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Leiden
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Quantitative research assessment and its unintended consequences

Dagiene, E.

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Chapter 4.

Prestige of scholarly book publishers: An investigation into criteria, processes, and practices across countries

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4.1. Introduction

For several decades, policymakers in many countries have incentivised researchers to promote “excellence” by publishing research findings through the “most prestigious channels.” Within the realm of academia, the narratives such as “excellence”, “quality”, “quantified control” (Burrows 2012; Lamont 2009; Moore et al. 2017) used in relation to funding allocation in the academic “prestige culture” (Fyfe et al. 2017) affect how researchers perceive the “quality” and “prestige” of book publishers. However, no complementary phenomenological investigation has explored further what actually goes on in the “murky world of academic preferment” (Cronin and La Barre 2004). Acquisition librarians were the first who surveyed researchers to determine the “quality” of publishers (Lewis 2000; Metz and Stemmer 1996) to support the development of library collections. While scientometricians surveyed academics to identify “quality indicators” for books and their publishers for using them in compiling the ranking of publishers (Gimenez-Toledo, Tejada-Artigas, and Manana-Rodriguez 2013).

Apart from this traditional method, many attempts have emerged to quantify the book assessment, evaluate books’ impact, and distinguish their publishers using lib citations (White et al. 2009; White and Zuccala 2018); book reviews (Zuccala and van Leeuwen 2011; Zuccala and Robinson-García 2019); or a set of digital indicators (Neville and Henry 2014). The newest qualitative and quantitative initiatives are often experimental (Giménez-Toledo, Mañana-Rodríguez, and Tejada-Artigas 2015), while efforts to be purely quantitative, sometimes, lack clearly stated policies (Basso et al. 2017; Williams and Galleron 2016).

Almost two decades ago, Nederhof et al. (Nederhof, Luwel, and Moed 2001) constructed three indices: “a quality weight”, “an (inter)national visibility weight”, and “a combined index for publishers” assessing publishers in linguistics. Currently, ranking publishing channels and compiling lists of prestigious publishers are common practices for metric-based funding systems. Norway implemented the first thoroughly documented ranking of publication channels (journals, book series, and publishers) in 2005; often called the Norwegian model (Sivertsen 2018). Denmark and Finland adopted this widely discussed and extensively followed approach, identifying top-level publishers in 2008 and 2012, respectively. One of Belgium region, Flanders takes a somewhat different approach by differentiating publishers according to their peer review practices (Giménez-Toledo et al. 2016).

Lithuanian policymakers began using the term “prestigious publisher” in 2005. Still, nobody has investigated the book assessment practices that policymakers have used for over twenty-five years. Williams et al. (2018) have described some Lithuanian procedures as “an essentially bureaucratic decision on what is and what is not a book.” For sure, Lithuanian institutions earn funding points in the national Performance-Based Funding System (PBFS) for every fourteen pages of eligible books or chapters in edited volumes. For instance, Verleysen and Engels (2018), discussing weight ratios of publication types, do not suggest the possibility of considering the number of pages of a publication in research evaluation. There

is one more distinctive Lithuanian feature in assessing *book outputs in the sciences*². Only books published by prestigious foreign publishers earn points (and state funding) for institutions, they get nothing for books published by “ordinary” publishers. This has elevated publisher prestige to the utmost importance for Lithuanian institutions. Moreover, while formal national regulations define the notion of a prestigious publisher, the decision whether a specific publisher is prestigious or not depends strongly on the opinion of anonymous experts.

Few empirical studies have investigated the consequences of book assessment based on publishers’ judgements. Only a handful of papers examine the Norwegian model (Aagaard, Bloch, and Schneider 2015) or emphasise challenges in verifying the prerequisites for publishers of academic book outputs (Borghart 2013). Several papers flag the unexpected potential consequences of national performance-based funding systems on research practices (Aagaard 2015; Faggiolani and Solimine 2018; Hammarfelt and de Rijcke 2015; Rowlands and Wright 2021). These studies provide a background for more extensive research, particularly concerning the possible implications of assessing books based on their publishers’ prestige. At the same time, there is still an ongoing debate in research evaluation studies about the endeavour of ranking book publishers per se (Giménez-Toledo et al. 2015), and information is scattered in the literature.

The main goal of this paper is to get more insight into the validity and desirability of the systems for rankings of book publishers in different countries, to bring information together in an integrated way, and to provide additional empirical insights from Lithuanian practices.

In this chapter, I intend to answer the following research questions:

- RQ 1: What methods are employed in Lithuania to identify prestigious publishers in assessing book outputs, and how do these methods differ from those used in other countries?
- RQ 2: To what extent do assessments of book outputs based on the prestige of book publishers yield consistent results, both over time and between countries?
- RQ 3: To what extent is it possible to verify whether book publishers meet the formal prerequisites of national assessments?

Using a mixed-methods approach, I will explore the ways publishers’ prestige is determined across countries. This study will contribute to a deeper understanding of the complexity of assessing scholarly books. It will also identify the uncertainties of a process in which books are evaluated based on their publisher’s prestige.

4.2. Research design

This paper presents a case study that combines qualitative and quantitative methods. A qualitative document analysis was performed to study two related phenomena: *the assessment of scholarly book publishers* and *the methodologies and practices used to determine*

² The term “the sciences” refers to all fields of research except for the social sciences and humanities.

prestigious publishers. I used a snowball method to gather relevant literature starting from Sivertsen's (2018) extended explanation and retrospective of the Norwegian and other related models. Research papers, edited volumes, regulations, reports, and grey literature were examined to identify rules and practicalities related to the assessment of scholarly books and their publishers. As an example, the documents, regulations, research papers and other information associated with the Norwegian Publication Indicator—as the best-documented indicator, followed by other countries—were obtained from its webpage “About NPI”³ (henceforth referred to as the NPI). Rankings of publishers and the publication points earned by Norwegian institutions were taken from the Norwegian Register for Scientific Journals, Series and Publishers⁴ (henceforth referred to as the Norwegian Register). Lithuanian legal acts containing the methodologies for the formal evaluation of research produced by research and higher education institutions were obtained from an official database: The Register of Legal Acts of the Republic of Lithuania (TAR)⁵.

For the bibliometric investigation, I chose the Lithuanian book outputs submitted by institutions to the national metric-based funding systems from 2005 to 2016. I thoroughly examined bibliographic data on registered books assessed by anonymous panel experts. Then, I identified publishers that were awarded both the highest category (prestigious publisher) and at least one other category (not-so-prestigious or non-prestigious). Such discrepancies in judgements about publishers have been discussed within Lithuanian academia at all levels (departments, faculties, and universities) for years. These results are significant for researchers because institutions operate internal incentive schemes reallocating funds received after these annual assessments. However, I only studied issues related to publishers' prestige and did not analyse the institutional incentive schemes.

Bibliographic information on Lithuanian book outputs was derived from databases managed by the Lithuanian Research Council: (1) Dynamics of Lithuanian Research Potential⁶ for outcomes published from 2004 to 2008; and (2) Reports on Scientific, Arts and other Relevant Activities of Research and Higher Education Institutions⁷ for outputs published from 2009 to 2016. From a bibliographical perspective, the compiled records had various shortcomings. So, I enriched the primary bibliographical data with manual searches of the missing details in multiple catalogues: the National Bibliographic Database by Martynas Mazvydas, National

³ Norwegian Publication Indicator (NPI) <<https://npi.hkdir.no/>> accessed 21 July 2024.

⁴ Norwegian Register for Scientific Journals, Series and Publishers
<<https://kanalregister.hkdir.no/publiseringskanaler/Forside/publiseringskanaler>> accessed 21 July 2024.

⁵ Register of Legal Acts of the Republic of Lithuania (TAR) <<https://www.e-tar.lt/portal/en/index>> accessed 21 July 2024.

