SYP Podcast sustainability-with-rachel-martin\_audio (1)

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**SPEAKERS**

Kate Spratt, Speaker 1, Rachel Martin

**Speaker 1** 00:01

Welcome to this episode of Inside Publishing, the series where we interview industry experts on everything publishing.

**Kate Spratt** 00:08

Hi, my name is Kate and I'm one of the conference captains this year on SYP Oxford's Conference Committee. I'm speaking with Rachel martin, who is the Global Director of Sustainability at Elsevier. Rachel, thanks so much for joining us.

**Rachel Martin** 00:29

Thanks so much for having me.

**Kate Spratt** 00:35

So your role at Elsivier is the Global Director of Sustainability. Could you please tell us a little bit about what that role entails?

**Rachel Martin** 00:42

No worries. So it's a slightly fancy title, Global Director of Sustainability. And essentially, I head up our Climate Action Programme. And I also help coordinate our sustainable development goals approach. And I represent Elsevier on lots of different trade bodies thinking about how we can prioritise and drive action for sustainability.

**Kate Spratt** 01:04

Great. So if you were to like break it down, like what might you do on a day to day basis?

**Rachel Martin** 01:10

So I kind of love this question. Because no two days seem to be the same in my life. Every day is something different. And I think that really speaks to the fact that sustainability is so broad and can cover very, a lot of different categories. So on one day, I might be thinking about how do we reduce our emissions as an organisation, we might be getting into details about carbon models or emission factors. On the next day, we could be thinking about how the content we're publishing can drive action. So, you know, we might be thinking about new journal launches, or the UN Day or something that we can celebrate and showcase and think about what we might be doing to drive action. And on another day, I might be talking to some wonderful partners about some collective action that we could be doing together. And so it's really varied. No, two days are the same. But it's also super rewarding, and that it's incredibly exciting. And it's incredibly dynamic.

**Kate Spratt** 02:07

Yeah, that sounds, that sounds really great. Actually, it sounds like a really diverse and like also quite rewarding, rewarding role. So I'm wondering, like, how did you kind of get into this position? Like, what is your background in publishing? I was wondering as well about this role? It is something I imagine a lot of people who are interested in publishing might not necessarily know that roles like this exists. So I'd love to hear a little bit about how you got here, so.

**Rachel Martin** 02:29

I think my role and there's a nice new breed of directors or sustainability leads or climate action leads across the wider industry, which is so encouraging. And it means that our industry is really taking sustainability to heart and that we're really prioritising this and putting resources such as dedicated leads in place. And a few years ago, that definitely wasn't the case, particularly around climate. So we've really seen a big change. And I think, you know, in terms of background, first and foremost, you need to really understand the business, you need to understand what publishing is, about the production processes, and how you might be thinking about the categories of which you need to influence in order to take action on this. Personally, my background, I've been at Elsevier for over 13 years, which is a long time. I've been in many different roles. I was the chief of staff to Michiel Kolman, who was the president of the International Publishers Association. And in that role, we started thinking about collective industry action and what we could be doing around SDGs, what we should be doing around climate, and from there it was just a natural progression to kind of think about how we might be doing that for Elsevier as well. So a nice natural flow into a really dynamic and new role for the for the sector.

**Kate Spratt** 02:40

So it was a new role, you kind of stepped into it, and you've got to make it your own.

**Rachel Martin** 03:53

Yes, indeed. And, you know, increasingly, you see on LinkedIn that even the most basic jobs, or even the most sort of traditional jobs, let's say, are starting to have green skills, you know. Everybody across the organisations need to understand what sustainability means, what, what it is, and what your role might be contributing to it. So you know, you start having this idea that if you're going into publishing or editorial, if you're in operations, if you're in marketing, if you're in sales, it doesn't matter where you are in the business, you really do need to start thinking about sustainability as a core part of your role in the way that you can be empowered to take decisions that will ultimately help, you know, on climate and on broader sustainability as well.

