

ARTÍCULO ORIGINAL

Rethinking book industry analysis: A mesosystemic model for strategic and institutional understanding

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Repensando el análisis de la industria del libro: Un modelo mesosistémico para su comprensión estratégica e institucional

Repensant l'anàlisi de la indústria del llibre: Un model mesosistèmic per a la seva comprensió estratègica i institucional

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Abstract

Traditional analytical frameworks used to study the book industry—mainly linear, firm-centered, and value-chain based—offer limited capacity to capture the relational, institutional dynamics that characterize publishing ecosystems. To address this gap, this article introduces the Book Industry Mesosystem Model (BIMM), a novel mesoeconomic and mesoanalytical framework that reconceptualizes the book industry as a mesosystem embedded in economic, institutional, and territorial structures. The model integrates five core concepts, six transversal dimensions, and twenty-five agent typologies, providing an architecture for examining complexity beyond firm or market boundaries.

BIMM was developed through a 39-month multimethod design combining: 1) iterative conceptual refinement with experts and industry professionals (n = 29), 2) semi-structured interviews with experts and professionals (n = 43), and 3) application to two case studies focused on creation and production processes. This hybrid research pathway ensured conceptual rigor, empirical grounding, and transferability.

The resulting model provides a framework for examining coordination mechanisms, institutional configurations, inter-agent dependencies, and transversal forces. Its empirical application reveals

patterns of precarious work, concentration, technological dependency, and institutional mediation that remain under-represented in traditional approaches. BIMM expands theoretical and methodological horizons for research on cultural and creative industries, offering a foundation for comparative analyses and mixed-method operationalization.

Keywords

Publishing industry; mesoeconomics; mesosystem analysis; Book Industry Mesosystem Model (BIMM); cultural and creative industries; strategic and policy analysis; innovation and ecosystem governance.

Resumen

Los marcos analíticos tradicionales utilizados para estudiar la industria del libro —principalmente lineales, centrados en la empresa y basados en la cadena de valor— ofrecen una capacidad limitada para capturar las dinámicas relacionales e institucionales que caracterizan los ecosistemas editoriales. Para abordar esta brecha, este artículo introduce el Book Industry Mesosystem Model (BIMM), un nuevo marco mesoeconómico y mesoanalítico que reconceptualiza la industria del libro como un mesosistema insertado en estructuras económicas, institucionales y territoriales. El modelo integra cinco conceptos centrales, seis dimensiones transversales y veinticinco tipologías de agentes, proporcionando una arquitectura para examinar la complejidad más allá de los límites de la empresa o del mercado.

El BIMM fue desarrollado mediante un diseño multimétodo de 39 meses que combina: 1) refinamiento conceptual iterativo con expertos y profesionales del sector ($n = 29$), 2) entrevistas semiestructuradas con expertos y profesionales ($n = 43$), y 3) aplicación a dos estudios de caso centrados en procesos de creación y producción. Este itinerario híbrido de investigación garantizó rigor conceptual, base empírica y transferibilidad.

El modelo resultante proporciona un marco para examinar mecanismos de coordinación, configuraciones institucionales, dependencias interagenciales y fuerzas transversales. Su aplicación empírica revela patrones de trabajo precario, concentración, dependencia tecnológica y mediación institucional que permanecen infrarrepresentados en los enfoques tradicionales. El BIMM amplía los horizontes teóricos y metodológicos para la investigación sobre industrias culturales y creativas, ofreciendo una base para análisis comparados y operativización mediante métodos mixtos.

Palabras clave

Industria editorial; mesoeconomía; análisis de mesosistemas; book Industry Mesosystem Model (BIMM); industrias culturales y creativas; análisis estratégico y de políticas; innovación y gobernanza de ecosistemas.

Resum

Els marcs analítics tradicionals utilitzats per estudiar la indústria del llibre —principalment lineals, centrats en l'empresa i basats en la cadena de valor— ofereixen una capacitat limitada per captar les dinàmiques relacionals i institucionals que caracteritzen els ecosistemes editorials. Per abordar aquesta mancança, aquest article introdueix el Book Industry Mesosystem Model (BIMM), un nou marc mesoeconòmic i mesoanalític que reconceptualitza la indústria del llibre com un mesosistema inserit en estructures econòmiques, institucionals i territorials. El model integra cinc conceptes centrals, sis dimensions transversals i vint-i-cinc tipologies d'agents, proporcionant una arquitectura per examinar la complexitat més enllà dels límits de l'empresa o del mercat.

El BIMM va ser desenvolupat mitjançant un disseny multimètode de 39 mesos que combina: 1) refinament conceptual iteratiu amb experts i professionals del sector ($n = 29$), 2) entrevistes semiestructurades amb experts i professionals ($n = 43$), i 3) aplicació a dos estudis de cas centrats en processos de creació i producció. Aquest itinerari híbrid de recerca va garantir rigor conceptual, base empírica i transferibilitat.

El model resultant proporciona un marc per examinar mecanismes de coordinació, configuracions institucionals, dependències interagencials i forces transversals. La seva aplicació empírica revela patrons de treball precari, concentració, dependència tecnològica i mediació institucional que continuen infrarepresentats als enfocaments tradicionals. El BIMM amplia els horitzons teòrics i metodològics per a la recerca sobre indústries culturals i creatives, oferint una base per a anàlisis comparatives i operativització mitjançant mètodes mixtos.

