading experiences. For example, NVDA (NonVisual

89. Department of Canadian Heritage, 'Support for Publishers - Publishing Support', Government Grants and Funding, *Canada.ca*, 11 February 2021, <https://www.canada.ca/en/canadian-heritage/services/funding/book-fund/publishing-support.html>.

90. Canada Council for the Arts, 'Funding', Canada Council for the Arts, accessed 13 July 2023, <https://canadacouncil.ca/funding>.

91. ACP, 'ACP Evaluation of the Accessible Digital Books Initiative Prepared for the CBF, Canadian Heritage'.

92. OAC, 'Accessibility Fund: Project Support', Provincial Government Agency, Ontario Arts Council, 2023, <https://www.arts.on.ca/grants/accessibility-fund-project-support>.

Desktop Access) is a free and open-source screen reader that has gained popularity for its robust features and compatibility with various operating systems.⁹³

Notably, the development and refinement of assistive technologies are often driven by collaboration between publishers, technology developers, and accessibility organizations, which instils additional confidence in emerging technologies. The growing demand for thoughtfully developed, user-oriented technologies has yielded positive results, prompting publishers—who now have better access to funding initiatives—to invest in accessible workflows with more confidence. By intentionally creating content compatible with these technologies, publishers will not only improve accessibility, but also expand their readership, and enhance the overall user experience with features everyone can enjoy.

5.2. Opening doors

As discussed, the scholarly realm thrives on the exchange of ideas, intellectual growth, and the dissemination of knowledge. There is thus inherent value to increasing access to content: reaching a wider audience amplifies the impact of academic works. This report has spent a lot of time reflecting on the challenges that come with developing more accessible content. To inspire real change, it's also important to reflect on what and how the benefits eclipse potential difficulties.

The following sections thus shine a light on the various motivating factors that academic book publishers should keep in mind when working to improve accessibility. These benefits reveal themselves when publishers can identify customer limitations, value nonprofit organizations by respecting their capacities, and understand how to harness the strengths of print *and* digital media to work smarter, not harder. By navigating these considerations, academic book publishers can discover the transformative potential of accessible academic publishing.

93. 'About NVDA', NV Access, 5 July 2017, <https://www.nvaccess.org/about-nvda/>.

5.2.1. Meeting institutional demands

Supporting the production of accessible content at the onset presents an easy opportunity for Canadian book publishers to open new markets. According to an accessibility evaluation published by *The Association of Learned & Professional Society Publishers*, the effort that goes into developing and integrating more accessible practices into modern workflows is relatively insignificant compared with the benefits of entirely new marketing opportunities. Notably, these can be accessed “without doing anything more than following good practices that have been part of the occupational standards for publishing since 2012.”⁹⁴

Though this report does concede that there are some consequential hurdles to overcome,⁹⁵ the high market demand and increasing legal requirements arguably present enough motivation to confront the challenges head on. According to Benetech’s GCA program, postsecondary institutions are increasingly demanding accessible titles from publishers due in part to the “liabilities [higher education] institutions face for inaccessible content.”⁹⁶ Ultimately, while publishers who produce and market inaccessible books might not be in direct violation of any laws, the institutions that adopt them as required readings could be in the not-so-distant future. University presses thus find themselves in a unique position to leverage their institutions’ Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion (EDI) initiatives. By aligning their publishing practices with their institution’s EDI commitments, university presses have the opportunity to meet accessibility needs while positively impacting the Canadian book publishing industry.

5.2.2. Easing the burden off nonprofit organizations

As long as accessible workflows continue to be perceived as nice-to-haves, rather than non-negotiables, Canadian publishers who do not—or cannot—allocate time to employ more intentional efforts will fall behind. As explored in the previous chapter, the tendency to overlook the importance of accessibility can stem from unfounded concerns about the financial and time-intensive demands of implementing

94. McNaught et al., ‘Evaluating E-Book Platforms’.

95. McNaught et al., ‘Evaluating E-Book Platforms’.

96. Benetech, ‘Frequently Asked Questions’.

accessible practices into their workflows.⁹⁷ Due to the absence of national regulations or enforcement, the work of engendering full and equal participation for all Canadians—as required by Bill C-81⁹⁸—often falls to publicly funded, nonprofit groups who are underfunded and overworked.