⁶ Lietuvos mokslo potencialo dinamika [The dynamic of the Lithuanian research potential]
<<http://www.mokslas.mii.lt/mokslas>> accessed 21 July 2024.

⁷ Mokslo ir studijų institucijų mokslinės, meninės ir su jomis susijusios kitos veiklos ataskaita [Reports of outputs submitted by research and higher education institutions after research assessments] <<https://mokslas.lmt.lt/INSTITUCIJOS/>> accessed 21 July 2024.

Library of Lithuania⁸, the Lithuanian Academic Electronic Library⁹, WorldCat catalogue¹⁰, and on the web.

ISBNs are mandatory prerequisites for scholarly books in almost all countries, including Lithuania, and registrants of ISBNs can be presumed to be responsible for the content they make publicly available. Thus, I recognised the ISBN registrants as the publishers in the analysed dataset. I chose the Global Register of Publishers (GRP) as a primary, reliable, and freely accessible resource about registrants of ISBNs created by the International ISBN Agency¹¹. I derived from the GRP further data about the ISBN registrants of the books in our dataset, enriching bibliographical information for book outputs gathered from the Lithuanian Research Council databases.

Many papers on scholarly book evaluation focus on the social sciences and humanities, even though in Norway, Finland, and Denmark (countries that rank publishers to assess book outputs), academic book publishers are not divided into academic fields. In this paper, presenting Lithuanian book assessment results, I separate between the sciences, the social sciences, and the humanities because Lithuanian regulations apply stricter requirements for book outputs in the sciences than in the social sciences and humanities (see subsection 4.3.5). Additionally, the Lithuanian regulations set no criteria for publishers of conference proceedings; therefore, I excluded 50 publications records from the initial dataset of 4135 records (Dagienė et al. 2019) as a thorough investigation of experts' comments revealed that they were conference proceedings published as edited volumes and assessed as conference proceedings.

The final dataset of Lithuanian book outputs (books and edited volumes without conference proceedings) reflects institutional submissions of 4085 unique titles having ISBN codes published from 2004 to 2016. The experts positively assessed 3712 (out of 4085) reported book outputs and scored them according to their publishers' prestige. In these cases, the publisher was classified as prestigious or not-so-prestigious. The panels rejected the other 373 titles as inappropriate mainly because the publisher was considered non-prestigious. The analysis focuses on the book publishers for which the experts were not consistently classifying them as prestigious, not-so-prestigious, or even not prestigious.

4.3. Defining prestigious book publishers

Numerous research papers confirm that modern research evaluation systems increase the pressure on researchers to publish more and reinforce their “publish or perish” habits, which significantly changes the publishing patterns of both journal papers and scholarly books (Broz and Stöckelová 2018; Butler 2003a; De Rijcke et al. 2016; Elton 2000; Good et al. 2015; Moed 2008; Osuna, Cruz-Castro, and Sanz-Menéndez 2011). Some studies show that scholars adjust

⁸ National Bibliographic Database <<https://ibiblioteka.lt>> accessed 21 July 2024.

⁹ Lithuanian Academic Electronic Library <<https://www.lvb.lt/>> accessed 21 July 2024.

¹⁰ WorldCat catalogue <<https://www.worldcat.org/>> accessed 21 July 2024.

¹¹ The Global Register of Publishers <<https://grp.isbn-international.org/>> accessed 21 July 2024.

their behaviour in response to these requirements of research assessments, especially when the number of publications is explicitly linked to their research funding.

The research assessment regulations best reflect the policymakers' perceptions of the "quality" of book outputs. Analysing policies, I found that countries applying qualitative research assessment (peer-review) do not emphasise book publishers' prestige. Meanwhile, countries with at least partial metric-based funding systems rank publishers, so funding points awarded to book publishers.

Book evaluation in countries having qualitative (peer review) research assessment systems. In the UK, experts assess the quality of published research outputs (and books among them) by reading the actually submitted books (Rosenberg 2015), which institutions select as their best outcomes. According to the Research Excellence Framework (REF) policies, panel reviewers evaluate three distinct elements for each submission: the quality, the impact beyond academia, and the environment that supports research¹². Also, there is a statement:

*"53. No sub-panel will make use of journal impact factors, rankings or lists, or the perceived standing of the publisher, in assessing the quality of research outputs."
(REF 2014 2012)*

Nevertheless, several reports with widespread scope commissioned by the UK's Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE) investigate metrics and possible changes in the assessment process. The Metric Tide (Wilsdon et al. 2015) discusses book-based indicators, among other metrics, and Crossick (Crossick 2015) examines the issues around open access for monographs. The latter relates to policymakers' intention to mandate open access monographs as book outputs in the REF in 2027 (Lockett 2018).

There are more independent reports on the REF2014 results. In one, Tanner (Tanner 2016) provides a thorough analysis of publishing data on books submitted across the arts and humanities—the experts assessed 8,513 books produced by 1,180 unique publishers. Tanner's conclusions include:

*"As far as can be ascertained from the available data, attempting to assess books through a purely quantitative method would be nigh on impossible to do fairly or equitably. [...] This study adds further evidence to the sense that bibliometrics remain a very unhelpful means of analysing books for research excellence."
(Tanner 2016)*

A general independent review on REF2014 results, widely known as the Stern Review (Stern 2016), includes a recommendation supporting the current peer review based assessment and emphasises that if the metrics are provided to inform the evaluation, they should be used transparently.

Similarly to the UK, it looks like publishers' status is currently not a decisive factor in France (Williams and Galleron 2016) or Italy (Basso et al. 2017; Faggiolani and Solimine 2018). Nevertheless, an Italian study has been conducted investigating the possibilities of employing

¹² The Research Excellence Framework (REF2021) <<https://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/20180319165633/http://www.ref.ac.uk/about/whatref/>> accessed 21 July 2024.

quantitative metrics to assess books (Basso et al. 2017). Researchers conclude that classifying publishers is fraught with difficulty (Williams et al. 2018) and suggest surveying researchers, as was done in Spain (see subsection 4.3.1). Nevertheless, Giménez-Toledo et al. (Giménez-Toledo and Román-Román 2009), based on a thorough systematic review, conclude that although there is no simple way to determine the “prestige” of publishers, publishers’ ranking is predominant in the research assessment.

The importance of publishers’ prestige varies in countries with metric-based assessment funding systems (Giménez-Toledo et al. 2019). In the Czech Republic, the actual publisher of book outputs was of no significance until 2013, when panel peer review evaluation was introduced (Broz and Stöckelová 2018); and the current formal criteria do not mention the importance of publishers (Government of the Czech Republic 2018). In Poland, researchers could self-publish monographs that meet the formal criteria for metric-based assessment funding (Kulczycki 2018) until the List of Scientific Publishers was introduced in 2018 (see subsection 4.3.4).

Meanwhile, there are countries which extensively rank the publishers for years. Norway introduced the first and widely documented ranking of publishing channels in 2005 (Sivertsen 2018), Denmark implemented a similar levelling in 2008¹³, and Finland followed them with a national system launched in 2012¹⁴. More details of these rankings are presented in Subsections 4.3.2 and 4.3.3 below.

A slightly different publishers’ assessment system was established in Flanders, the Northern Dutch-speaking region of Belgium. The Flemish regulations do not mention the publisher’s prestige; the main criterion is peer review—the procedures expected from the book publishers (Verleysen and Engels 2013). The national Authoritative Panel, consisting of professors affiliated with Flemish universities with expertise covering the social sciences and humanities, is authorised to evaluate publication channels (journals, publishers, and book series) against the criteria stipulated in the regulations (Verleysen, Ghesquiere, and Engels 2014). This panel has found the most challenging aspect of its work is to verify the peer review procedures in book output production. In response to the regulations and doubts, the Flemish Publishers Association invented a label, “the guaranteed peer reviewed content.” So, the Flemish list of publishers consists of two publisher types—those who handle peer review for all their published books and those who manage peer review for individual books or book series.¹⁵ Thus, the Flemish system has no concept of “prestigious” publishers: Springer, Catholic University of America Press, Oxford University Press, or Berg (to name but a few) are all treated the exact same way.