Paraules clau

Indústria editorial; mesoeconomia; anàlisi de mesosistemes; Book Industry Mesosystem Model (BIMM); indústries culturals i creatives; anàlisi estratègica i de polítiques; innovació i governança d'ecosistemes.

1. Introduction

Defining the relationships among economy, culture, industry, and society has long been a complex task (O'Connor, 2024). This challenge becomes even more pronounced when examining these relationships within the book industry, a sector understood here as a central component of a nation's intellectual system (Altbach, 1975) and a key driver of community development and cultural vitality.

A global assessment of the book industry shows that in 2024 the market was valued at approximately €97.86 billion, with a projected compound annual growth rate of 3,57% for 2025 (The Business Research Company, 2024). A closer analysis of economic performance by country in 2023 reveals that the United States held the largest market share (€27.550 millions), followed by China (€11.875 millions), Germany (€9.700 millions), and the United Kingdom (€8.440 millions). Other European markets—Italy (€3.439 millions), France (€2.944 millions), and Spain (€1.200 millions)—reported comparatively smaller figures, while Brazil (€696 millions) and Mexico (€491 millions) reflected more modest yet regionally significant markets. According to the Federation of European Publishers (Turrin, 2024), total publisher sales in Europe reached €24,4 billion, supported by the publication of approximately 585.000 new titles. The sector employs an estimated 500.000 people, although these figures remain approximate due to the high degree of market fragmentation.

Despite the sector's economic importance and its broader societal value, there is a notable lack of academic work analyzing the book industry from a mesoeconomic perspective (Augustyn, 2020; Vázquez-Álvarez, 2021; Renard et al., 2023). This gap in the literature does not imply an absence of valuable contributions from other economic and social science traditions (Vázquez-Álvarez, 2024),

- cultural economics;
- business administration theory; and
- industrial organization.

However, the limited application of mesoeconomic analysis—combined with the scarcity of research examining the book industry from managerial, industrial, or policy perspectives—has allowed other disciplinary approaches to dominate the interpretation of its economic and organizational phenomena. Three of these disciplines stand out for shaping the conceptual frameworks and narratives currently used to understand the book industry:

First, the *History of Books and Reading*, which emphasizes the centrality of print culture and examines the book as a material, social, economic, and symbolic artifact (Safers-stein, 2013). This field underscores the relevance of intermediary agents who help explain production processes, circulation modes, and patterns of reception and consumption (Adams & Barker, 2001; Darnton, 2007). It also analyzes the historical trajectory of corporate concentration (Mollier, 2022).

Second, the *Sociology of Books*, particularly the work of J. B. Thompson (Thompson, 2005, 2012, 2021), which—alongside economic sociology (Powell & Dimaggio, 1991) and strategic action theory (Fligstein & McAdam, 2015) examines cooperative, competitive, and interdependent relationships among agents and organizations. This discipline also investigates processes of publishing concentration and their consequences (Sapiro et al., 2009; Larivière et al., 2015).

Thompson's research highlights the importance of applying field theory (Thompson, 2012, p. 4) to the analysis of the book industry because:

- it reveals that the publishing world does not constitute a unified domain but a plurality of fields with distinct logics;
- it encourages analysis in relational rather than firm-centric terms;
- it shows that an actor's position within a field depends on the type and amount of resources—or capital—they possess; and
- it emphasizes that each field operates according to its own internal "logic of the field," which conditions agents' and organizations' strategies and possibilities for action.

Third, the *Political Economy of Communication and Culture*, represented by scholars such as Nicholas Garnham (Garnham, 2005), Ramón Zallo (Zallo Elguezabal, 2007), Philippe Bouquillon (Bouquillon et al., 2023), Guillermo Mastrini and Martín Becerra (Mastrini et al., 2023). This tradition focuses on the social relations—especially power dynamics—that shape the production, distribution, and consumption of symbolic goods. Its analyses typically address:

- ownership structures (Albornoz et al., 2020; Tröger & Becker, 2022)
- sectoral production structures (Miège, 2017) (Miège, 2017); and
- patterns of firm concentration (Discepolo, 2011; Quintana, 2023).

This situation highlights the need to adopt a mesoeconomic and mesoanalytical perspective capable of overcoming these limitations, a direction that the next section begins to articulate.

2. Research objectives

Building on the substantial contributions of previous scholarly traditions—whose models have shaped and, at times, constrained our understanding of the book industry—this research seeks to develop a mesoeconomic and mesoanalytical perspective that both honors and transcends these foundational approaches. The goal is to advance a more relational, multidimensional, and strategically oriented understanding of the sector, consistent with the structural and institutional complexity revealed by contemporary empirical realities and the need for analytical frameworks capable of capturing such complexity at the meso level.

