



London Book Fair Takes Climate Action

**Interviews with
Gareth Rapley, London Book Fair
&
Rachel Martin, Elsevier**

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KENNEALLY: London Book Fair returns this week to the historic Olympia exhibition venue on Hammersmith Road.

Welcome to CCC's podcast series. I'm Christopher Kenneally for Velocity of Content.

For 2023, London Book Fair turns the spotlight on Ukraine to showcase that nation's publishers and authors, who have responded to the Russian invasion last year with a renewed commitment to free expression.

The spotlight will also fall on Gareth Rapley, who became director of the London Book Fair last fall. He joins me now from London with a show preview. Welcome to Velocity of Content.

RAPLEY: Hi, Chris. Thank you very much for having me. A pleasure to join you today.

KENNEALLY: Well, thank you for taking the time to do that, Gareth. London Book Fair returned from its COVID-imposed hiatus last year with lower attendance than in pre-pandemic years, very understandably, and limited participation of North American publishing houses. So in 2023, are the Yanks returning?

RAPLEY: I think the evidence we're seeing so far through registrations, along with exhibitors, the way they're talking about US colleagues coming back over from a lot of the larger publishing houses, through to a considerable number more of literary agent bookings, is very much the US presence is coming back to London Book Fair, and in good force as well. I think we're very pleased so far.



KENNEALLY: You've described London Book Fair as the essential spring chapter for the industry in the global marketplace. For you, Gareth Rapley, what distinguishes the London Book Fair from other publishing industry events?

RAPLEY: London itself is an iconic city in the arts and cultures, has a very historic heritage and rich nature in terms of the writing and the screenplays and all of those things that kind of emanate out of London and the UK as a whole.

We have some fantastic content programs happening at London Book Fair across a variety of different job roles and areas of the book industry. So whether you're a bookseller – you know, there's a curated program around that – through to whether you're looking for those key policy areas of discussion, things like copyright, they will be hopefully addressed and discussed as part of London Book Fair.

KENNEALLY: What are the highlights of the Ukraine spotlight programming, Gareth, and what else is new or special for 2023?

RAPLEY: I think we're very privileged to be able to help support and shine a spotlight, having Ukraine as the guest spotlight country for 2023. I think it was very evident in lots of discussions I had early into my tenure in taking over the role as director that there's many challenges still faced by the Ukrainian publishing industry, lots of support still required across the globe and across the industry to help retain that culture, that history, and that heritage, along with accessibility of having those words and those works reach different communities.

KENNEALLY: The Sustainability Hub is a focused space on the show floor for examining the impact publishing has on the environment. That's new. And you've also added a new prize for sustainability to the annual LBF Excellence Awards. Why did you decide to make sustainability so prominent a concern?

RAPLEY: Very good question, Chris, and I think this comes into when – you asked a moment ago about what's new for this year.

And sustainability – I think across every industry, every business, and every individual around the world at the moment, you can't help but not read the news and see that we're in a climate emergency.

So we've tried to curate the Sustainability Hub with some wonderful partners, like our colleagues in Elsevier, the IPA, along with sponsors we have for this year in CPI and Springer Nature, around sharing practical information. We've kind of blended the days between sharing those SDG goals – delighted to have participation from people within the



UN to be able to share maybe some of that progress – and then really kind of look into some of those different areas of the industry.

KENNEALLY: On Wednesday, in fact, Mayor of London Sadiq Khan will keynote the fair with a discussion about his new book, *Breathe: Tackling the Climate Emergency*. Do you expect Mayor Khan to challenge his publisher audience to do more about climate change?

RAPLEY: I think there'll be many aspects to the session. We're delighted to have Mayor Khan come along. I think it reemphasizes that position of London as an arts and culture kind of hub. And I think it's also reinforcing again – when you look towards sustainability, a key part will be the roles in which cities play, because there's lots of that urbanization, urban infrastructure, connection pieces, and how they're challenging the businesses that are operating within there.

KENNEALLY: Extensive development is underway at the Olympia site. Will book fair attendees be working at a construction site?