¹³ The BFI is an element of the performance-based model for distribution of the new block grants for research to universities. In: Ministry of Higher Education and Science, Denmark <<https://ufm.dk/en/research-and-innovation/statistics-and-analyses/bibliometric-research-indicator/bfi-rules-and-regulations>> accessed 25 April 2020.

¹⁴ Publication Forum in: Federation of Finnish Learned Societies <<https://www.julkaisufoorumi.fi/en/publication-forum>> accessed 21 July 2024.

¹⁵ The Flemish Academic Bibliographic Database for the Social Sciences and Humanities (VABB-SHW) is a database of academic publications from the social sciences and humanities authored by researchers affiliated to Flemish universities. <<https://www.ecoom.be/en/data-collections/vabb-shw>> accessed 21 July 2024.

4.3.1. Scholarly Publisher Indicators in Spain

Based on a thorough examination of methods to assess monographs through their publishers, Giménez-Toledo and Román-Román (2009) concluded that “there is no one quality indicator which can be considered determinant and by which the quality of the publisher can be established’.

To find out academics’ perceptions of what exactly determines the quality of publishers of monographs, Giménez-Toledo et al. (Gimenez-Toledo et al. 2013) used responses from three thousand Spanish researchers. Considerable variations were revealed within the criteria for the “prestige” of publishers in different scientific fields. As Giménez-Toledo et al. noticed, some of the leading indicators recognised by researchers (peer review, an ongoing trajectory of publications, publishers’ monographs being in libraries, and in international databases) partially coincide with those indicated by the Spanish research evaluation agencies: the National Agency for Quality Assessment and Accreditation and the National Commission for the Evaluation of Research Activity. Besides, the surveyed academics pointed out additional indicators of “prestige”, such as good reviews in the best journals (in Prestige of Publisher), an adequate structure of publications (in Quality of Publications), or publishers maintaining a presence in foreign bookstores (in Dissemination and Distribution System of the Publisher) (Gimenez-Toledo et al. 2013).

A Spanish information system on publishers entitled the Scholarly Publishers Indicators was created in 2012 and later updated in 2014 and 2018 (Giménez Toledo 2018). Scholarly Publishers Indicators covers only Spanish and international publishers that researchers participating in a survey indicated to be among the top ten in their respective fields; thus, publisher prestige in Spain is field-specific. Accordingly, the Scholarly Publishers Indicators (SPI) ranking allows selection of the most highly valued publishers in sixteen disciplines within the social sciences and humanities. Additionally, the Spanish SPI includes interactive charts: *Manuscripts Selection Processes* (reported by publishers) and *Scholarly Publishers Indicators Expanded* (showing the presence of each book publisher in five information systems)¹⁶.

The SPI is used quite widely in Spain. However, according to Giménez-Toledo et al. (Giménez-Toledo et al. 2016), Spanish assessment agencies use the indicators only as a reference, and their function is to support the decisions of expert panels. Mañana Rodríguez and Pölönen (Mañana Rodríguez and Pölönen 2018) specify that the information concerning scholarly publishers in Spain “is supplemented with further review of the individual titles by expert panels in the context of the applicant’s CV” and conclude:

“It must also be said that a ranking of publishers based on “quality” does not mean that there is always a direct relationship between a high quality book and a high

¹⁶ SPIs Expanded showed the presence of each book publisher in five information systems: Book Citation Index (Clarivate Analytics); Scopus Book Titles (Elsevier); Norwegian list (Norwegian categorization of book publishers, used in various European countries); SPI/Book publishers’ prestige (I LIA/CSIC Research Group); Finnish list (Finnish categorization of book publishers) <<http://ilia.cchs.csic.es/SPI/indexEn.html>> accessed 13 Nov 2020 but not opened at the time this PhD thesis was prepared. See the SPI portal <<https://spi.csic.es>> accessed 21 July 2024.

quality publisher. Expert panels therefore need to have access to each individual publication in order to observe this limitation.”

Interestingly, Mañana Rodriguez and Pölönen (Mañana Rodriguez and Pölönen 2018), comparing Finish and Spanish ratings, identified differently ranked publishers (prestigious in one country and primary level in another).

4.3.2. Prestigious publishers in Norway

The widely discussed Norwegian model, developed for indicator-based funding, incentivises researchers to publish in the most prestigious channels within their research area (Sivertsen 2018). This model implies that prominent researchers designate which journals and book series that have met the entry requirements (level 1) are considered prestigious (level 2) in their particular science area; even book publishers in the Norwegian model are not separated by the science areas as in the Spanish SPI.

To better understand the Norwegian ranking of publishers, I investigated the regulations available on two separate portals: the Norwegian Publication Indicator and the Norwegian Register. Both have interfaces in English and provide extensive information on processes for publisher ranking.

According to mandatory regulations declared in the Norwegian Register, to be registered at level 1 (which is the basic entry level), book publishers must submit for primary evaluation: (1) their ISBN prefix, (2) documentation of their scientific publishing programme (not the editorial board), (3) external peer review procedures (an explanation in a PDF file is enough), and (4) proof of their international or national authors (names and affiliations from the last two years). Figure 1 shows the prerequisites in the Norwegian Registry for the entry level 1 and conditions for level 2.

Stage 1: approval of minimum entry requirements for basic level (level 1)

Norwegian Centre for Research Data or reported institutions ensure that academic publishers meet the criteria for inclusion.

Prerequisite 1 ISBN prefix	Prerequisite 2 Established procedures for external peer review	Prerequisite 3 Advisory or editorial board; the scientific publishing programme of publishers	Prerequisite 4 National or international authorship
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Stage 2: selection as the most prestigious publishers for top level (level 2) from the approved at stage 1

Empowered researchers on panels take the final decision which publishers are prestigious.

Condition 1 Publishers issue the most significant academic literature in the field	Condition 2 Publishers produce about 20 per cent of academic publications	Condition 3 Publishers have international authorship (less than two thirds of the authors are from the same country)
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Figure 1. Prerequisites and approval procedures for publication channels of the Norwegian Register

The prestigious level 2 is limited to channels—journals, book series, or book publishers—that issue “the most outstanding works by researchers from different countries.” But it is unclear how to identify outstanding works. Even more, the guidelines state that for calibrating

“prestige”—‘level 2 publication channels shall together constitute about one-fifth (20 per cent) of the field’s total academic publications” (Sivertsen 2018). However, according to the NPI, the Norwegian Register of academic book publishers is not divided into academic fields, and the National Board of Scholarly Publishing¹⁷ “is responsible for the publisher rating levels and updates this annually based on input from academic fields where book publishing is a central or frequent format for publishing research.” In addition to the experts’ decision, level 2 has a 20 per cent field-based threshold, creating even more ambiguity in identifying the book publishers’ prestige.

4.3.3. Publisher rankings in Denmark and Finland

Denmark and Finland have implemented the Norwegian model with some adjustments. The main requirements for an entry level listing correspond with those set in Norway (e.g. peer review before publication). Also, as in Norway, local researchers are empowered to decide which publishers deserve to be designated as prestigious.

In Denmark, the Bibliometric Research Indicator¹⁸ (BFI), announced in 2008 and launched in 2009 (Pedersen 2010), has two types of lists: one for journals, books, and conference series, and the other one for book publishers. These BFI lists were each divided into two levels from 2012 to 2017. Since 2018, these lists have had three publication levels: level 1 (ordinary), level 2 (particularly distinguished), and level 3 (prestigious). Level 3 includes no book publishers but only the most prestigious journals, book series and conferences. The level allocation depends on researchers who serve on expert panels (Danish Agency for Science and Higher Education 2019).

