

## ROMANIAN PUBLISHING INDUSTRY – DEAD-END OR CROSSROAD. SOME NUMBERS AND POINTS OF VIEW

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**Abstract.** *Culture and, above all, cultural industries are the first to be affected by economic crises and changing the taste of the public. The book market in Romania has always been at the edge of the interest of state people, either by disinterest or through regulations that hinder the development of the domain. Do you need Romanian authors alive? Or only translations? "Bestseller" - a noun that came worldwide directly from English, is the magic word of the book industry. For some Romanian publishers, of course, the bestseller means the first print run of 100 copies, for others, large numbers mean four or five zero at the end. The development of digital printing has allowed books to be printed in small prints at reasonable prices for any customer, whether publishing house or individual (independent author). The main question both authors and readers ask is whether we still need publishers. There are already commercial companies in Romania that provide editorial services on demand. On the Romanian market, some important actors in online book distribution are struggling, with three of them having a top position, detached from the rest of the platoon, made up of smaller companies, the sites of important bookstore networks, or even the publisher's personal websites. By comparing the statistics provided by the Cultural Consumption Barometer and those of the main market actors (publishers and book fairs) for the Romanian side to those of other European and international markets (from the specialized publications) we will find the situation of the market of the book in Romania. I will try to identify the potential problems and potential solutions for stabilizing and eventually developing the book industry. Between the lack of interest in reading and the development of functional illiteracy at an extreme and the rapid technological development at the other extreme, the Romanian book market is still in the search for a faithful public and methods to approach the written text no matter how it is presented - printed book or e-book and regardless of how it is published or distributed.*

**Keywords:** *Publishing industry; Publishers; Bookstores; Library; Print-run; Readers, Authors.*

### **Introduction**

Culture and, above all, cultural industries are the first to be affected by economic crises and changing the taste of the public. The book market in Romania has always been at the edge of the interest of state people, either by disinterest or through regulations that hinder the development of the domain. A simple example would be the Law of the book that was still discussed without any finalization.

Massive translations have not been able to support the industry themselves by promoting in-flight package with manuscripts. The presence of a name on the cover and just so, sublimely induced the idea of a character located somewhere far, inaccessible, eventually disappeared from the real world.

The lack of a coherent policy that encourages Romanian authors - both classics and living - those who could have acted directly as actors in promoting the sector generated an enormous opaque curtain between authors and readers. I have often heard the phrase - *We still have Romanian authors in life?*, and the answer through the physical presence of the authors has not yet succeeded in convincing the Romanian public that it can be written at international standards and in Romania.

### ***Where and what is the market today? A few numbers***

Romania currently has about 12,000 registered publishing houses, but only about 1000 are active on the market (WallStreet.ro, 2018) and 500 publishers participate (Gaudeamus.ro, 2017) in one of the main book fairs in the country - Gaudeamus International (in Bucharest each November). So in the summer at Bookfest. Romania currently owns about 160 physical bookstores and less than a thousand public libraries: in addition to 40 county-libraries, town and village libraries mostly do not have funds to purchase the book.

The count of titles published in Romania is based on the ISBN code-numbers given by the publishers (received from National Library of Romania). According to this statistics, there are about 50,000 new titles each year.

The development of digital printing has allowed books to be printed in small prints at reasonable prices for any customer, whether publishing house or individual (independent author). The Friendship Pattern - a form of self-publishing of pride has developed tremendously over the last 4 years, so anyone can publish about 1,000 lei, 100 copies of a volume of about 100 pages, with materials of good quality, then send them to friends. About the quality of the text - story, style, grammatical rules - no one remembers anything because the pattern has been democratized and accessible.

### **What is a bestseller?**

"Bestseller" - a noun that came worldwide directly from English, is the magic word of the book industry. For some Romanian publishers, of course, the bestseller means the first print run of 100 copies, for others large numbers means four or five zero at the end. There is no objective definition of the term, its relativity being generated by each national or linguistic market in part.

### ***But a book sold well or extraordinary is a good book?***

Frederic Rouvillois (2013) in the volume "A History of the Bestseller" quotes Carlos Ruiz Zafon who believes that "success is a guarantee of quality"; so a bestseller is a "good book". But it continues: "In reality, literary success and value - quality and quantity - are not a deflection in binding relations. Very large books were resounding failures, while others, including the incontestable masterpieces of the human spirit, have glorified their very first appearance, just like some kind of easy or two-talented novel about which, retrospectively, we ask how they have he could have liked so many people. A best seller can be a sublime book - and so good a mediocre or even exuberant: everything is possible. In terms of quality, success means nothing. So if we want to define the bestseller, we need other criteria: the number (copies sold), the time (of which success

needed to take place) and the place (the bestseller's history showing that success has always ignored the borders)." (Rouvillois, 2013, pp.13-14).

