



Call for Papers: SHARP conference 2027

Opening (up) the Book

We would love to welcome the SHARP community to South Africa, for the 2027 SHARP conference, with the theme of “Opening (up) the Book”, to be held at the University of Pretoria from 7 to 9 July 2027.

Books in the Africa, and the Global South more broadly, are quite often seen as a foreign import. Indeed, the legacy of colonialism and neo-colonialism is still present, not least in the languages of publishing and the unequal access to resources and systems of value. However, there is a long-standing history of written culture and interactions with texts that complicates this centre-periphery dichotomy and challenges perceptions of booklessness. Given that this would be the first time the SHARP conference is held in the Global South, we would like to invite participants to explore and focus on ways of opening up and diversifying the field from a transnational perspective.

South Africa itself is a very diverse country, linguistically, culturally and socially. Historically, books and reading have been subject to stringent restrictions and highly stratified access in a closed and exclusionary system. Opening up the book has a special meaning in a post-apartheid, post-censorship context. Thus, the question of who is included or excluded in relation to books and knowledge is a key area of interest.

What does it mean to open (up) the book? Some perspectives include:

- Expanding or questioning definitions of ‘the book’, whether conceptual, by format, by use, by place or time
- Opening books physically and virtually, their materiality and technology
- Global networks and distribution: how books move (or not) around the world, to new readerships, through physical or digital platforms
- How books create connections: books as mediators or intermediaries between communities, cultures and countries

- Inclusion and accessibility for marginalised communities, local and indigenous publishing initiatives, as well as preservation in the face of global trends
- How language can both open and close off access to books, relating to multilingualism, translation, and the dominance of English
- Closed systems of censorship and regulation vs. open systems of circulation
- Making space for books, book spaces and book places
- Using books for 'non-book' purposes: advocacy, activism, art and more
- Decentring 'universalist' paradigms, theoretical frameworks and cases, especially given the context of the Global South and decoloniality

These themes complement the Information for All Programme (IFAP) sponsored by UNESCO, which is supported by the Department of Information Science at the University of Pretoria. In keeping with the theme, we aim to encourage greater inclusion and representation of scholars from and research on different geographic regions and institutions, especially from African countries. At the same time, we hope to expand book history networks and communities around the globe.

Submission of Proposals

We seek proposals for panels, individual presentations and roundtables.

Individual papers (20 minutes)

Proposals for individual research papers must include a title and an abstract of up to 300 words.

Panels

Panel proposals must include a description and title of the panel, the presenters, and an abstract for each proposed paper.

Roundtables

Proposals for roundtables must include a description of the broad or topical theme, a title and overall abstract, and the names of presenters.

Please submit your abstracts by 30 January 2027 to:

Dr Jana Klingenberg jana.klingenberg@up.ac.za

The conference website should be live in October 2027.

Programme committee

Prof. Beth le Roux, Publishing Studies, University of Pretoria (Chair)

Prof. Archie Dick, Information Science, University of Pretoria

Dr Jana Klingenberg, Publishing Studies, University of Pretoria

Prof. Lize Kriel, Visual Arts, University of Pretoria

Dr Siphiwo Mahala, English, University of Johannesburg

Thabiso Mahlape, Nali'ibali

Dr Athambile Masola, Historical Studies, University of Cape Town

Dr Samantha Miller, Publishing Studies, University of Pretoria

Lindiwe Soyizwapi, Library, University of Pretoria

Lisa Treffry-Goatley, Publishing Studies, University of Pretoria