The Finnish Publication Forum¹⁹ (henceforth referred to as the Finnish ranking) was launched in 2012 and currently has three levels for book publishers. From 2012 to 2014, book publishers were only distributed between two levels in a particular proportion. In essence, 90 per cent of book publishers were in level 1, and ten per cent were designated as level 2 (prestigious leading publishers). Level 3 was reserved for a quarter of the level 2 journals and series (not book publishers). Since 2015, some book publishers have been awarded level 3.

It is worth noting that book publishers and the book series they produce are ranked separately, creating confusion in the rankings. But different countries deal with such issues differently. For example, the Norwegian model allows differences in levels, such as a book series can be ranked as level 2, and its publisher ranked as level 1. On the contrary, the Finnish ranking determines that (even if a book publisher was ranked at level 1 before), it must be rated at level 2 if one of its book series is assigned level 2. Despite this, the designers of the Finnish ranking warn: “the quality levels applied in the Publication Forum predict the average quality and impact of large publication volumes, but they are too arbitrary a tool for the evaluation of

¹⁷ The National Board of Scholarly Publishing <<https://npi.hkdir.no/organisering>> accessed 21 July 2024.

¹⁸ The Bibliometric Research Indicator (BFI) is a part of the performance-based funding model for distribution of basic funding to Danish universities <<https://medialibrary.uantwerpen.be/oldcontent/container50336/files/Faurbaek.pdf>> accessed 21 July 2024.

¹⁹ *Publication Forum* is a classification of publication channels created by the Finnish scientific community to support the quality assessment of academic research <<https://www.julkaisuforum.fi/en>> accessed 21 July 2024.

individual publications or researchers” (Auranen and Pölönen 2012; Mañana Rodriguez and Pölönen 2018).

4.3.4. The List of Scientific Publishers in Poland

Poland had a quantitative book evaluation system with some formal mandatory criteria (e.g., monograph’s length), and neither the prestige of book publishers nor peer-review, book reviews, citations, or book visibility was measured. According to Kulczycki (Kulczycki 2018), the main weakness in the Polish system was giving the same number of points for books published by Cambridge University Press, books published by a small local publisher, and even self-published books.

Inspired by foreign publisher rankings, the List of Scientific Publishers was announced in Poland in 2018 (Kulczycki 2019). During the initial phase, to identify the most prestigious (level 2) and the less prestigious (level 1) publishers, the Ministry of Science and Higher Education established “the Ministerial group for the lists of scientific journals and academic publishers”. This advisory body, consisting of almost 20 academics, prepared the first publisher list based on several data sources: (1) the Finnish Publication Forum; (2) the Norwegian Register for Scientific Journals, Series and Publishers; (3) the Scholarly Publishers Indicators (Spain); (4) the Book Citation Index (Clarivate Analytics); (5) Scopus (Elsevier); (6) data from the Polish research evaluation system to identify publishers of books authored by Polish researchers in 2013-16.

In 2019, the Ministry of Science and Higher Education founded the Research Evaluation Council, consisting of over thirty academics responsible for research assessment of Polish higher education and research institutions. Polish and foreign publishers interested in being included in the List of Scientific Publishers were invited to contact the committee responsible for maintaining the list. The chair of this committee, Emanuel Kulczycki, informed us that the ministry could modify the list prepared by the academics if needed.

The Polish Ministry of Science and Higher Education issued the List of Scientific Publishers in its regulation on December 17, 2020. According to this ministerial order, for every book issued by a level 2 publisher, institutions earned two hundred points in the sciences and three hundred points in the social sciences and humanities. For every book produced by a level 1 publisher, institutions acquired eighty points in the sciences and one hundred points in the social sciences and humanities. For every book published by any other publisher (not included in the List of Scientific Publishers), institutions obtained only 20 points (Kulczycki 2017).

At first sight, Lithuania (a close neighbour of Poland) may seem to have a similar system that distributes points according to publishers’ levels. However, Lithuania introduced the List of Globally Recognised Publishers in 2006, soon after dropped it, and revived slightly different lists of prestigious publishers in 2017.

4.3.5. Prestigious publishers in Lithuania

Lithuania introduced a metric-based funding system in 2005 (when Norway launched its Norwegian Register). Since 2005, the Lithuanian regulations have defined “prestigious

publishers” as publishers that (1) continually release publications authored by national and international researchers, (2) distribute their products in many countries, (3) issue globally recognised journals and series of books, and (4) provide enough information about these achievements on their websites. According to the formal Lithuanian definition, prestigious publishers should fulfil each of the four criteria listed above.

In 2006, designers of Lithuania’s national performance-based funding system changed some rules. They explained the aims of these amendments, declaring that they seek to incentivise research institutions to work efficiently, raise their international competitiveness, and comply with the state’s needs.²⁰ Within this order for outputs in the sciences (and not for the social sciences and humanities), policymakers introduced *the List of Globally Recognised Publishers*. It comprised sixteen named book producers such as Elsevier Science Group, Springer Group, Oxford and Cambridge University Presses, and similar publishers.

We want to explicitly draw attention to the fact that publishers issuing book outputs in the sciences were assessed *based on their journal publishing activities*. The List of Globally Recognised Publishers concluded by stating that prestigious publishers of monographs are those publishers which issue at least *five peer reviewed journals* indexed in the Journal Citation Reports (Clarivate Analytics, the former Institute of Scientific Information). Officially, the list was revoked soon after, in 2010.

Yet the List of Globally Recognised Publishers is still alive in Lithuanian researchers’ minds. From 2004 to 2016, the experts (senior researchers in their fields) consistently scored monographs or edited volumes issued by those sixteen large publishers as the highest-level book outputs produced by prestigious publishers.

From its beginning, the formal Lithuanian metric-based system was a purely quantitative formal assessment. However, in 2009, significant changes happened in the Lithuanian metric-based funding system. The evaluation was divided into two parts: *peer review assessment* (for 20 per cent of institutional outputs) and *formal metric-based assessment* (for the remaining eligible pieces of research). The Research Council of Lithuania still administers this ex-post evaluation. It assigns self-registered senior researchers (henceforth referred to as the experts) into the pool for two expert panels (one for the sciences and the other for the social sciences and humanities). The experts have not been named; they work anonymously. According to the Lithuanian regulations, in the peer review assessment part, the experts evaluate the quality of the research presented in a book; in the formal metric-based assessment part, the same experts should appraise the prestige of book publishers.

4.4. Inconsistencies in assessing the book publisher prestige

In Lithuania, for book outputs in the sciences, the only—prestigious publisher—level exists; books issued by other publishers are simply rejected and not scored. In contrast, any publisher is eligible for book outputs in the social sciences and humanities; however, research works

²⁰ The Ministry of Education and Science of the Republic of Lithuania, 12 April 2006 order No ISAK-685 (Valid from 7 May 2006, not valid from 19 July 2009) (see in Annex 1).

issued by prestigious book producers earn significantly more points than those published by not-so-prestigious ones.

Analysing the research assessment results, I selected publishers for which Lithuanian experts did not agree on their prestige. Table 1 compiled from the publishers that experts ranked as *prestigious* and at least one other category: *not-so-prestigious* (but sufficient for the social sciences and humanities) or *not-prestigious-at-all* (usually for outputs in the sciences).

Table 1. Publishers awarded by the Lithuanian experts to the highest category and at least one other category in the national research funding assessments from 2004 to 2016, indicating the levels and years these publishers were awarded in the Norwegian Register.