**Kate Spratt** 04:34

Yeah, thanks. I think that's a really important point, because, you know, every everyone who works in the publishing industry will be kind of, you know, they'll be playing their part in, you know, contributing to making sure that it's a sustainable business. So, obviously, we can't just let that be all on your shoulders. That would be a lot of pressure. We kind of all have to work together, don't we? So I think that's a really great point. So could you tell us about any initiatives that you have worked on? In this role in Elsevier, are there any achievements that you're particularly proud of so far in this role?

**Rachel Martin** 05:05

So I have quite a few actually, that I'm very proud of, that I have been very honoured to be working as a part of a team. So a few years ago, it was actually a children's book club that we established when I was working through my capacity in the International Publishers Association. And it was a collaboration with the United Nations publications team, but also across the value chain. So we were working with libraries, we were looking, working with booksellers, and we're working with young authors to create an annotated reading list for children aged between six and 12, in all UN official languages, and these were about creating these reading lists related to the SDG. So you know, SDG four, which is about quality education, you know, what books were interesting — fiction, nonfiction, comic, you know, could be inspiring the next generation to really understand the principles behind sustainability. And I've been so honoured to continue to work on that for the past six years. And we've finally finished the SDG book club at the UN level. And we've started local chapters. So I'm currently based in Amsterdam, we've just launched a Dutch version, there's a German version, there's a Portuguese, there's a Brazilian, there's even an African one in all four main African languages, plus a highlight every month on a local language as well. And that's been such a rewarding project. And it sort of laid the foundations to the second one, which was the SDG Publishers Compact, and that was 10 concrete steps that anybody across the sector, no matter where you were, could take in order to prioritise and to think about our contributions as a sector towards sustainable development. And that's really gone from strength to strength. We've got over 300 signatories, we've done our first progress report, and we're really thinking about ways that we can further embrace that. And in my capacity as the chair of the social responsibility committee at the STM Association, so the US trade association for academic publishers, we've just done a roadmap, which is super cool, which is like all the suggestions, steps that you could take, when you're thinking about signing up, when you've just signed up. And maybe when you're ready to take the extra step to think about all the different ways that you can be driving sustainable development. But just to give, you know, a whole range of really actionable pragmatic tools to drive action across the sector.

**Kate Spratt** 07:25

Wow, that sounds amazing. And I really love the sound of that children's book group as well. So much fun. Yeah, I mean, like, do you get to kind of go out and like, you know, spread the word about that sort of thing as well? Because it just sounds super exciting and, you know, I'm actually like a bit of a sucker for children's like fiction and all this stuff, like, I think it's so like appealing, even as an adult, I just love it. So I can just imagine that was such a fun project to work on.

**Rachel Martin** 07:50

Oh, it's totally fun. I was, earlier this year, in a library in Rotterdam. And we were doing storytime talking about, you know, maths for your life. With young, you know, students, it's so rewarding. I mean, it's great to be there. It's great to have everyone across the value chain working together for a collaborative project. It really shows the power of, of, you know, books as tools of action. And I think that's the most rewarding part of my job sometimes.

**Kate Spratt** 08:17

Yeah, what I really loved about those examples as well is it shows just how diverse pursuing more sustainability in business in publishing can be. You know, I think a lot of people can kind of assume that it just goes down to production to paper to print, or kind of, you know. It's so broad, and you can make such a huge change and have such a big influence as a publisher. So I think that's really exciting. And it's really great to hear all the things that you've been working on. So on the flip side of things, I'm wondering about what the main challenges are that you find in becoming more sustainable as part of a publisher. What do you find are like the roadblocks to achieving some of your goals?