RAPLEY: Outside of the four walls of Olympia, you can see there's still a huge amount of construction ongoing at the moment. This a huge project, really stratospheric in terms of what Olympia is going through at the moment. I think it's something like a £1.3 billion infrastructure innovation that'll see things like new hotels coming on site, a whole new sky garden terrace with cafés, bars, restaurants, live theater, a music venue. So there's a lot that's happening to kind of build that together.

But once you get into the walls of London Book Fair into the venue itself, it won't be evident really, the construction.

KENNEALLY: Gareth Rapley, director of the London Book Fair, thank you for speaking with me, and good luck this week.

RAPLEY: Thank you so much, Chris. Really enjoyed joining you today, and we'll look forward to seeing you and many more next week.

KENNEALLY: Rachel Martin is the global director of sustainability at Elsevier and a key organizer for the Sustainability Lounge at the London Book Fair. Welcome to Velocity of Content, Rachel.

MARTIN: Thanks so much. Happy to be here.

KENNEALLY: Your Elsevier colleague Michiel Kolman will be challenging Frankfurt Book Fair president and CEO Juergen Boos and London's Gareth Rapley with a very pointed



question – book fairs, how sustainable are they? What are you expecting that Boos and Gareth Rapley will say, and what does your research tell you?

MARTIN: This is definitely a not-to-be-missed session. I think everybody wants to hear about book fairs and sustainability. I think book fairs have been the lifeblood of our sector for so many years. They're where authors, where publishers, where agents, and even the public come to do business – very important – and also to meet each other and discuss the importance of our sector. So making sure that they work in a net-zero world is so important. I think having both these heavyweights on stage is going to be amazing.

What are they going to talk about? I think they're going to talk about some things that we might not already understand about sustainability and book fairs. A lot of work has already been happening in the events industry to become net zero – a lot of good conversations, a lot of good actions. Some of the venues, such as Olympia, are run on 100% renewable energy. And I think it will be really interesting for people to understand those developments.

I think what you'll also get from that session is a little bit of a sneak peek about what are we going to see in 2030? What will the future of the book fair be? Like I said, they're the lifeblood of the sector, but what does that mean in a net-zero world? What kind of experience will you as a visitor have? You may not get your badge and your lanyard, as we're so used to. It may be digital. It may be better. We might be walking on carpet that generates the electricity that powers all the lights. It could be fantastic. And I think hearing from these experts is going to be so inspiring for everybody and also for us to think about our own imprint as we go on and visit the fair.

KENNEALLY: That sounds very exciting. And I have to say, I just learned something about Olympia Hall, which is to find out that it's generating its own power. That is really something to know. But how will the whole industry of publishing really begin to ensure that publishing is lowering emissions in its own operations, not just at book fairs?

MARTIN: This is definitely the hot question, and I think we'll deal with it in lots of different ways during the Sustainability Hub. First and foremost, and I think we said it last year at the London Book Fair, is that you have to set your commitment. Paris is very clear. It's 2050 that the world needs to get to net zero. And some publishers have committed to reducing their emissions to 2050. It's a really important north star. Some will move more quickly, and that's great. Elsevier and others have committed to 2040. Some people have been very ambitious and gone 2030, and some even earlier than that. That's all good news, in that we are setting that north star.



The second thing is that we really have to get upskilled and understand the data around this. Lots of these actions that we need to take as organizations require data that we may not already have. It's certainly not in the same place. And it certainly requires us to really think carefully about how do we collect it? How do we share it? How do we align our methodology? This is why it's so important that we need to come together and have those conversations. There are some amazing projects that have already been launched to help publishers along this way. The UK Publishers Association launched the Carbon Calculator at the end of last year along with the Materiality Matrix, which will really help UK members of that organization to upskill, to get to grips with what data is available, and to start calculating their footprints. What we also find is that along the supply chain, there's a lot of action happening as well.

KENNEALLY: And one of the areas where the publishing industry really has its work cut out for it, Rachel Martin, is in book returns. That's an interesting, idiosyncratic practice of publishing, but it really has an impact on the environment. Tell us about that.