The titles on publishers identified by ISBNs in the Global Register of Publishers (country ISBNs were registered)	The number of books evaluated by the experts and categories publishers received within the years			The scientific level of the publisher and the years from the Norwegian Register
	Prestigious publisher (for all sciences) ^a	Not-so-prestigious, lower category (for SSH, scored)	Not prestigious, outcomes rejected (for the sciences)	
In Tech d.o.o. (Croatia)	16 2010–2011	4 2010–2016	25 2012–2016	level 1 2007–
OmniScriptum GmbH & Co. KG ^b (Germany)	20	26	18	–
VDM Verlag Dr Müller*	5 2008–2011	3 2007–2012	–	level 1 2008–2010
LAP Lambert Academic Publishing*	14 2009–2011	17 2012–2016	16 2010–2016	level 0
Südwestdeutscher Verlag*	1 2010	–	–	–
Scholars' Press*	–	3 2015	2 2014	level 0
Palmarium Academic Publishing*	–	1 2014	–	–
GlobeEdit*	–	1 2015	–	–
Nova Science Publishers, Incorporated (the USA)	9 2009–2015	12 2006–2016	9 2012–2016	level 1 2005–2017
Peter Lang (the USA)	10 2008–2016	10 2007–2016	3 2012	level 1 2004–
Authors or miscellaneous publishers (Austria, Australia, Estonia, Finland, Germany, Latvia, and Lithuania)	2 2009, 2011	9 2004–2016	2 2008, 2015	–
Studium Press, LLC (the USA)	1 2014	–	2 2013, 2014	level 0
Begell House Publishers, Incorporated (the USA)	4 2005–2010	–	1 2012	level 1 2004–
Herder-Institut e.V. (Germany)	1 2015	–	1 2005	level 0
IGI Global (the USA)	8 2011–2016	2 2010, 2014	1 2013	level 1 2007–
Shaker Verlag (Germany)	1 2017 ^d	–	1 2016	level 1 2005–
Cambridge Scholars Publishing (the UK)	20 2010–2016	4 2010–2016	–	level 1 2006–2018
Hermann (France)	1 2017 ^d	1 2013	–	level 1 2009–

* OmniScriptum imprints presented as they were named in the bibliographic data of books submitted to the assessment in Lithuania.

a The Lithuanian level “prestigious publishers” is equal to level 2 in the Norwegian Register.

b OmniScriptum GmbH & Co. KG (Germany) has the highest values and is the only publisher issuing books under many imprints.

d The status of the publishers was taken from the orders of the Research Council of Lithuania.

I identified sixteen inconsistently assessed publishers and thirteen self-publishers²¹ that issued multiple books (either in the sciences or in the social sciences and humanities). This means the same publisher was sometimes assessed by anonymous experts as prestigious, while in other cases, it was assessed as non-prestigious. Selected publishers issued 224 books

²¹ Thirteen self-publishers were identified in the GRP using prefixes of the book ISBNs. According to the Lithuanian formal regulations, self-published works do not qualify for submission to metric-based assessments, neither do those having no ISBNs or misleading ISBNs.

submitted for evaluation by the Lithuanian Research Council expert panels. The experts designated ninety-three books as published by prestigious publishers. They also rejected sixty-three books published by the same publishers, thus allocating them to both (the highest and lowest) categories. The remaining sixty-eight books produced by the same publishers were submitted to the not-so-prestigious publisher category (allowed only for books in the social sciences and humanities).

Identifying registrants of ISBNs in the Global Register of Publishers (GRP), quite a striking finding reveals that the publisher listed in a library catalogue (and on the book's copyright page) does not necessarily match the ISBN registrant. For example, the books' copyright pages state that publishers are universities or academic institutions; but factually, these books were issued by individuals or miscellaneous publishers who may have been assigned just one or two ISBNs. In the GRP system, such books are identified as self-published books. It must be pointed out that Lithuanian research assessment policies do not qualify self-published books as proper research outputs. This is why thirteen self-published books were distinguished in the row "Authors or miscellaneous publishers" in Table 1.

One more noteworthy finding was that six separate publishers (compiled in the first column and marked with an asterisk in Table 1) in the GRP were identified as one German-based company OmniScriptum GmbH & Co KG. Nevertheless, these publishers do not exist in the GRP and the ISBN system; they are listed on the OmniScriptum webpage and library catalogues. Even more, two (out of six) Omniscriptum branches in the Lithuanian results—Verlag Dr Müller (VDM) and Lambert Academic Publishing (LAP)—are included in the Beall's List of vanity presses²², the Lithuanian experts awarded them the prestigious category from 2009 to 2011. Furthermore, LAP's books were rejected as inappropriate and awarded the highest (prestigious) category within the same years.

An in-depth investigation of the disagreements among the Lithuanian experts revealed a pretty complicated situation. In 2009, both panels (in the sciences and the social sciences and humanities) decided that LAP was a prestigious publisher, and book outputs received maximum points. Nevertheless, after a year, in 2010, the panel in the sciences rejected the book outputs issued by LAP as produced by a non-prestigious publisher (and institutions received zero points). At the same time, the panellists in the social sciences and humanities awarded the books issued by LAP the highest category (and institutions received the maximum points). Then, in the assessment of 2011, both panels decided that LAP was a prestigious publisher, and six books submitted in the sciences and the social sciences and humanities received the maximum points again. A turning point occurred in 2012 when the submission of monographs published by LAP doubled. Regrettably for the institutions (which were aware that the experts treated LAP as a prestigious publisher in the preceding year), the experts on both panels decided that LAP was not prestigious anymore. So, book outputs in the sciences were rejected (meaning no points), while those in the social sciences and humanities were awarded level 1 (meaning positive assessment and fewer points).

²² The Beall's List of vanity presses. *What is vanity press?* <<https://beallslist.net/vanity-press/>> accessed 16 April 2020.

There are more inconsistencies in the experts' decisions. The following example deals with the status of InTech d.o.o. The Lithuanian experts scored maximum points for sixteen outputs (in the sciences) published by InTech d.o.o. over 2010-11. However, from 2012 to 2016, the experts decided that twenty-five books produced by this publisher were inappropriate because a non-prestigious publisher issued them. Thus, these twenty-five were rejected, and institutions did not receive the points (and funding) they expected, even though they had been incentivised to publish with this book producer one year earlier. Nevertheless, Lithuanian institutions received their points for chapters (in four edited volumes published by the same InTech d.o.o.) as outputs in the social sciences and humanities at the lower category (not-so-prestigious publishers) – where any publisher is eligible.

Significant changes in circumstances regarding a publisher's prestige have surrounded the widely known UK-based publisher Cambridge Scholars Publishing (formerly Cambridge Scholars Press Ltd.²³). It is interesting to note that the Lithuanian experts designated twenty of its titles as being produced by a prestigious publisher from 2010 to 2016. At the same time, four books were classified as issued by a not-so-prestigious one (so institutions received fewer points). In 2018, the Lithuanian experts awarded Cambridge Scholars Publishing the highest level, deeming it a prestigious publisher in the humanities.²⁴ There is significant controversy around Cambridge Scholars Publishing across countries. In France, when describing the inevitable confusion about misleading value of publishing houses, interviewed researchers mentioned Cambridge Scholars Publishing:

'I published there, so I found it quite good, but lately I learnt from English researchers that they consider it their Harmattan [...] Harmattan is not greatly considered by "serious" French researchers' (Williams and Galleron 2016).

However, in the UK, Cambridge Scholars Publishing was among thirty-nine publishers which had twenty or more books submitted to the Research Excellence Framework across the arts and humanities in 2014 (Tanner 2016). In the UK REF2014, nearly three hundred outputs (authored books, edited books, chapters in books) produced by this publisher were selected as institutional choices of their excellence.²⁵

In Norway, Cambridge Scholars Publishing had level 1 status, and it was ninth on the list of top ten publishers, covering 25 per cent of all scholarly book outputs published in international languages in the social sciences and humanities between 2005 and 2009 (Sivertsen and Larsen 2012). However, Cambridge Scholars Publishing received level 0 status in 2019, although Norwegian scholars still publish their works with this publisher, which is confirmed by significant numbers of production points registered in the Norwegian Publication Indicator²⁶.