**Rachel Martin** 08:58

So I think in general, if I think about the industry, I think the first one is defining what do we mean by sustainability? Sustainability is really broad. It can be diversity and inclusion, it can be climate action, it can also be making sure that we've got ethical supply chains. And I think understanding what does sustainability mean for you as your organisation? What does it mean for your customers? What does it mean for your employees? And there I think, you know, the SDGs as a roadmap — that's the UN Sustainable Development Goals, 17 incredibly broad topics such as ending poverty or gender equality — but it's a really great kind of blueprint to think about. Okay, how does this all relate? How might this work for me? And that's why I think the publishers compact was such a great initiative on... Yeah, it gives you 10 concrete actions to get started because the roadblock often is, let's redefine sustainability. And you know, what do we do in order to get started? Well, you need to kind of gather the views and if we can align around a framework, SDGs, as a bit of a north star, it gives you a framework to start action. And I think that that's been a really great way to start thinking about some of these topics. I think the other big roadblock, particularly in climate action, is that we just don't have the data. So I think lots of people are thinking about, okay, carbon impact. What does that mean? Better than digital? Or is digital better than print? And the fact of the matter is, is that our whole supply chain from the paper mills all the way through to the end consumer, we just don't know yet. We have some ideas, we have some actions. And so it's really striking the balance between how much do we need to know before we can take action, and how much are we fine to make decisions today that can influence our carbon footprint in the next years to come. And I think those are happening at great initiatives, such as supply chain committees, where we're getting everybody across the supply chain to share what they're doing, but also to think about accreditations and standards, and what does that mean, and laying the foundations for what should be a sustainable publishing sector.

**Kate Spratt** 11:11

Yeah, that's really interesting. I'm just thinking about how big some of these goals and ambitions are. And I'm imagining you kind of stepping into this new role and kind of looking at this and thinking, wow, like, this is huge kind of ambitions, like a lot to achieve, it must have been like, a little bit overwhelming at times.

**Rachel Martin** 11:31

So I'm incredibly optimistic as a person, I think, working in sustainability. Optimistic? Absolutely. You know, I think they are ambitious. But quite frankly, it's the future we deserve. You know, I'm looking, I've got two kids, you know, I'm looking at my kids thinking, I want them to come into a world that's amazing. I want them to love their life, I want them to have amazing experiences. And they will be very different to the experiences I had growing up, you know, it was, I'll tell you a side story. But I take my kids, and we normally, if we I don't actually own a car, but we have a car share scheme. And it's with an electric car. And so we know we were stopped somewhere. And the charging point was, you know, you know, an actual petrol place, and my kids had never smelled petrol. And they were like, "What is that smell?" And I was thinking, "Oh, my God, like, I can't believe they've never smelled petrol." But that was the first time that I've ever taken them to a petrol pump to you know, try and charge the car. And it was like, those little things are parts that our publishing sector play, right. So educating them about, you know, renewable energy, educating them that what we might have done in the past might not be appropriate in the future, but also that the future is nothing to be scared of either. So often, when I think we're picking up the papers, we can be very paralysed by fear and by anxiety about what's happening. And so I think pragmatic approaches, like the publishers compact — I also co-founded the publishing 2030 accelerator, which was really looking at climate action. And then we were thinking about the methodology, about how do you account for the carbon footprint of an actual print book, and you know, coming together as a sector of passionate individuals to kind of lay the foundations because we've got to break it down for people, we've got to break it down into little chunks and take the steps continuously every day towards getting to those big ambitious goals. And then we can do it in our business and across our sector. Because our sector's awesome.

**Kate Spratt** 13:31

Yeah, I love that. And I love the story of you and your kids, and them never having smelled petrol. You know, it's so kind of amusing to think of a new generation who are not, you know, used to the things that we have gotten used to. And also it does kind of create that bit of cognitive dissonance to think, actually, things can be different, and we can change things. So I think that's like a super, great, relevant story that really highlights that point. Along the same kind of lines of that then, what do you think motivates publishers to kind of pursue more sustainability, particularly with climate sustainability? You know, is it difficult to persuade things, to change things for the better?