Organizations like the National Network for Equitable Library Service (NNELS) and the Centre for Equitable Library Access (CELA) partner with libraries and educators to deliver accessible materials to individuals with print disabilities, “in equal measure to that which is enjoyed by other members of their community.”⁹⁹ Current estimates from NNELS suggest that less than 5% of published works are available in accessible formats, and these organizations work hard to support the 3.8 million Canadians with print disabilities.¹⁰⁰ But government funding—which supports 65% of the services offered by these organizations—is at risk of being cut again.¹⁰¹ At the end of the day, relying solely on nonprofit organizations with miniscule and precarious budgets to bear the significant responsibility of accessibility is unsustainable. As discussed in the previous chapter, there is a strong likelihood that Canadian legislation—and consequently, industry expectations—will gradually shift towards more accessible production practices. If there were to be sudden or urgent demands for these changes, organizations like NNELS and CELA would simply not have the capacity to provide timely support for the overwhelming majority of published works that still lack sufficient accessibility features.¹⁰² This situation is already the case.

In that same vein, it is worth noting that the EAA directive allowed a three-year transition period between implementation and enforcement of accessibility regulations for digital books, signalling that the shift towards ‘born accessible’ production takes time. Therefore, if Canadian book publishers are not prepared to release accessible e-books simultaneously with print publications in less than two years, they will face

97. Catherine Jewell, ‘The Accessible Books Consortium: What It Means for Publishers’, WIPO, February 2018, https://www.wipo.int/wipo_magazine/en/2018/01/article_0001.html.

98. Parliament of Canada, ‘Bill C-81 (Royal Assent)’.

99. CELA, ‘About Us’.

100. NNELS. ‘About NNELS’. Text, 21 June 2013. <https://nnels.ca/about>.

101. Michelle, Ellen. ‘Future Uncertain for Accessible Book Providers CELA, NNELS after “One-Year Reprieve” from Total Funding Cuts’. Quill and Quire, 17 March 2021. <https://quillandquire.com/omni/future-uncertain-for-accessible-book-providers-cela-nnels-after-one-year-reprieve-from-total-funding-cuts/>.

102. Brady and Levy-Pinto, ‘Accessible Ebook Publishing in Canada’.

limitations in the global market and will be left scrambling to adapt, while dealing with potential international business and legal repercussions.

5.2.3. Opening up new markets

While maximizing profits is not typically the main motivating force for academic book publishers, it's important to recognize that there *are* significant financial advantages to be gained from producing more accessible content. Enhancing the accessibility of their books opens up new opportunities for Canadian book publishers to tap into diverse markets and gain a competitive edge.

Firstly, the annual buying power of the Canadian disability community is \$55.4 billion.¹⁰³ This is a particularly staggering number when considering the findings from the Libri Italiani Accessibili (LIA), which indicate that when texts are made accessible to them, readers with print disabilities are likely to consume three times the number of books compared to their non-print disabled counterparts.¹⁰⁴

Secondly, there is potential for greater discoverability online. Providing detailed information about the accessibility of products to meet metadata standards strengthens Search Engine Optimization (SEO), and enables broader categories for discovery, which ultimately boosts sales. While the technical aspects of this process are beyond the scope of this paper, EDItEUR offers a comprehensive guide on providing accessibility metadata in ONIX.¹⁰⁵

Third, there are optical benefits to producing accessible content as it aligns with the growing demand for inclusivity and diversity in the publishing industry. In an era where social consciousness and inclusiveness are highly regarded, academic book publishers can enhance their reputation. Customers value inclusion—physically and digitally—and statistically, companies that champion accessibility facilitate higher rates of customer loyalty and generate repeat business.¹⁰⁶ Moreover, publishing 'born

103. Brady and Levy-Pinto, 'Accessible Ebook Publishing in Canada'.

104. LIA, "'Accessibility Now". An Event at the Frankfurter Buchmesse', Fondazione LIA, 14 September 2021, <https://www.fondazione.lia.org/en/cnferences/accessibility-now-an-event-at-the-frankfurter-buchmesse/>.

105. EDItEUR, ONIX For Books: Product Information Format Introduction to ONIX 3.0 (GB: EDItEUR, 2020), <https://doi.org/10.4400/nwgj>.