²³ Cambridge Scholars Publishing Ltd in the Companies in the United Kingdom
<<https://www.companiesintheuk.co.uk/ltd/cambridge-scholars-publishing>> accessed 21 July 2024.

²⁴ The Research Council of Lithuania 31 October 2019 order No V-554, the list of prestigious publishers in the humanities (full data in Annex 1).

²⁵ REF2014, Research outputs (REF2) <<https://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/20170302140351/>>
<<http://results.ref.ac.uk/DownloadSubmissions/ByForm/REF2>> accessed 20 Apr 2020.

²⁶ Cambridge Scholars Publishing in The Norwegian Register
<https://kanalregister.hkdir.no/publiseringsskanaler/KanalForlagInfo.action?id=19631> accessed 21 July 2024

In the Danish BFI lists, Cambridge Scholars Publishing first appeared in 2011 (BFI lists had no levels for book publishers at that time), then it became a level 1 publisher over 2012-13 and has disappeared from the BFI lists since 2014. In Finland, researchers on panels also assigned Cambridge Scholars Publishing to the basic level 1 status. In the Flemish database (VABB-SHW), this book producer is indicated as a level 0 publisher, having only some ISBN titles peer reviewed.

Another striking instance occurred in the Lithuanian data when a publisher became prestigious in the sciences category within a year. In 2017, the unnamed experts on the sciences panel rejected a monograph published (in 2016) by Germany-based publisher Shaker Verlag on the basis that the publisher was not prestigious. In 2018, the experts on the same sciences panel (we do not know if these were the same anonymous experts) selected Shaker Verlag as a prestigious publisher.²⁷ This book producer has publisher status “level 1” in Norway, Finland, and Denmark and “level 0” in the Flemish database.

Since 2018, the Research Council of Lithuania has distributed three separate lists of book publishers determined as prestigious in the sciences (nine publishers), the social sciences (eleven publishers)²⁸, and the humanities (twenty-three publishers) on its website. However, this does not explain if books produced by these prestigious publishers in subsequent years would also receive maximum points—uncertainties for the submitting institutions still exist.

Additionally, the results presented in the last column of Table 1 indicate if the publisher was ranked in the Norwegian Register and if so, the years it happened. Level 0 means that somebody registered the publisher (or the publisher did so); however, they were not assigned a level (the Norwegian Centre for Research Data examines whether the book channel meets the minimum requirements). The sign “–” indicates that nobody has submitted the publisher to the Norwegian Register.

Notably, not a single publisher ranked as prestigious in Lithuania appeared at the Norwegian Register’s level 2 (Norway’s highest level), and four publishers ranked as prestigious in Lithuania did not attain level 1 (Norway’s entry level).

In sum, several cases vividly illustrate that the prestige of publishers relies on the impressions or previous experiences of the scholars who serve on assessment panels. A considerable disagreement has persisted among researchers and experts regarding the prestige of publishers, not only in different countries but even within the same country (i.e. Lithuania). The evidence presented above challenges what may be defined as a prestigious publisher.

In the following section, I analyse whether the national Norwegian and Lithuanian regulations are clear enough to determine the required status of publishers (e.g. academic or prestigious publishers, respectively). If so, scholars could easily follow the rules, and policymakers would

²⁷ The Research Council of Lithuania 31 October 2019 order No V-556, the list of prestigious publishers in the sciences (see in Annex 1).

²⁸ The Research Council of Lithuania 31 October 2019 order No V-555, the list of prestigious publishers in the social sciences <https://www.lmt.lt/lt/doclib/grc78rw5k5pk3tyskcpm8bguunhwt323>

reach their policy goals—to create an incentive for academics to publish their research with the most prestigious publishers.

4.5. Verifying whether book publishers meet mandatory prerequisites

We reviewed the above-analysed international publishers listed in Table 1 to see whether I could verify that publishers meet *the minimum requirements for entry* into the Norwegian Register and the Lithuanian *formal definition of prestigious publishers* set in the regulations. Making the right decision regarding book publishers is more prominent for scholars in countries approaching metric-based assessment systems (e.g. Norway or Lithuania) than in countries with peer review evaluation (e.g. the UK). For example, if Lithuanian researchers published with the “wrong” publishers, institutions would not earn funding for research (currently, this system is used to allocate forty per cent of the governmental funds for research). Table 2 shows data on publishers anyone could collect from various sources.

The first column shows how transparent and identifiable publishers are (to be discussed in subsection 4.5.1). The middle columns give the minimum prerequisites for inclusion into the Norwegian, Finnish, and Danish rankings of publishing channels (to be discussed in subsection 4.5.2). The last section offers insight into how the publishers fit the Lithuanian explanation of “prestige” (to be addressed in subsection 4.5.3). To be exact, I assumed that if publishers are international, they must provide information about the distribution of their books, policies, and authors on their websites in internationally understandable languages (see column 10).

4.5.1. Misdemeanours in the appearance of publishers

To interrogate the data further, I chose the Principles of Transparency and Best Practice in Scholarly Publishing developed by well-known scholarly organisations²⁹ as the primary standard. As an example, in a study on scholarly journals’ compliance with this standard (Choi, Choi, and Kim 2019), the sixteen principles of the standard were sub-divided into 33 items in four different categories: (1) basic journal information, (2) publication ethics information, (3) copyright and archiving information, (4) profit model information. For the analysis presented in this sub-section, I adjusted the items proposed in the category “basic journal information.”

ISBNs and publishers. The regulations mandate ISBNs for book outputs in Norway, Finland, Denmark, Flanders, and Lithuania. According to the International ISBN Agency, it is always the book publisher who should apply for the ISBN³⁰.

²⁹ Principles of Transparency and Best Practice in Scholarly Publishing. The third version published on 15 January 2018 <<http://wame.org/principles-of-transparency-and-best-practice-in-scholarly-publishing>> accessed 21 July 2024.

³⁰ Who should apply for ISBN? International ISBN Agency <<https://www.isbn-international.org/content/what-isbn>> accessed 21 July 2024.

Table 2. Publishers which Lithuanian panel experts awarded the highest and at least one other category compared with their ranks in the metric-based assessments by various other countries (data as of 19 April 2019)

The transparency of the publishers	The minimum requirements for entry to the national registries, and the levels publishers awarded by 2019							The Lithuanian description of prestigious publishers	
‘Registrant name” in the Global Register of Publishers “Publisher” on the website (if different) a country of ISBNs, declared, year established	Policy on peer review of books	Editorial or Advisory Board	Author-ship	Publisher’s level in the national system in				Publish book series or journals	Languages of the content provided on the website
				Norway	Finland	Denmark	Flanders		
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
In Tech d.o.o. (Croatia, 2007) = <u>IntechOpen</u> (the UK, 2017)	yes COPE*	yes	Int’l	level 1 2007–	level 0	–	–	book series	English
<u>OmniScriptum GmbH & Co. KG</u> (18 academic brands, Germany, 2002)									
VDM Verlag	–	–	Int’l	level 1 2008-10**	level 1 2012-14	–	–	?	English
LAP Lambert Academic Publishing	–	–	Int’l	level 0	level 0	–	–	?	English
<u>Nova Science Publishers</u> **** (the USA, 1985)	yes	? *****	Int’l	level 1 2005-17	level 1 2012-19	level 1*** 2008-19	ISBN-selection	journals, book series	English
<u>Peter Lang</u> (the USA, Switzerland, 1970)	yes	–	Int’l	level 1 2004-19	level 1 2012-19	level 1 2008-19	ISBN-selection	journals, book series	English
<u>Studium Press</u> (the USA, India, 1980)	–	=	?	level 0	–	–	–	book series	English
<u>Begell House</u> (the USA, 1991)	–	?	Int’l	level 1 2004-19	level 1 2012–	level 1 2008-19	–	journals, book series	English, six more languages
<u>Herder-Institut</u> (Germany, 1990)	–	–	?	level 0	level 1 2014-19	–	–	journal, book series	German, English
<u>IGI Global</u> **** (the USA, 1998)	yes COPE	?	Int’l	level 1 2007-19	level 1 2012-15 and 2018-19	level 1 2008-19	to employ peer review for all books	journal, book series	English, Chinese
<u>Shaker Verlag</u> (Germany, 1986)	–	–	Int’l	level 1 2005-19	level 1 2012-19	level 1 2008-19	ISBN-selection	book series	German, English, Dutch
<u>Cambridge Scholars Publishing</u> (the UK, 2001)	–	?	Int’l	level 1 2006-18	level 1 2012-19	level 1 2011-13	ISBN-selection	book series	English
<u>Hermann</u> (France, 1876)	–	–	?	level 1 2009-19	level 1 2015-19	level 1 2008-19	–	book series	French

* Publisher is a member of the Committee on Publication Ethics (COPE).