Accordingly, the objectives of this research are to:

1. Develop an integrative analytical model that synthesizes existing managerial approaches used in the book industry with new mesoeconomic and systems-oriented perspectives, thereby moving beyond conventional linear or value-chain frameworks and enabling a more nuanced interpretation of sectoral structures, agent relations, and process interdependencies.
2. Capture the complexity of sectoral and territorial dynamics by offering a meso-level analytical lens that accounts for interactions among actors, institutions, processes, and policies across diverse contexts, including variations in market structures, organizational logics, resource access, technological infrastructures, and regulatory environments.
3. Strengthen decision-making processes for stakeholders—whether direct or indirect, active or passive participants in the book industry—by generating actionable insights that bridge theory and practice, supporting more informed strategic behavior, policy design, innovation processes, and assessment of structural vulnerabilities and opportunities while remaining analytically grounded rather than prescriptively oriented.

3. Theoretical Framework

To properly contextualize the analytical model developed in this research, it is necessary to articulate both a general conceptual framework informed by diverse traditions of economic and organizational analysis, and a specific theoretical framework grounded in the managerial approaches commonly applied to the book industry. Together, these frameworks provide the intellectual foundations that support the mesoeconomic orientation of the proposed analysis and clarify the conceptual position from which the model is developed.

3.1. General conceptual framework

The general conceptual framework underlying this study emerges from the convergence of five major traditions in economic and organizational thought:

1. mesoeconomics;
 2. regulation theory;
 3. the French tradition of industrial economics;
 4. economic sociology; and
 5. strategic management studies.
- Mesoeconomics, understood as a framework for analyzing productive sectors as situated socio-economic ecosystems (*milieux*), conceptualizes them as configurations shaped by territorial resources, institutional arrangements, shared norms, and collective learning dynamics, rather than as mere micro- or macro-level aggregates. The aim of this approach is to study systems that exhibit a degree of relative autonomy while remaining embedded within broader structural and regulatory dynamics (Bodet et al., 2025). This analytical positioning rests on a dual dialectic: micro–meso, referring to the co-constitution between agency and institutional structures, and meso–macro, referring to processes of negotiation, adaptation, and alignment vis-à-vis dominant economic regimes. Within this framework, mesoanalysis (Morvan, 1991) offers a relational and systemic perspective for understanding sectoral configurations, while the notion of mesosystem (Gilly, 1997) conceptualizes economic activity as an organized interaction among actors, institutions, and material and immaterial resources. For empirical application, mesoeconomics employs four analytical channels: 1) products-competition; 2) la-

bour; 3) futurity; and 4) relationship to nature (Lamarche & Bastien, 2025). Collectively, these dimensions enable scholars to characterize differentiated productive models and trajectories, as well as to examine processes of emergence, consolidation, transformation, or decline in sectoral development.

- Regulation Theory seeks to understand how capitalist economies are structured in different historical and geographical contexts, with a focus on modes of regulation and accumulation dynamics (Boyer et al., 2023, p. 3). This theory assigns the function of “highlighting the regularities of social spaces endowed with relative autonomy, while being structured by their relations with other meso spaces and the accumulation regime” to the meso approach (Lamarche, 2023; Lamarche & Bastien, 2025). From this tradition, we can extract certain conceptual tools (Boyer et al., 2023), as: Accumulation dynamics; Modes of regulation; Institutions; Socioeconomic compromises between workers, entrepreneurs and the State; Diversity of models of capitalism; Historical-structural analysis; Spatial and territorial approach; Analysis of economic crises and adjustment of sectors and regions.
- The French tradition of industrial economics (Ramírez Cendrero, 2003) approaches the industry in a transversal and dynamic manner (Arena et al., 1991). It focuses on three key elements (Morvan, 1991, p. 41): 1) the strategies of the agents within the productive system and their determinants, as well as their relationships with each other and with the wider environment; 2) the functioning of the productive system including its structure and modes of transformation; and, 3) the content and scope of this system and its actions. From this tradition, we can extract certain conceptual tools (Morvan, 1991), as: Structure-Behavior-Results Paradigm; *filière de production*; *Branche d'activité*; Analysis of Industrial Clusters; Theory of contestable markets.
- Economic sociology emphasizes how economic processes are deeply embedded in social structures, relational networks and institutions (Portes, 2010; Granovetter, 2017). This perspective assigns the task of analyzing how social interactions shape specific markets, affecting the distribution of resources, trust and economic strategies, to the meso approach. From this tradition, we can extract certain conceptual tools (Powell & Dimaggio, 1991; Portes, 2010; Granovetter, 2017), as: Embeddedness; Social networks; Social capital; Social class; Informal economy; Network ambivalence; Trust and reputation; Institutional isomorphism; Organizational fields; Institutional agency; Transnational communities.
- Strategic Management studies the set of managerial decisions and actions that shape the long-term performance of organizations. This includes environmental assessment (Vaujour et al., 2023), strategy formulation (Parmentier & Gandia, 2022), and implementation, as well as their evaluation and control (Bader Alharbi, 2024). We have adopted an integrative approach to this discipline (Guerras Martín & Navas López, 2016), acknowledging that every organization functions as a multi-level system (Hassink et al., 2013; Klein & Kozlowski, 2000). From this tradition, we can extract certain conceptual tools (Grant, 2024), as: Multilevel analysis; Organizational theory; Sectoral structure; Benchmarking; Strategic alliances; International trade theories; Multilevel analysis; Organizational theory; Sectoral structure; Benchmarking; Strategic alliances; International trade theories.

3.2. Managerial approaches used in the book industry

Our proposed model also engages with four managerial approaches that stem from economic perspectives specific to the book industry:

1. systemic análisis;
2. *filière de production*;
3. structural analysis of creative value chains, and
4. the book value chain.