106. Brady and Levy-Pinto, 'Accessible Ebook Publishing in Canada'.

accessible' content offers *everyone* the chance to interact with it, regardless of ability. A 2018 BookNet survey revealed that 50 percent of all e-book users used accessibility features, despite only 17 percent reporting a medically diagnosed vision impairment or print disability.¹⁰⁷ Just as we can all benefit from automatic doors and lower curbs, *all* users can appreciate the opportunity to use text navigation tools or manipulate font size, lighting, and colour, and thus improves overall user experience.

5.3. Thinking ahead: opportunities of working in a digital medium

In order to truly grasp the barriers to accessibility in academic publications, this paper emphasized the importance of distinguishing how a scholarly text is used, understood, and interpreted, both as intended by its target audience, and as a digital entity. Within the digital realm, we have witnessed unprecedented opportunities to bridge the accessibility gap that transcend traditional print limitations. While a related discussion in Chapter 3 explored potential complications that new digital media pose to legacy workflows, this section will focus on the opportunities they present and how academic book publishers can wield these tools to deliver on the unique value proposition of the scholarly text. By delving into the transformative potential for inclusivity in the digital medium, we can uncover compelling reasons to inspire extra efforts from academic book publishers to develop and maintain accessibility-first workflows.

5.3.1. Designing for UX

In the digital realm, reader experience becomes synonymous with user experience, which presents academic book publishers with an opportunity to fulfil the “assistive technology potential” inherent in digital formats.¹⁰⁸ Ultimately, once the objectives of a scholarly text are identified, if reader modalities in the digital space are truly understood, it becomes difficult to separate the goals of comprehension from those of accessibility. Simply put, the digital delivery of content is so ubiquitous that

107. Kira Harkonen, ‘How Do Readers Use Ebooks?’, BookNet Canada, 1 August 2018, <https://www.booknetcanada.ca/blog/2018/8/1/how-do-readers-use-ebooks>.

108. McNaught et al., ‘Evaluating E-Book Platforms’.

most users have baseline expectations about what the technical functions should satisfy, such as the ability to resize or manipulate the text (even as simple as the ability to zoom in). Thus, regardless of whether accessibility was considered, some of the most expected features in UX design end up being vital components to accessible design.

5.3.2. Producing for digital readers

When reading scholarly texts in a digital space, the ability to manipulate and interact with text isn't just *valuable* to the reading experience, it's *vital* to reader comprehension. Uniquely digital features, such as content navigation and hyperlinks, serve as digital equivalents of physical conveniences that we often take for granted in print books. The significance of this is particularly pronounced in the context of academic books, where comprehension and retention are primary reading goals. These goals are supported by book features that we tend to overlook as important—until they're not available to us. For instance, the convenience of quickly accessing a list of acronyms without disrupting the reading flow is not only useful, but sometimes necessary, for comprehending the content. In print editions, readers can bookmark or dog-ear the page and refer back to it as needed. In digital editions, it's not enough for the same page to exist—a quick-navigation feature needs to be built into book files to replicate the *convenience* inherent in print books. Similarly, footnotes in physical texts provide immediately relevant information that is often indispensable for reader comprehension. In digital editions, these notes require active hyperlinks to allow for seamless cross-referencing as needed.

To ensure true accessibility of digital books, it is critical that academic publishers recognize the comprehensive nature of reading as it relates to a reader's search for meaning through text. When basic interactive elements are available for sighted readers but not optimized for accessibility, individuals relying on screen readers are deprived of a vital aspect of comprehension. Understanding this concept helps shed light on why statistics regarding e-book accessibility can be misleadingly optimistic. For example, looking back to the BookNet statistic mentioned in section 3.3.1., which states that 95 percent of e-book publishers claim to use "at least one

accessibility feature,"¹⁰⁹ consider what the *actual* impact on accessibility would be if just a single accessibility feature was integrated into an e-book. Yes, a file with proper heading hierarchies that a screen reader can interpret correctly is better than one without; but if that same screen reader fails to identify embedded code that would help assist users in navigating with ease, then comprehension is compromised. When visually impaired readers miss out on features from which sighted readers benefit, the book is not truly accessible.