** as VDM Verlag Dr Müller Aktiengesellschaft & Co. KG. in the Norwegian Register. VDM Verlag was relaunched as OmniScriptum in 2013.

*** The BFI list of publishers in Denmark had no levels for book publishers from 2008 to 2010. Level 1 and level 2 for book publishers were launched in 2012.

**** Publishers included into the Beall’s List of vanity presses <https://beallist.net/vanity-press/> assessed 9 June 2020.

***** “?” means that I was not able to find information on authorship or about an editorial/advisory board.

Thus, I examined the transparency of publishers, comparing the “registrant name” in the Global Register of Publishers (GRP) with the “publisher” as it appears on the website it owns. I supposed that the publishers are transparent for authors, readers, and evaluators when this information matches.

The data show that two (out of eleven) publishers have a different presence on their web pages, and the GRP: In Tech d.o.o. (named IntechOpen on its website) and OmniScriptum (which has numerous brands recognised on its website).

The publisher In Tech d.o.o. would look inconsistent for some researchers and the panel experts who assess its book outputs because searches in the GRP (by the prefix “978-953-307” of Lithuanian outputs” ISBNs) produce the publisher In Tech d.o.o. based in Croatia. However, the URL (provided on the GRP) directs users to the IntechOpen website ³¹, which declares only its headquarters in the UK (‘About IntechOpen’). Nevertheless, the “Contacts” page reveals that IntechOpen has two offices: In Tech d.o.o. in Croatia (registered in 2007³²) and IntechOpen Limited in the UK (registered in 2017³³). Despite its achievements and membership of COPE and OASPA (both being developers of the principles of transparency), IntechOpen stands as a level 1 publisher in Norway, a level 0 in Finland, and has no level in Denmark and Flanders.

Researchers and assessment panel experts would have more doubts regarding the publisher OmniScriptum. In the Lithuanian dataset, OmniScriptum consists of six imprints. However, only two of them (those awarded the prestigious category in Lithuania and listed in the Norwegian Register) are included in Table 2. At its origins, it was VDM Verlag, launched in 2002 and relaunched as “OmniScriptum” in 2013. Lambert Academic Publishing (LAP) is another brand of OmniScriptum, about which searches on the internet reveal claims it is a predator, vanity press, or at least questionable (Broz and Stöckelová 2018).

Currently, OmniScriptum openly declares its policies and business models on its website:

‘Yes, we are aware of the criticism towards OmniScriptum that can be found on the web. [...] Our company has changed tremendously in the last years. We have changed our business (no more Wikipedia since ages), we have changed our publishing terms, we have even changed our name. Just to clarify – we are OmniScriptum! [...] Meanwhile our publishing group incorporates more than 45 imprints’. ³⁴

³¹ About IntechOpen <<https://www.intechopen.com/about-intechopen>> accessed on 21 July 2024.

³² Fininfo <<https://www.fininfo.hr/Poduzece/Pregled/in-tech/Detaljno/107379>> accessed on 21 July 2024.

³³ Intechopen in the Companies in the United Kingdom <<https://www.companiesintheuk.co.uk/ltd/intechopen>> accessed on 21 July 2024.

³⁴ OmniScriptum—diversity and innovation <<https://www.omniscriptum.com/>>> accessed on 21 July 2024.

4.5.2. Compliance with necessary prerequisites

The criteria for including new scientific publication channels into the Norwegian Register³⁵ are like those required in Finland and Denmark. Book publishers should have (1) established procedures for external peer review and (2) an academic editorial board (or an equivalent) primarily consisting of academics; also, they should (3) issue books authored by an international or at least a national research community.

The first prerequisite—*necessary procedures for external peer review in book publishing*—is essential, as it usually takes place in journal publishing. However, independent academic book publishers operate differently (Derricourt 2012); this is why I looked for the policies on peer review practices on the publishers' websites (Table 2, column 2). I found that only four publishers make publicly available their statements or descriptions about their peer review procedures, the main requirement for publishers accepted for the entry level into these four publisher assessment systems.

The second prerequisite—*a required advisory board of academics*—is declared as a list of people only on the IntechOpen website (Table 2, column 3). The symbol “—” means that I did not find any advisory board on the publisher's website. The sign “?” means that publishers do not publish who is on their advisory board; instead, they list authors, editors, and reviewers (in some cases) in one general list (e.g. Nova Science Publishers, Begell House). Alternatively, Cambridge Scholars Publishing lists 130 boards in the physical sciences and 102 boards in the social sciences on its website. It is challenging to assess the presence of an editorial or advisory board, or scientific committee on the websites of book publishers because of diverse practices book publishers have in place.

The third prerequisite—*an international or at least a national authorship*—is required from book publishers for entry and standing at the minimum level 1 (Table 2, column 4). According to the Norwegian Register requirement, international publishers should have less than two thirds of their authors from the same country, while national authorship means “no single institution is responsible for more than two-thirds of the publications in the channel over time”.

Because I did not find a single piece of advice on the source of calculation in the NPI website, I just checked the publishers' websites to see their online book catalogues or statements on their authorship. For example, IntechOpen states:

‘Our community ranges from key opinion leaders of the international academic and scientific community, including Nobel Laureates and the top 1% of the world's most cited authors, to the next up-and-coming generation of scientists looking to make their mark.’ <https://www.intechopen.com/about-intechopen>

The symbol “?” means that there were no authorship statistics or relevant information on the publisher's website. For example, the Herder Institute has no online book catalogue, statement, or lists of authors or editors. However, I found that it is a unit of the Leibniz Association (the Leibniz-Gemeinschaft), having 96 non-university research institutes. Thus, I

³⁵ In the Norwegian Register, the procedures for processing new submissions include: ‘Note that the submitter must be a person, not the journal/series/publisher or an organization’

<<https://kanalregister.hkdir.no/publiseringsskanaler/OmProsedyrer>> accessed 21 July 2024.

could suppose that the Herder Institute would have at least a national authorship and meet this entry-level requirement. Nevertheless, I am not sure if I could make such an assumption about the fulfilment of this mandated criterion. So, it is challenging for assessors of book publishers to identify the level of publishers' authorship.

Additionally, I collected data on *the levels the publishers gained in the national systems* to compare our findings on the fulfilment of compulsory requirements with the publishers' levels (Table 2, columns 5-8). There are some disparities in the ranks of IntechOpen and the Herder Institute in their rankings in Norway and Finland, and it is not clear if these publishers had actually been considered and had not received any level in Denmark. However, LAP and Studium Press were not approved unanimously in all countries. The results suggest that some publishers (e.g. Begell House, Cambridge Scholars Publishing, Hermann, or Shaker Verlag) have no verifiable mandatory prerequisites in place.

Unfortunately, in some cases, I could not find a straightforward way to verify if the book publisher complies with the minimum prerequisites; thus, transparent verification of compliance with the requirements is impossible.

Notwithstanding, some publishers without exceptionally high results in other countries were designated as prestigious in Lithuania, prompting re-examine the formal national definition of prestigious publishers.