With deep frustration I would add: the language (in which the manuscript was written and the first edition of the book appeared). Many times the theoreticians of the world book industry have analyzed situations, have written and published articles with volumes in high-circulation languages: French, English, German, Spanish, Italian, Russian, the languages of the great empires of the Middle Ages, The Renaissance, the Seasons of the Light and the Technological Revolution. In a still low-lived and somewhat illiterate Europe, at the edge of the empires, the small number of readers could not hold a consistent book market until the second half of the nineteenth century.

### ***Brief history of the bestseller***

Specialists believe that the appearance of *The Pilgrim's Progress*, signed by John Bunyan, in 1676, was one of the first bestsellers in English in history (Owens, 2003, p.xiii): "The book has never been exhausted. Numerous editions have been published and translated into more than two hundred languages. "

Let's not forget that at that time the pattern was made exclusively by hand and implicitly the time required for printing a volume was particularly long. Rouvillois states: "More than circulation, the sales figure is impossible to calculate precisely: what shows the success of a book (at that time authors note.) is the number of editions, possibly translation. That's why, for some, "the first bestseller of world literature" was a book that was taken out on January 16, 1605 in just a few hundred copies, in Juan de la Cuesta's *Madrigal Printing: Don Quixote* by Miguel de Cervantes. And that's because "ingenious Hidalgo" generates a general enthusiasm, first in Spain and Portugal, then across Europe." (Rouvillois, 2013, p.32)

### **Nowadays situation in Romania and worldwide**

#### ***The Romanian market***

On June 11, 2018, Afrodita Cicovschi publishes an article (on the *Adevărul* blog) titled: "The Romanians are returning to reading. The book market reaches the maximum of the last 7 years." Without completely sharing the author's enthusiasm, especially since the text appeared at the same time as Bookfest 2018, in the new pavilions at RomExpo and the figures seem slightly brushed, I would choose two quotes that offer an up-to-date picture of the Romanian publishing industry (Adevarul.ro, 2018):

*"According to KeysFin estimates, the turnover of publishers and book traders in Romania will exceed the level of 1.11 billion lei this year, by 16.2% above the 2012 level. Against the backdrop of business consolidation, publishers and book sellers have optimized their spending, so the sector's profits have doubled from 2012 to the present, from 51.3 million lei to over 100 million lei, a figure projected for the evolution in 2017. Business Radiography in this area shows that the number of companies has remained constant during this period, around 1000 publishers and 350 merchants. (...)*

*"Top of the most profitable book business (...) The top book editors are headed by the Art Publishing Group, with a turnover of 38.2 million lei, followed by Group Media Litera SRL (26.6 million lei), Tarsago Romania SRL (25.3 million lei), POLIROM SA (23 million lei), Humanitas SA (19.3 million lei) and Lotus Publishing SRL (17.2 million lei).*

*KeysFin data show that the top 10 players in the market achieved 36% of total turnover in the publishing market, estimated in 2016 at 585.3 million lei. In the bookstores' top, the most important player is Direct Client Services SRL (Cărturești), whose turnover of 87.1 million lei accounts for almost one third of the turnover of book traders in Romania. The top is completed by the Bookstores Company Bucharest SA (45.6 million lei), Blor Retail SA (Diverta) (45.6 million lei), Libris SRL (27.4 million lei), SedcomLibris SA (19.7 million lei), One Distribution Company SRL (18.2 million lei) and Humanitas Bookstores SA (17.5 million lei). "*

Some comments are needed regarding the quotes above. The first would be to mix publishing publishers with books and especially those who only trade editorial products. A simple example: Lotus Publishing appears in some materials as a glossy magazine editor, and 11 ebooks are all on the eMag website (eMag.ro, 2018), all edited abroad and in foreign languages. You will also have a similar surprise if you come to Tarsago's website (Tarsagomediagroup.com, 2018). Which means that if we remove firms that import magazines and books or complementary products (cars and trains or others) for sale at kiosks, their own national book production is much smaller. However, the above turnover in the euro is about 120 million. My estimation, of course empirical, proposes a figure of approximately 80-90 million euros for the Romanian book production.