- Systemic analysis (Chile. Ministerio de las Culturas, 2023) defines a system as a group of interconnected objects working towards a common purpose which may, in turn, be made up of various subsystems or spheres of action with their own purposes. “In the case of the book, it is necessary to determine the agents involved in the productive process, their operations and relationships among them. In addition to establishing the influence or dependence of third parties in the different stages of value addition, stating suppliers, regulators and promoters of the industry” (Sáez & Mardones, 2016).
- The *filière de production* approach (Rouet, 2013) views the book industry as a *filière*, or a chain of convergent production branches. These are structured around successive transformation operations that lead to the production of goods. Their articulation is shaped by the state of the art, technological developments, and the strategies of agents seeking to maximize value.
- The structural analysis of creative value chains (European Commission et al., 2017) defines three key functions for the book industry: 1) creation; 2) production / publication; and 3) dissemination / marketing. Moreover, this approach includes 4) exhibition / reception / transmission, a key factor shared with other cultural and creative industries. This proposed model differentiates between essential functions, support functions (Porter, 1998), and providers of ancillary goods and services. The value chain is understood as “the full range of activities required to produce a product or service from conception, production and delivery” (Kaplinsky & Morris, 2000).
- The book value chain is similar to the previous model, but is purely descriptive. It maps the book ecosystem and its processes, serving less as a tool for economic, sectoral or strategic analysis. Over time, it has evolved to reflect technological changes and the emergence of new actors, processes, and formats. Currently, we can distinguish four approaches: 1) those addressing the traditional book industry (Smith (Jr.), 1966); 2) those incorporating digital transformations (Bide, 1997; Phillips, 2005; Uribe et al., 2008; Gil & Rodríguez, 2011; Robin, 2016; Magadán-Díaz & Rivas-García, 2019); 3) those analyzing the impact on specific issues or agents (Tian & Martin, 2013; Cordón García, 2014; Piovesan & Paris, 2024); and: 4) those from the Media Economy approach, which emphasizes the dematerialization of the book industry and the centrality of copyrighted content, as opposed to the book object itself (Dubini & Raviola, 2015; Küng, 2017; Noam, 2019).

Taken together, the general and sector-specific theoretical foundations presented in this section establish a coherent conceptual basis that supports and informs the methodological approach introduced in the following section.

4. Methodology

This research employed a multi-method qualitative design structured around three complementary tools. Together, these tools enabled the iterative development, refinement, and empirical application of the proposed mesoeconomic and mesoanalytical model, ensuring both theoretical rigor and practical relevance.

Tool 1: Expert Panel

A multidisciplinary panel of 29 experts from both academic and professional backgrounds was assembled. Over a period of 29 months (April 2019–August 2021), each expert participated in structured, individual discussions with the researcher across three distinct phases. To broaden the scope of debate, a working paper derived from the first

phase was published in a peer-reviewed journal (Vázquez-Álvarez, 2022). This working paper served as the foundation for subsequent discussions and was progressively refined as expert feedback was incorporated.

Across all phases and intersections of the research process, discussions centered on the following thematic domains:

1. the relationship among economy, culture, commodities, and the book industry;
2. economic modeling approaches for understanding the book industry within the broader field of cultural and creative industries,
3. the suitability and limitations of existing managerial approaches—particularly value-chain-based conceptual frameworks—used in the publishing and book sectors,
4. participants' knowledge and assessments of mesoeconomics and mesoanalysis as analytical frameworks for the book industry; and
5. feedback on the evolving mesoeconomic model, which was iteratively revised throughout the research process.

Tool 2: In-Depth Interviews

In-depth interviews (Valles, 2007; Morales Contreras et al., 2016) were conducted with 43 experts from various segments of the book industry between March 2019 and August 2021. All interviews were recorded in audio format and followed a semi-structured questionnaire consisting of seven sections, each tailored to the interviewee's expertise.

The sections covered:

1. personal background,
2. education,
3. professional experience,
4. assessment of data quality and availability in secondary sources on the book industry,
5. field and mesosystemic logics across different types of book publishing,
6. present situation and future prospects of the book industry in Spain; and
7. observations and critiques of the mesoeconomic and mesoanalytical model proposed by the researcher.

Interviews lasted an average of 110 minutes. Participants were selected to ensure representation across the sector, including public administrations, trade organizations, researchers, consultants, and industry professionals. All interviewees met two key criteria:

1. recognized expertise in one or more areas addressed in this article; and
2. a minimum of ten years of professional experience in the book industry.

Tool 3: Application of the Model in Two Case Studies

The model was applied to two Spanish case studies, each published in a different journal: one in a professional journal widely recognized in the book industry (Vázquez-Álvarez, 2022a), and the other in an academic journal (Vázquez-Álvarez, 2022b). The first case study examined the creation process in the book industry, while the second focused on the production process.

Both studies incorporated data derived from Tool 2 and analyzed the following quantitative secondary datasets:

1. *Overview of Spanish publishing (1996–2019)*, and
2. a statistical analysis of databases from 2,683 companies included in the Iberian Balance Sheet Analysis System (2019–2021).

Data analysis for the case studies was conducted between September 2021 and March 2022.