4.5.3. Adherence to the formal Lithuanian definition

The Lithuanian formal research assessment regulations define prestigious publishers as publishers that continually (1) release publications authored by national and international researchers and (2) distribute their products in many countries. Moreover, prestigious publishers are classified as such when they (3) issue globally recognised journals and book series as well as (4) provide sufficient information about these achievements on their websites.³⁶

The first feature—*international authorship*—is a similar prerequisite for level 2 or level 3 publishers in the above-discussed national rankings (in Norway, Denmark, and Finland), which define this as less than two thirds of authors from the same country (Table 2, column 2). Nonetheless, Lithuanian policymakers do not specify that authorship should be “international”.

The second attribute—*distribution of books in many countries*—does not make publishers unique because currently, many publishers (and all I investigated in this study) distribute books they produce through their own websites, Amazon, or other vendors. Hence, I did not include this piece of additional information in the table.

The third quality—*issue globally recognised journals and series of books*—is somewhat ambiguous. It seems strange to judge book publishers according to their journal activities and decide whether their journals and book series are globally recognised (because the formal

³⁶ The Ministry of Education and Science of the Republic of Lithuania, 4 October 2017 order No V-747 (Valid since 1 November 2017) <<https://www.e-tar.lt/portal/lt/legalAct/69270ef0a8d411e78a4c904b1afa0332>> accessed 21 July 2024.

regulation does not explain how to measure the level of recognition). Likewise, uncertainty is left regarding publishers which issue only book series (and no journals) as to whether such publishers can be prestigious or not. Therefore, the results compiled in column 9 (Table 2) suggest that producing only book series (and no journals) would be enough for publishers to be awarded the prestigious rank.

Notably, LAP (an imprint of OmniScriptum) announces on its website that its main targets are theses and dissertations (and I did not recognise series on its website). Nonetheless, the experts scored books they produced as those published by prestigious publishers, and with such a decision, they have created incentives for researchers to publish with this publisher.

The concluding requirement—*provide sufficient information about all achievements on their websites*—seems rational because achievements (if the formal regulations specify them) would help identify prestigious publishers. However, many controversial (or questionable) publishers have such perfect-looking websites that even experienced scholars do not recognise their failings.

Therefore, I decided that if international authorship is a mandatory feature, it would be reasonable to check whether the publishers have their policies and other content on their websites in English. Thus, any potential author could become acquainted with information provided on the website before submitting a manuscript, or the experts could ascertain that the publisher fits the definition of a prestigious publisher. Column 9 in Table 2 shows the languages of the content provided on the publisher's website. Only Hermann, the oldest publisher on the list, would not meet the fourth criterion because its webpage is only in French, so it is difficult to learn more about its achievements (and Google translate did not help in this case). Nevertheless, the Lithuanian experts designated Hermann as a prestigious publisher.

Given all the circumstances mentioned above, it is not surprising that the Lithuanian experts' panel has no consensus on the "prestige" of book publishers (presented in Table 1). Even the official national regulations do not help to differentiate the prestigious from the not-so-prestigious publishers.

4.6. Discussion and conclusions

The evaluation of book outputs is debated at length in research papers studying national research assessment systems or examining indicators for the assessment of books.

In countries performing national research assessment exercises that rely on qualitative peer review assessment, researchers debate the benefits of a metrics-based approach versus a peer review approach (Allen and Heath 2013) or look for new ways to assess books (Basso et al. 2017). Meanwhile, UK policymakers, exploring ways to extend the possibilities for evaluating books, have introduced some pioneering prerequisites, such as open access for monographs, which have already been widely discussed (Crossick 2015; Lockett 2018).

At the same time, researchers in countries that use quantitative assessment systems express concerns about the effects of metrics-based research assessment on research practice in general. For instance, some institutions reward individual researchers using metrics that were

originally intended to be used only at the institutional level (Aagaard 2015; Hammarfelt and de Rijcke 2015). Moreover, Mouritzen and Opstrup (Mouritzen and Opstrup 2020) reveal components of the Danish Bibliometric Research Indicator leading to game the system, and Rowlands and Wright (Rowlands and Wright 2021) investigate the effects of such research assessment on research practice in Denmark. In 2021, the Bibliometric Research Indicator (BFI) was terminated.³⁷ However, there seems to be relatively little debate about the underlying causes and consequences of incentive structures in countries that employ publishers' rankings to assess books.

Our findings show that no matter whether countries employ qualitative (peer review) or quantitative (metrics-based) research assessment, experts evaluate book outputs and decide on the quality of books. However, the UK policies urge experts do not consider book publisher standing. This is opposite in book publisher rankings, where empowered researchers select the most prestigious book publishers from all publishers that are considered meeting basic entry requirements; so, institutions receive state funding only by book publishers, but not by the quality of individual books.

As our examination of various national assessment systems reveals, publishers' rankings rely on four mandatory prerequisites—ISBN prefix, external peer review procedures, a scientific publishing programme or advisory board, and national or international authorship. However, as our findings show, rankings' descriptions do not disclose the details of their approval procedures, nor do book publishers make the information about peer review publicly available. Hence, there is little transparency in determining whether publishers meet the minimum requirements for entry into a national register.

Furthermore, our results show that experts in different countries may have contradictory opinions on the prestige of a publisher. The same publisher may be ranked differently in the Danish, Finnish, Norwegian, and Lithuanian registers. The results show that the same publisher in Lithuania may be categorised as prestigious in one year and as satisfactory or even ineligible in the next year. These findings indicate that it is difficult to reach a common understanding of what it means to be a prestigious publisher and that there is no consensus on international and prestigious publishers. This raises doubts about the outcomes of assessments of books based on a judgement about their publisher.

It strikes us that neither quantitative nor qualitative assessment approaches stress the importance of the dissemination of research published in books. The rankings of book publishers focus on the content quality expected from publishers maintaining peer-review prior to book publication. They do not assess how publishers contribute to disseminating academic research and scholarship (e.g. high-quality metadata). Even though the Lithuanian regulations mention dissemination as a feature of prestigious publishers, they do not explain or specify what it means or requires.

³⁷ In 2021, a new political agreement was finalised. With this agreement the Bibliometric Research Indicator (BFI) was terminated. The steering committee, BFI commission, and research expert groups ceased to exist as of December 3rd, 2021. All activities related to BFI were discontinued at the same time <<https://medarbejdere.au.dk/en/pure/bfi>> accessed 11 July 2024.

Future research may focus on developing improved approaches for assessing books. Our suggestion would be to start that there are more roles of book publishers which are significant for communication between researchers: (1) quality control (e.g. peer-review, copyediting); (2) production (e.g. print runs, digital format, editions); (3) dissemination and archiving (e.g. metadata, digital formats, and long term digital preservation); (4) marketing (e.g. book reviews, social media); and other roles (Dagienė and Li 2021; European Commission 2019a).

Publishers may decide how much they want to offer in each area mentioned above. However, they need to be transparent about the services delivered at each stage for every book. Presumably, different publishers will make different choices in that respect. If publishers are transparent and show what they offer in terms of quality control, dissemination, and other services, research assessment systems can use this information. In an ideal situation, publishers should provide information at the level of individual books, eliminating the need to rely on general information about publishers.

The literature lacks studies on book metadata, transparency of editorial and peer review practices, publisher services, and imprints in book publishing. Researchers should consider these factors from a research assessment perspective and take a more detailed approach to understanding the practicalities in book publishing. Another direction for future research is understanding why different countries take different approaches to evaluate book outputs. Understanding country differences can help explain why some countries prioritise Open Access for books (Crossick, 2015), while others focus on a global register of publishers³⁸.

³⁸ Academic Book Publishers (ABP): a global and multilingual register <<https://enressh.eu/wp-content/uploads/2019/08/Academic-Book-Publishers-ABP-A-global-and-interactive-register.pdf>> accessed 11 July 2024.