**Rachel Martin** 14:08

So I think first and foremost, we're a sector where I think you can look at everybody's vision, mission, objectives on their website, I think we're all thinking about our contribution to society. I think we all get up in the morning with a purpose, to go make the world a better place through all the different ways that we do it, whether it's education, or the best fiction, or the amazing children's books. So I don't think it's too hard to sell somebody on sustainability. I think, in general, it's the idea of: what can I do? So often, we're thinking about these big publishers — I'm from Elsevier, we're the largest academic publisher. Yes, we have resources to divert people to the cause of sustainability, which is fantastic. But if you're in a smaller and medium sized organisation, you may not have that luxury. So your SDG lead or your climate lead will probably be somebody who's co-sharing that with their day job. And so what does that mean? And so I think it's more around resource allocation, and how do we make the most efficient choices, then motivating them to embrace sustainability or think about climate or to understand what it is. I think the second biggest challenge is really understanding the complex environment, particularly on climate. You asked specifically on climate: it is a very specialised field, you've got to understand what scopes are science based targets. There's a lot of jingle and jangle and jargon around about what that means. And I think you have to navigate through all of that and figure out as a small or medium sized organisation how you're going to address that. And that's why things like an STM roadmap, for example, can spell out some areas that you might want to investigate or some best practices. The IPA have a really great website called the IPA SDG dashboard, you can put it in Google and find it very easily. But the place there is to share what are you all doing across the industry and internationally, you know, there might be some great reports that you could read, there could be some great podcasts you might want to listen to, you know, that you can do on an everyday basis, regardless of whether you have a devoted person or not. And to get involved in these new sustainability committees, there's loads of committees being created. So in the UK, the Publishers Association have a wonderful sustainability taskforce that are doing some amazing things, their supply chains. So there's loads of opportunities to really dive in. And it's a super collaborative space, which is always really excited. So, you know, I also say, pick up the phone: I love to talk to loads of people who, you know, have ideas or suggestions or, you know, want to sense check something. It's, it's a really collaborative space.

**Kate Spratt** 16:54

Yeah, absolutely. And I'm glad you mentioned podcast, too, because hopefully, some people will find this one and be inspired by some of the initiatives you've been working on as well. That kind of blends into my next question, actually, because I was going to ask about collaboration between publishers working together to reach sustainable goals. And it's interesting, because, you know, publishers are companies, you know, they, they are competitors in a lot of ways. But I think when it comes to sustainability, there's kind of a need to put on a united front, right, this is kind of bigger than just profit goals or other goals that a publisher might have. As you, as you've mentioned, there are many big goals that we kind of need to work towards, together. So I wonder if you could talk a little bit about how you kind of collaborate with other publishers to share ideas to kind of reach some of these ambitions.

**Rachel Martin** 17:42

So first of all, I'd like to say no one gets to net zero by themselves. Collectively, we have to get to net zero. But on that respect, you know, if you want to out-compete me and become you know, net zero before me, go for it, I think, great for the planet. Um, so, you know, I like a little competition, but I also like a little bit of collaboration. Um, so, you know, particularly on climate, you know, we're just defining the rules of the game more than anything else, because, you know, we have unique products. Books are not somewhere, you know, it's not a magazine, it's not a newspaper, it's also not, you know, cardboard packaging from your Amazon deliveries either, you know, we have this unique contribution to make. And it's goes beyond just using paper as a raw material. But it goes beyond the ability to change the hearts and minds of the people who read the words that we publish. And I think that in itself is so inspiring. And I think that's where you kind of get the idea of, yeah, we're all very happy to collaborate. There's great committees that are thinking about methodologies, like I said, emission factors, and that's super great. But also, I think there's just such a wide diversity that's needed from the creative industries, to get people to support climate action in ways that will positively contribute. You know, I think a couple of years ago, it used to be that you could only read dystopia kind of fictions about a world which we know what no one wanted to live in. And now we're at the stage where if you're thinking about, you know, publishing a story, and it doesn't have some sort of extreme weather situation, it's technically science fiction, right? Yeah, that's the world we're living at the moment. I think we have a role within our organisations to start thinking through how we can help people navigate that world, but feel inspired and feel positive to make the contributions that we need. And we need the creative industries. We need the scientists to communicate their science. We need the creative industries to articulate what that means. And we need the Netflix series of the future to kind of illustrate that for those who don't read. So we, you know, we need everybody and I think there there's a collaboration in being able to prioritise but to think through it in the very diverse ways that we can actually publish content. So in that way, I think it can be collaborative, but also transformative, not just on our sort of operational side, but also on the content side. And the diversity of voices. My goodness, I mean, we have such a beautiful, new diversity focus. And it's amazing if we could see climate stories told from children's, from minorities from, you know, women, I think there's such an interesting mix there. So, yeah, I welcome some competition there. I can't wait to see, you know, the next prize-winning books, and you know, how they address climate and sustainability.