Another issue that needs to be clarified is that of sales of bookstore chains. Let's not forget that there are all sorts of handicrafts, teas, and there are terraces where you can eat - I am not at risk of saying that they are managed by the same companies. There is also a lot of imported goods. In addition, most bookstore networks sell stationery and related products - gifts, crafts, drawing and painting materials, leather goods, DVDs, etc. So I think we cannot have a clear picture of the book market in Romania.

Another statement makes me nervous in the text above. The number of players on the market estimated by analysts at KeysFin at approximately 1,000 publishers. The figure seems to be removed from my hat because it does not even approach the figure advanced by, for example, the Gaudeamus Book Fair (one of the most important or even the most important editorial event in Romania) - 300 participants or the one offered by the National Library of Romania - a much larger figure we will come back to. In conclusion, the data is quite unclear and unsafe.

However, for a picture of the place that the book occupies in today's Romanian society see table 1 presenting information from the Cultural Consumption Barometer (2017, 2018, p.185)

**Table 1. Frequency of reading in Romania**

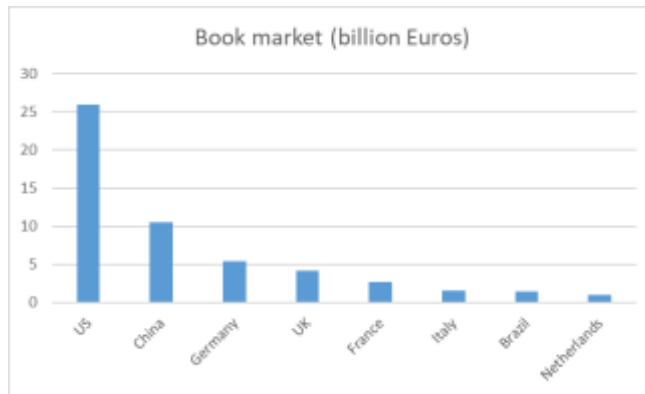
<i>In the past 12 months, how often have you read books (generally)?</i>	
<b>The national sample</b>	<b>The sample on Bucharest</b>
- 42% never;	- 29% never;
- 27% less;	- 29% less;
- 10% several times a year;	- 14% a few times a year;
- 9% monthly;	- 13% monthly;
- 7% weekly;	- 11% per week;
- 4% daily.	- 3% daily.

As expected, book use in urban areas is much higher, the category never fluctuates from 29% in the national sample to 29% in the Bucharest sample. However, if we collect *the*

*professionals* - those who read weekly and daily - the differences are not very high: 11% at national level compared to 14% in Bucharest. Unfortunately, the research does not specify the relationship between the fiction book and the non-fiction book, because I have often encountered reputable readers who say openly and without remorse: *Dear, I have no time to read novels or poems, I read just what I need for school (or job).*

### **The other markets**

According to *Statista.com*, in 2015, the main players on the book market are: the US with 25.99 billion euros, followed by China, Germany, United Kingdom and France.



**Figure 1. Top book markets. Source: Statista, 2015**

After *Publishing Perspectives*, the material provided by the StatShot Annual Report - announces for the year 2017 a figure of \$ 26.2 billion for 2.7 units (children's paper or e-products) traded, a figure continuing a slight trend downward trend of the last five years - from \$ 27.07 billion in 2013, for the US Publishing Market (Anderson, 2018). A slight decrease in adult fiction and a significant increase - 4.4% for adolescent fiction (YA). A last observation: the paperback volumes (on paper!) Dominate all categories - over 1 billion units sold.

On another scale, in Europe, we chose to present the figures from Lithuania after the latest material made available by the officials of that country: The Latvian Book Market. (The Latvian Book Market, 2018, pp. 6-7)

A 2004 EU member country with a population of 1,931 million (less than Bucharest!) presents the following data:

- the number of publishers (who publish at least one title per year): 475,
- new titles per year: 2146,
- average print run for a title: 1263 copies,
- average book price sold in bookstores: 12.07 euro.

And two other important information:

- 12% VAT for books and 21% for electronic publications;
- 150 bookstores and 1671 libraries (impressive figure for a country with 2 million inhabitants)

Finally, the percentage of people who read at least one book a year: 57%.