5.3.3. Working with third parties

Publishers also need to assess their relationship with third parties and how they support—or hinder—the development of accessible e-books. For academic book publishers, this involves not only selecting the right partners, but also considering how to communicate with them. If publishers lack the knowledge or resources necessary to clearly express the intricacies of their accessibility needs, they need to carefully consider who they're working with and why. For instance, a publisher may value the convenience and legacy knowledge of copyeditors who are familiar with their publications. However, without carefully considering their ability to deliver content in an accessible manner, these publishers are unintentionally de-prioritizing accessibility at a crucial stage of production. Choosing freelancers and suppliers has a significant impact on the overall accessibility workflow, and sometimes, this might require moving away from familiar third parties. Sometimes when priorities evolve, 'the way it's always been done' no longer serves a useful purpose. It's vital that publishers are not complacent and start to really consider the consequences of their partnerships.

Even when third parties have been carefully selected with accessibility in mind, there can still be a learning curve in understanding how they respond to specific requests. Publishers often outsource work where they lack expertise, which is reasonable and expected. However, it's important for them to develop a sufficient understanding of the required outcomes of the work to effectively communicate them in terms that are clear to those performing the work. This can include using clear terminology and providing guidance on tasks, such as setting the desired tags.

109. BookNet Canada, 'The State of Publishing in Canada: 2021'.

Without this clarity, the back-and-forth communication between publishers and third parties can result in an unnecessary waste of time and resources.¹¹⁰

5.4. Turning the page: closing thoughts

There are many motivated book publishers out there striving to grow more every day. This work is commendable, and I'm not here to criticize the work being done. The pursuit of improved and integrated accessible workflows can be likened to transportation in a bustling city. Many individuals embrace sustainable transportation methods amidst a car-dominated infrastructure, but their impact remains limited without the collective effort of major corporations and city planners. Similarly, while many publishers strive to enhance accessibility, the industry's overall transition away from legacy workflows that do not effectively serve accessibility goals is a slow one. Just as a city requires the collaboration and concerted efforts of both individuals and corporations to truly transform its transportation system, the publishing industry needs a collective mindset shift and actionable support from legislative and funding bodies to prioritize accessibility. Given their distinct cultural position and wide reach, this holds particularly true for academic book publishers. Only then can academic books truly become accessible to all readers, transcending the limitations of individual efforts, and fostering inclusivity on a wider scale.

To achieve this, we must foster collaboration among publishers, accessibility experts, authors, and readers with print disabilities and visual impairments. By engaging in dialogue, sharing best practices, and embracing emerging technologies, we can push the boundaries of what is possible and create a more inclusive publishing landscape. Furthermore, we must continuously invest in the development of expertise and knowledge in accessible publishing. This means providing training and resources to our staff, partnering with accessibility organizations, and staying up-to-date on advancements in technology and accessibility guidelines. By nurturing this expertise, we empower ourselves to overcome the challenges that lie ahead and ensure that accessibility remains at the forefront of our publishing endeavours.

110. PUBLIC Journal, Amy Rollason on the Work of Working Accessibly.

The ideas presented in this paper serve as both a call to action and a guidebook. Accessibility is not a mere afterthought; it is a fundamental pillar of inclusivity that should permeate every aspect of our publishing practices. Accessibility is about ensuring equal access to knowledge, empowering individuals with disabilities to actively participate in academic discourse, and fostering a more equitable society. It is a matter of fairness, respect, and dignity for every reader. Acknowledging the limitations is an important step to overcoming them, but it's critical to remember that they are explanations, but not excuses. The challenges book publishers—and especially academic book publishers—face pale in comparison to the human impact of failing to optimize accessibility.

In closing, accessibility is not just a checkbox to be marked off but a responsibility we bear as publishers. Academic publishers in particular have a moral *responsibility* to the public, but they also have an *opportunity* to make a lasting impact, to bridge the gap between knowledge and readership, and to transform the lives of individuals who rely on accessible content. They have the historically endorsed authority to lead the charge, demolishing barriers to open doors to a world where *every* person has an equal opportunity to engage with scholarly knowledge.

Accessibility matters. As publishers, it is our responsibility to break the cycle of exclusion and inform a new narrative where inclusivity is the norm. It demands an unwavering commitment to equity and dignity for everyone, regardless of ability. The time for excuses is over.

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