**Kate Spratt** 20:36

Yeah, I feel like that's a really great way to look at the competition, as well as kind of see it as a way of everyone finding new ways to kind of approach the same topic, you know, finding new gaps, as you say, like many different voices, you know, we're going to have blind spots in our positions and our backgrounds, where we're from, that other people are going to be able to pick up and kind of run with. So I agree, I think collaboration is really important. So I'm going to talk a little bit about conference now. So as you know, Rachel, the SYP Oxford Committee has been working really hard to pull together our 2023 Conference, which this year is called 'Sustainable Futures'. Hence, the theme. The topic is looking at all themes relating to sustainability in the workplace, relating to technology. And also, of course, in the environment. You know, the conference's theme, 'Sustainable Futures' is kind of targeted at early career publishers and publishing hopefuls. So that's kind of who it's aimed at. And the SYP's work in general is also very focused on this group. So I'm wondering how can people in publishing, but especially those who are earlier on in their careers, get involved in making their workplace more sustainable. You know, people who, you know, have just started out or are hoping to start out who may not feel quite so empowered to make change — what kind of [advice] would you recommend to them?

**Rachel Martin** 21:53

So I think definitely, my recommendation is to develop the skill, which is a sustainability mindset. So to really think about how sustainability might intersect into your work life and into the career that you want to develop. A great way to start is, you know, I'm thinking about from climate, you know, calculate your own personal carbon footprint, because that's going to give you an idea about how an organisation is also going to be thinking about their footprint, once you kind of understand, okay, there's chunks, there's emission categories, and these are what's driving them. It's not that much different to an organisation: Elsevier had to map out our own carbon footprint. And then we found you know, print was one of the biggest emission categories followed by business travel, for example. And when you do your personal one, you might find that, yeah, you know, your holiday might be your biggest part or your your car, maybe it's your house. And you can also think, okay, for an organisation, it's their office space, but it will help you get into the mindset of some of the decisions you're going to start seeing through the companies were more remote now and you know, with more flexible in terms of the way that we're working, but it also means that organisations are not going to have massive offices anymore, that they have to heat and that that would have a carbon footprint. So you start understanding about some of the environment that you're kind of going to be working in or being challenged with, particularly sort of business travel, I know, lots of publishers are starting to bring in restrictions around, you know, making sure you get the most out of your trip, or that you're not, you know, taking a train instead of a plane and those sorts of things. So I think, you know, if I was starting to think about sustainability and entering the publishing industry, I think would be sort of flexing that muscle of how do you be sustainable? You know, how can I bring that in my everyday life, even if you have zero power, I find, the other thing would be really handy is that put sustainability on your team's agenda. Even if it's your action point 12 and you might not get around to it — that's okay. They always ask any other business and I always raise my hand and go, can we talk about sustainability? And I think, you know, that's a great, easy thing that you can do because... Open the conversation, think about suggestions, some of the best suggestions I've had are — I'll give you a great example. So events team, they were thinking about, I think Frankfurt Book Fair, and they're like, Rachel, I thought of you. And we were gonna do 100% recycled paper. I was like, well done. Fantastic, right. And that's a decision you can make without even consulting anybody else. Right. So I think that the stuff that you can be doing, even taking, you know, a reusable water bottle, you know, those little steps still count, right? I think, you know, we often get dismissed of oh, the little actions don't mean as much as big actions. It doesn't mean if you know, Netflix suddenly did something big. That's okay. But it doesn't make you feel empowered on an everyday basis. And I think if you're just starting out, thinking about what does sustainable really mean within a publishing context, understanding the lingo or getting into the mindset. And then coming to work showing up and being very, you know, positive and suggesting, you know, thinking about sustainability is a way that you can start the conversation. And then you get to learn more about it from your team members. And you also get to think about what you can do on a day to day basis.