Taken together, these three tools provide an integrated and iterative methodological approach that enables both the conceptual refinement and empirical validation of the proposed model.

Open-Access Documentation of Expert Participation

Given the large number of professionals and specialists who participated in Tools 1 and 2, and the volume of contributions they provided, an external document has been generated and deposited in an open-access academic repository (Zenodo). This document contains a record including the names, professions, and specific contributions of each participant. <https://zenodo.org/records/17859171>

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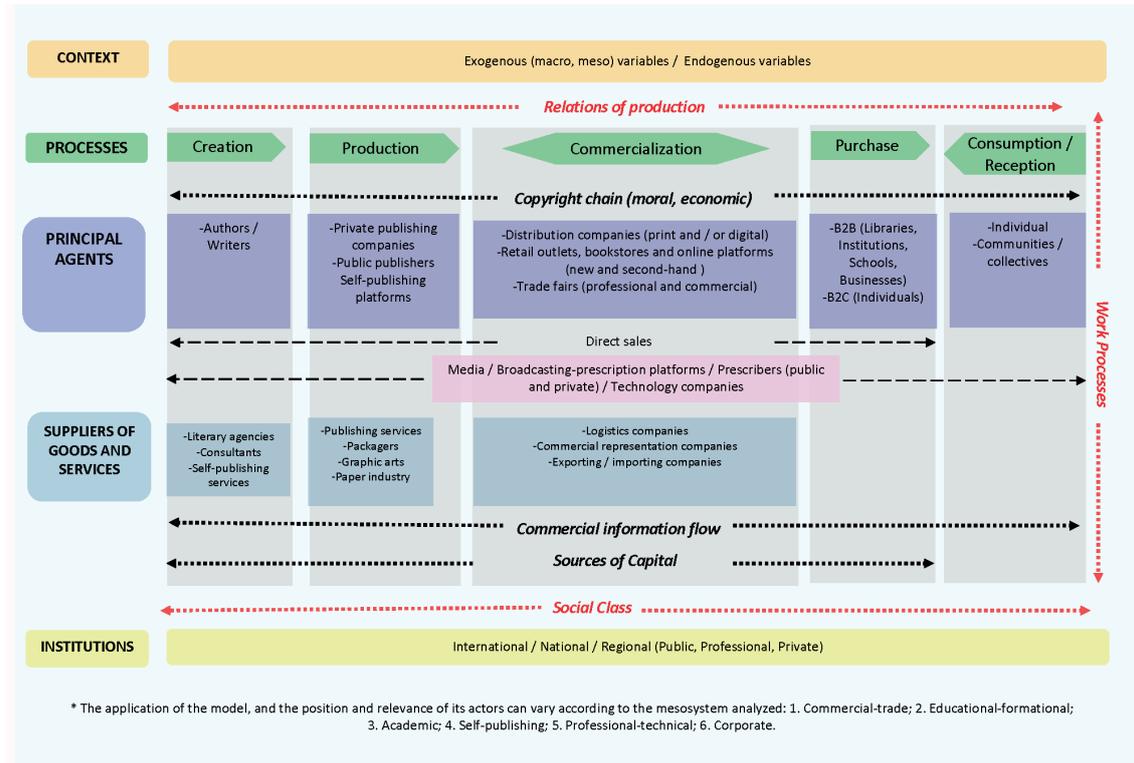
5. Results: The Book Industry Mesosystem Model (BIMM)

The research process resulted in the formulation of the Book Industry Mesosystem Model (BIMM), a dynamic and adaptable framework that synthesizes the theoretical traditions and empirical evidence discussed above. BIMM is designed to capture the book industry as a mesosystem: a structured yet open configuration of actors, processes, and institutions embedded in broader economic, social, and territorial dynamics.

The model is organized around five principal concepts—context, processes, principal agents, suppliers of goods and services, and institutions—and six transversal dimensions that cut across them. In addition, it distinguishes twenty-five agent typologies, grouped into principal agents and suppliers, which reflect the internal heterogeneity of the sector. Rather than serving as an exhaustive taxonomy, these categories function as analytical lenses that allow researchers and decision-makers to trace how value is created, distributed, and appropriated across different segments of the industry.

Figure 1 presents a graphical synthesis of BIMM, showing how these elements interrelate at the meso level.

Figure 1. BIMM is graphically represented as follows. Source: Author’s elaboration (2025)



The definitions of these conceptual categories are provided below. Due to space limitations and the exploratory scope of this article, we do not define each of the twenty-five agent typologies. These agents vary considerably in characteristics such as organizational size, access to resources, functions, mesosystemic interactions, technological adoption, and business models.

5.1. Core Architecture: Principal Concepts

The first core concept—*context*—refers to the set of endogenous and exogenous conditions shaping the operational environment of the book industry, encompassing macroeconomic dynamics, technological change, cultural policies, demographic patterns, and territorial specificities, including ecological resources and environmental sustainability. From a mesosystemic perspective, context functions as the structural foundation that conditions, enables, and redirects sectoral strategies, institutional configurations, and organizational behaviors, revealing how a sector aligns with, adapts to, or transforms its surrounding environment.