MARTIN: Book returns are really about the relationship between publishers and booksellers. Traditionally, booksellers in many parts of Europe and particularly in the UK have a system called book returns, where books are sent to the booksellers, and if they don't get sold, they're returned back to the publishers. Now, it seems quite inefficient from a carbon emission perspective if you've got these books coming and going, shipping back and forth between bookshops and publishers' warehouses. Often, this very simple inefficiency needs to be addressed. And it's not just a small problem. It's quite an ingrained part of our workflows. It's how we've always done business. And it's something that we will need to address as we move to a net-zero world.

That's why it's so important to hear the latest research on that. There'll be some really great research coming out of the European Booksellers Federation, who will be coming and presenting at the Sustainability Summit exactly on this topic. So it's going to be really interesting, because every country has a slightly different way it's configured. How it works in the UK is not necessarily how it might work in Spain or in France. And understanding those are going to be critical in order to change those established workflows.

KENNEALLY: When we last spoke, Rachel Martin, in October for the Frankfurt Book Fair, you described the Publishing 2030 Accelerator project. Tell us about the data-driven directions that some of the findings there offer us as a way forward.

MARTIN: When we did the Publishing 2030 Accelerator, the first thing we did was a carbon label – well, a carbon calculation of an individual book.



Now, this year, my challenge was to take the same concept of a carbon label for an individual book and think about it from our exhibition stand. What does it mean to come to a book fair? There's two sides of the coin here. One is that these book fairs are an awesome opportunity to combine lots of different meetings, which means we don't have to fly everywhere or multiple trips. We can combine these into the one place. Also, they're the meeting place for lots of different ideas, stimulation, inspiration.

What we wanted to do was to think, OK, what choices could we make – much like we do when we commission a book – to make sustainable choices? The two main categories of emissions is your stand build, so what materials you're using, and also how long you use it for. So the Elsevier stand is actually a stand originally designed for three years, and we started having conversations based on the data to say, well, does it have to be three years? Maybe we could use it for five years. So you start thinking about maybe timeless design. How do make sure that we have a design of a stand that reflects our brand for the longest possible time? We're also having a think about how those materials might be taken from stock materials. So we don't have to create or use raw materials specifically just for our stand. We could upcycle and reuse things which are readily available as well. That started a lot of different conversations.

The other area is how do you operate your stand? Who's going to be there, and where do they come from? So we're also looking at collecting the data from the Elsevier staff who were going to come there, where they're staying, and of course, how they're getting to the fair and back. That's really interesting, because it starts us thinking about, well, it might be good if you look for a hotel in walking distance or serviceable by public transport.

KENNEALLY: Rachel Martin, global director of sustainability at Elsevier, you have given us a call for action around the supply chain, but also around the content that comes from publishers. Share with us more about this call for climate-relative literature.

MARTIN: I think most importantly, when we think about climate action, it tends to be very much about the doom and gloom. We know the situation's bad. The latest IPCC report was not great reading for anybody who is concerned about their future and the future of their kids and their nieces and their nephews. But we do need is people who give us inspiration and hope.

I think having that vision and having it enshrined in fiction, in poetry, in children's literature – it has to be absolutely everywhere. When we wake up in the morning, we have to feel it in our gut. And at the moment, we don't necessarily have that same connection. I think we're still kind of trying to get our heads around it. We know intellectually it's happening, and I think we need the cultural power of the book sector to really get together and to think about, OK, how do we push this forward? How can we be agents of change?



That's where I think we have a great role to play, and I'm really looking forward to meeting so many people who will answer that call for action.

KENNEALLY: Rachel Martin, global director of sustainability at Elsevier, thanks for joining me on Velocity of Content.

MARTIN: Lovely to join you.

KENNEALLY: That's all for now. Our producer is Jeremy Brieske of Burst Marketing. You can subscribe to the program wherever you go for podcasts, and please do follow us on Twitter and on Facebook. You can also find Velocity of Content on YouTube as part of the CCC channel. I'm Christopher Kenneally. Goodbye.

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