**Kate Spratt** 25:20

Yeah, definitely, I think there's really useful advice there. And I think it's true that kind of showing up and being an advocate for, you know, making those positive changes is really important. And it's those small steps which kind of have a knock on effect with those people around you. I really liked one that you said that somebody thought of you and it made them think, oh, let's use recycled paper, that must have felt like a great achievement. And to, you mentioned, putting points on agendas. So part of my job, actually, I do like, sometimes distribute agendas for meetings, or in my working life. And I do sometimes joke with my colleagues like, Oh, I'm just gonna put something on the agenda that nobody else said, you know, like, sneak up on there, because nobody's going to know like, all the points come from different people. You know, I'm not necessarily recommending people do sneak things on agendas about without passing through someone, but it is an option, it is an option. But yeah, I think people are very receptive, right. For people who, who haven't yet worked in publishing, who are not sure. I think like, in my experience, people are so receptive to ideas and to having those conversations. I think it's a really great industry in that sense. So big question here, but you're used to big questions, what do you think a sustainable future looks like in publishing? What are your big hopes and goals?

**Rachel Martin** 26:37

I'd like to say that I think a sustainable future in publishing is one where we make the books that we have always loved and that society loves, but just in a way that loves the planet, and it's going to be more efficient, and it's going to be more diverse. And it's going to be more dynamic. And we're going to really, you know, think about innovations, not just, you know, in terms of Gen AI, the biggest, you know, top trend ever, but also in terms of innovation of, you know, voice, of character, of format, and it's going to be really dynamic, and it's going to be done in a way, like I said, that we love and that the planet loves as well.

**Kate Spratt** 27:19

Great. That's so amazing. And then to finish off my last question for you, which is hopefully a fun one. What do you love most about your role?

**Rachel Martin** 27:28

Um talking to people, I love talking to people, I love making connections. I think there are so many great ideas that are generated from our industry. And it's been so fun and such a privilege to be able to connect some of those ideas, test them out, see if they work, move on, pivot. It's amazing. I mean, it's so dynamic.

**Kate Spratt** 27:48

Amazing, great, Rachel, this has been so interesting, really, really insightful. It's been really great talking to you. And I really hope that people listening can take something really valuable away from it as well. You know, you've shared some really great ideas about what we can do, what is being done in the industry to kind of improve sustainability on all different fronts. So it's been, it's been wonderful. Thank you. I just want to say as well, if you enjoyed listening to this podcast, there is still time to buy tickets for our 2023 conference, 'Sustainable Futures'. It's happening on the 2nd of December, Oxford Brookes University. And I just want to give a huge shout out to our sponsors this year, Inspired Selection and Bloomsbury. So thanks so much, Rachel. You'd think listening to the podcasts that we're also sponsored by Netflix, but it's not the case.

**Rachel Martin** 28:39

But yeah, but I do want to see the next generation of sustainability leaders, so I'm hoping everyone who listens are inspired to take up the reins.

**Kate Spratt** 28:47

Absolutely, yeah. And you know, it will be so much easier with people like you, pathfinding the way. Great work. And yeah, I'm really excited to hear about what you do next in all other formats.

**Rachel Martin** 28:58

Excellent. Thanks so much for having me.

**Kate Spratt** 29:01

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