The second principal concept—*processes*—captures the sequence and interaction of activities through which an immaterial creation becomes a book-commodity (physical or digital) with symbolic, educational, informational, or entertainment value. BIMM identifies five core processes:

1. Creation,
2. Production,
3. Commercialization,
4. Purchase, and
5. Consumption–reception.

Unlike linear value-chain models, BIMM treats these processes as interdependent and recursive, allowing for feedback loops (e.g., from consumption back to creation) and the coexistence of multiple logics (market, public, community-based).

The third principal concept—principal agents—comprises those actors that play a preeminent role in at least one of these five processes. These include, among others, authors, private and public publishers, self-publishing platforms, distribution companies (print and digital), retail outlets and bookstores, online sales platforms, professional and trade fairs, and different types of buyers (business-to-business and business-to-consumer). BIMM does not aim to provide a definitive list of agents; rather, it identifies those whose decisions and interactions have systemic relevance for the functioning and transformation of the mesosystem.

The fourth principal concept—suppliers of goods and services—encompasses the wide range of organizations that enable the existence of the book-commodity and support the activities of principal agents. These suppliers include literary agencies, consulting firms, self-publishing and publishing service providers, packagers, graphic arts and printing companies, the paper industry, logistics and commercial representation firms, exporting and importing companies, media and recommendation platforms, prescribers, and technology companies. The inclusion of suppliers as a distinct category allows BIMM to map vertical and horizontal dependencies, revealing how structural changes in adjacent industries (e.g., paper, logistics, digital platforms) reshape the book industry.

The fifth principal concept—institutions—refers to public, private, and professional organizations, at international, national, and regional levels, that influence the book industry directly or indirectly. This category includes regulatory bodies, funding agencies, professional associations, trade organizations, educational and cultural institutions, and standard-setting entities. By integrating institutions as a core component, BIMM makes visible the institutional logics that frame sectoral strategies, mediate conflicts, and condition access to resources and markets..

Together, these five principal concepts provide a structural map of the book industry as a mesosystem, allowing the analyst to position actors and processes within a coherent architecture that goes beyond traditional firm- or chain-centered approaches

5.2. Transversal Dimensions and Integrative Capacity

A key contribution of BIMM lies in its six transversal dimensions, which intersect with all principal concepts and provide the model with its integrative and diagnostic capacity: Production relations capture the forms of social and economic relations that link those involved in the production and distribution of material and symbolic goods. This dimension highlights power asymmetries, contractual arrangements, and patterns of dependency among agents.

Work processes: defined as a series of interactions (factual, cognitive, or otherwise), between social actors (individuals or groups) and instruments, while acknowledging their macro-social characteristics and the production relations they entail (Zallo Elguezabal, 1988). These interactions take place within specific spatio-temporal contexts, ranging from immediate and localized settings to broader, more diverse contexts such as economic or productive organization, and are oriented towards either material or symbolic modification of the product (Lozares et al., 2004).

The copyright chain (moral and economic) addresses how different legal traditions and intellectual property regimes (Dulong de Rosnay & Le Crosnier, 2013) structure the allocation of rights and revenues. By treating copyright as a transversal dimension, BIMM links legal frameworks to business models, negotiation processes, and value appropriation.

Sources of capital encompass both internal and external financing mechanisms, including credit lines, bank loans, equity investments, public subsidies, and crowdfunding. This dimension is crucial for understanding the unequal capacity of agents to invest in innovation, absorb shocks, and sustain long-term strategies.

Flows of commercial information capture the role of metadata and information systems in enabling catalog management, discoverability, and market coordination. This dimension allows analysts to examine how control over information infrastructures constitutes a strategic asset and a source of competitive advantage (Braman, 2024; Raban & Włodarczyk, 2024).

Social class (Wright, 2015), addresses how broader social inequalities—economic, cultural, educational, and health-related (Benach et al., 2013) —shape access to cultural goods, opportunities for professionalization, and patterns of consumption and reception. This dimension connects the internal dynamics of the book industry with wider societal structures.

By combining these transversal dimensions with the five principal concepts, BIMM offers a multidimensional analytical grid suitable for examining sectoral structures, institutional configurations, and organizational dynamics. It is this cross-cutting structure, rather than the number of categories, that differentiates BIMM from existing managerial approaches.

Following the conceptual definitions, we present the results obtained by applying the proposed model to two case studies: creation and production.

5.3. Application of the Model: Key Findings in Creation and Production Processes

To assess its analytical capacity, the Book Industry Mesosystem Model (BIMM) was applied to two empirical case studies focused on creation and production within the Spanish book industry. The model provided the architecture for systematizing data, guiding a structured examination of contextual environments, institutional configurations, organizational actors, and supplier networks, as well as the transversal dimensions shaping work, capital, and information. The following subsections present the principal findings obtained through this application.

5.3.1. Creation Process

The first case study applied BIMM to the creation process in the Spanish book industry. The model guided the analysis of how authors and associated service providers are positioned within a wider mesosystem shaped by institutional frameworks, market structures, and evolving business models.

At the contextual level, the model made it possible to distinguish clearly between macro conditions—such as an unfavorable fiscal, labor, and cultural policy environment—and meso-level dynamics, including intense competition for visibility, high barriers to entry in traditional publishing, and low barriers to entry in self-publishing. This distinction helped systematize why authors' opportunities are structurally limited even in a nominally expanding market.

In terms of principal agents, BIMM highlighted authors as structurally vulnerable actors within the mesosystem. Using the model's categories, the study differentiated between professional and non-professional authors and related this distinction to income structures, employment trajectories, and reliance on complementary occupations. The

model was also instrumental in showing how motivations—economic, symbolic, and reputational—translate into different relational logics with publishers, intermediaries, and platforms.

Regarding suppliers of goods and services, BIMM illuminated a significant evolution of the supplier landscape since the 2008 economic crisis. Traditional literary agencies have retained symbolic centrality but comparatively modest economic weight, maintaining privileged ties with specific trade publishers while representing a limited segment of authors. At the same time, new agencies, consultancy firms, and self-publishing service providers have redirected their business models toward monetizing non-professional authors, leveraging digital technologies, training programs, and brand-building services. The model's emphasis on suppliers as distinct yet interdependent actors allowed these shifts to be interpreted not as marginal phenomena but as changes linked to specific strategic re-positionings within the mesosystem.

Finally, by mapping institutions alongside agents and suppliers, the model drew attention to a dense but highly concentrated business environment, where a small number of public agencies and professional organizations shape the regulatory and symbolic conditions of creation. Overall, the creation case showed that BIMM is particularly effective in revealing how precarious work, business concentration, and new commercial intermediation mechanisms intersect at the meso level.

5.3.2. Production Process

The second case study applied BIMM to the production process in the Spanish book industry. The model structured the analysis of how firms, institutions, and industrial suppliers interact within an increasingly complex mesosystem shaped by technological change, shifting consumption practices, and evolving organizational configurations. Through BIMM, production could be examined not only as a technical sequence of operations but as a relational field in which economic capacities, institutional alignments, and supply-chain dynamics converge.

BIMM reveals a production environment characterized by polarization and structural transformation, driven by digitalization, the diversification of formats, and growing business concentration. The model shows how the COVID-19 pandemic intensified pre-existing dependencies on public subsidies and reinforced interdependencies between public and private institutions, which simultaneously represent sectoral interests and pursue their own organizational continuity.

Regarding principal agents, the model allowed the identification of five distinct groups of publishers—large cross-media corporations, publicly funded publishers, small artisanal presses, self-publishing companies, and author-publishers. Across these groups, BIMM highlights convergent global trends: consolidation, standardization, diversification, and a shift from book manufacturing toward content management. Statistical patterns within the model underscore significant asymmetries: a small cluster of firms concentrates most revenues and employment, while the majority operate under structurally constrained conditions.

BIMM also demonstrates the centrality of suppliers of goods and services in shaping the production mesosystem. The model captures similar dynamics of concentration and inequality among providers, including precarious labor structures and a growing strategic redirection toward self-publishing and creation-related services. The printing and paper industries, additionally pressured by the pandemic, face simultaneous processes of consolidation and cost escalation, whereas technology firms have acquired a more influential role in editorial workflows and metadata management. The model also indicates that many publishers lack the capacity to adopt specialized software

and negotiate on equal terms with large industrial or technological suppliers, which contributes to deepening existing structural disparities.

In sum, the production case shows that BIMM effectively integrates heterogeneous dimensions—contextual, institutional, organizational, and industrial—into a unified analytical framework. It demonstrates how technological dependencies, market concentration, and institutional mediation shape the strategic options available to firms operating within the production process of the Spanish book industry.

Overall, the Results: The Book Industry Mesosystem Model (BIMM) section establishes BIMM as a coherent and operational meso-level analytical framework, providing a rigorous empirical basis for the interpretative and theoretical examination undertaken in the Discussion.

6. Discussion

The comparative evaluation of the traditional analytical models presented among the managerial approaches used in the book industry and the mesoeconomic framework developed in this study (the Book Industry Mesosystem Model, BIMM) demonstrates clear conceptual and analytical progress. Earlier approaches—systemic analysis, the *filière de production*, creative value-chain models, and descriptive mappings of the book value chain—provided foundational insights into the sequential organization of publishing activities and the relationships among core agents. However, their predominantly linear, stage-based structures limit their ability to capture the interdependencies, institutional configurations, and transversal forces that shape contemporary book ecosystems. These models tend to simplify the complexity of the sector and do not fully account for feedback loops, power asymmetries, technological mediation, and territorial diversity.

The proposed Book Industry Mesosystem Model (BIMM) addresses these limitations by adopting a mesoeconomic and meso-analytical perspective grounded in systems thinking and strategic management. Rather than conceiving the industry as a chain of discrete stages, the model conceptualizes it as a dynamic mesosystem composed of interrelated processes, agents, institutions, and transversal variables. Its architecture—structured around principal concepts, transversal dimensions, and a detailed taxonomy of twenty-five agent types—captures structural heterogeneity, institutional embeddedness, and the relational dynamics that influence value creation. By incorporating elements such as capital structures, copyright regimes, work processes, social stratification, and metadata flows, the model provides a more comprehensive understanding of the sector's internal differentiation and the positioning of actors within it.

From a managerial and policy standpoint, the model advances analytical and decision-making capabilities by making visible the mechanisms through which organizations coordinate, compete, and adapt within the mesosystem. Its multidimensional design allows stakeholders to diagnose vulnerabilities, identify opportunities, and understand the material and institutional factors shaping business strategies and public interventions. The empirical application of the model to the creation and production processes supports its operational relevance, revealing distinct patterns of precarity, technological dependency, institutional mediation, and market concentration that remain insufficiently addressed in traditional frameworks. Overall, the model provides an integrative and analytically robust lens that extends conventional value-chain approaches and strengthens the theoretical and practical understanding of the book industry.

7. Conclusions

The strategic analysis model developed in this study represents a notable contribution to Industrial Economics, Strategic Management, and the analysis of cultural and creative industries. Inspired by Merton's tradition of middle-range theorizing (Bouvier, 2022), the model enhances understanding of the book industry by offering a mesoeconomic framework that is both analytically rigorous and potentially relevant for researchers, professionals, firms, and policymakers.

Two main conclusions emerge. First, the model's multidimensional structure enables a more detailed comprehension of sectoral dynamics. It clarifies interactions across value creation processes, provides insight into collaboration and competition among agents, and offers a solid basis for designing context-specific public policies. It also supports the identification of positive and negative externalities, facilitates innovation by revealing emergent opportunities for business development, and accommodates territorial differentiation by considering local conditions such as infrastructure, labor availability, and regulatory environments.

Second, the effective application of the model requires careful consideration of methodological and contextual factors. Its use benefits from mixed research methodologies capable of capturing the sector's complexity, from a contextualized interpretation grounded in specific mesosystems, and from recognition of the diversity within the book industry. The model may be particularly useful for analyzing the six mesosystem configurations identified—Commercial-Trade, Educational-Formational, Academic, Self-publishing, Professional-Technical, and Corporate—which operate under distinct logics, institutional roles, and market dynamics.

Taken together, these findings suggest that the proposed Book Industry Mesosystem Model (BIMM) offers an integrative, flexible, and strategically informative meso-level framework with the potential to bridge theoretical analysis and practical decision-making.

8. Limitations

Several limitations should be acknowledged. First, potential analytical constraints may arise from the research methods employed, given the diversity and fluidity of the book industry's structures. Second, although the model is designed for printed and digital books, its applicability to audiobooks and other cultural and creative sectors requires additional empirical examination. Third, the model was tested through two case studies conducted within a single national context (Spain). While expert consultation suggests that it may be transferable to other regions—including Latin America, the European Union, the United Kingdom, the United States, and Canada—broader comparative studies would be necessary to further assess this claim. Finally, effective implementation of the model requires mixed-method approaches and careful adaptation to specific mesosystems, which may present methodological and analytical challenges depending on users' objectives and available resources.

9. Practical Implications

The mesoeconomic strategic model proposed in this study offers several potential practical implications for stakeholders in the book industry, including firms, professionals, policymakers, and researchers. By providing a multidimensional understanding of processes, agents, and institutional configurations, the model enables organizations to identify structural vulnerabilities, resource and coordination dependencies, and opportunities for inter-organizational collaboration. It may support more informed decisions regarding investment, business-model development, partnership formation, and technological adoption.

For policymakers, the model offers an analytical reference for designing context-appropriate interventions. Its emphasis on institutional influence, capital structures, labor conditions, and value appropriation allows public agencies to assess sectoral needs and evaluate the distributional effects of subsidies, regulatory frameworks, and professional standards. The model's capacity to outline positive and negative externalities can assist governments in considering policies aligned with sustainable and equitable development goals.

Finally, the model may also support innovation by highlighting emerging roles for technology firms, metadata management, and hybrid forms of value creation. Firms and sector associations may use the model to anticipate shifts in market structure, assess competitive positioning, and develop strategies aligned with evolving mesosystem dynamics. Its meso-level and territorial adaptability also makes it a practical tool for local governments or industry clusters seeking to strengthen cultural ecosystems and promote territorial competitiveness.

10. Implications for Future Research

Future research could broaden empirical validation across different national contexts to assess and refine the model's applicability. Comparative studies involving additional regions would deepen understanding of how institutional, cultural, and technological environments affect mesosystemic dynamics.

Further studies could explore the model's applicability to other cultural and creative industries, such as film, music, video games, or digital content platforms. This would clarify the model's potential transferability and identify cross-sectoral patterns of mesosystemic organization.

Quantitative and mixed-method approaches could be developed to operationalize the model at scale. Constructing indicators for inter-agent relations, capital access, institutional influence, or information flows could support the creation of diagnostic tools aligned with the needs of industry associations, policymakers, and researchers.

Finally, future research could examine the implications of technological transformations—including artificial intelligence, automation, and algorithmically mediated distribution models—for the structural organization of the book industry, drawing on the model's transversal dimensions to anticipate potential shifts in labor dynamics, market concentration, and value appropriation.

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Ethical Approval and Informed Consent Statement

This study did not involve any medical, clinical, or experimental procedures involving human subjects, nor did it collect sensitive personal data. Therefore, formal approval from an Institutional Review Board (IRB) or equivalent ethics committee was not required. However, all research activities were conducted in accordance with established ethical guidelines for qualitative research and the principles of responsible academic inquiry. Participants involved in expert panels and interviews were fully informed about the purpose and scope of the study. Verbal or written informed consent was obtained prior to participation, and confidentiality was maintained throughout. All data were anonymized, and participants were assured of their right to withdraw from the study at any time without penalty.

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