## Motivations associated with the book industry

The most important questions that the book industry goes through today from authors to publishers and then to readers are:

*Why do Romanians write so much?*

*Why do Romanians read very little?*

*Why do Romanians read more translated Foreign Books?*

*Why do I read the Romanian authors?*

*May I earn enough money for leaving from rights of published books?*

Let's see some examples

A top set by Forbes Romania in 2011 (adevarul.ro, 2011):

1. Mircea Cărtărescu;
2. Gabriel Liiceanu;
3. D.R. Popescu;
4. Andrei Pleșu;
5. Nicolae Breban;
6. Neagu Djuvara
7. Augustin Buzura
8. Nicolae Manolescu
9. Dinu Sararu
10. Radu Paraschivescu

Since then, some places may be slightly modified because recent years have brought literature closer to readers. Especially after coming back in recent years. I am convinced that the volumes of Professor Lucian Boia could bring him to this top. Without joining them I want to be content about the content of the writings, and without any comment, I think of at least a few other names that appear (at least from the editors and librarians' declarations) to come to the forefront: the volumes of Irina Binder Fluturi, Butterflies), then the diptych ... Suffer by Andrei Ciobanu, the historical thrillers signed by Igor Bergler, the volumes of Mr. President Iohannis, and perhaps there would be other examples. All report figures in the tens of thousands of copies. Personally, it seems to me that some of the figures are much swollen, but I have no argument to support this statement.

There may be some people - 20 or 30, or even 50 who have earned a lot from writing. A comparison with the Western market would be pointless.

Therefore, all the others who publish – we are mainly referring to fiction - hope in a miraculous enrichment through immense circulation or just aspire to a local recognition among friends, colleagues, concitadins? We incline to believe that any creator has a very well developed ego, but enrichment depends on many more factors that are not and cannot be under the personal control of the creator. Many of them are in the editor's choice.

## Solutions for a new type of market

The main question both authors and readers ask is whether we still need publishers. There are already commercial companies in Romania that provide editorial services on demand. An example is the Berg Publishing House (edituraberg.ro, 2018):

*"PUBLIC*

*You wrote a book, and the friends who read it were impressed. It is time to publish the manuscript; we are here to support you.*

*In partnership with [www.serviciieditoriale.ro](http://www.serviciieditoriale.ro), a registered trademark of the BERG Publishing House, we have prepared for you a set of rules that you are going to follow to ease the work process and the duration of your book.*

*Your book can be done in 4 easy steps. "*

Of course, everyone has the right to manage their business as they think, and we have all the respect for Berg's leadership. The site is clear, simple, efficient, easy to understand for everyone. Our question is whether an author keeps sticking to the name of a firm that publishes the author's money? Or if the author still needs a publishing house? Or even simpler if you are turning to self-publishing - because ISBN code numbers can be released to individuals, so you can publish your own work yourself.

Editorial services (as Berg presents):

- Drafting / proofreading;
- Pagination (layout);
- Cover (cover);
- Publishing (I would have said the necessary publishing operations here, many of them: from the simple ISBN to the printing itself.)

***The new paradigm: New media and the book market. Integrated LIBRIS model***

On the Romanian market, some important actors in online book distribution are struggling, with three of them having a top position, detached from the rest of the platoon, made up of smaller companies, the sites of important bookstore networks, or even the publisher's personal websites. They are: [elefant.ro](http://elefant.ro), [libris.ro](http://libris.ro) and [librărie.net](http://librărie.net). About one of them the article of August 10, 2018, signed by Ovidiu Vrânceanu (2017) in BizBrasov:

*"Libris.ro, the largest online book retailer in Romania, grew by 40% in the first six months of this year and registered a turnover of 18.3 million lei.*

*The positive dynamics is due to the increase in visitors' conversion and return rates on the site, as well as the market and interest in popular or expected titles, such as Irina Binder or Sapiens, Short History of Humankind (Yuval Noah Harari).*

*The best-selling product categories are Fiction, Personal Development and Children's Books, which together generate over 80% of sales on Libris.ro. An interesting dynamic was also played by the books in Practical Psychology (+ 76%) and Child Growth (+ 67%).*

*Romanians' interest in the printed book is rising due to the increasing number of titles and promotional mechanisms that help the information to spread rapidly to numerous and well targeted audiences. For Libris.ro it was a very interesting first half of the year, we registered increases in all categories of books (...), "says Laura Țeposu, Development Director Libris.ro.*

*(...) Traffic from mobile devices has accounted for 60% of all visits to Libris.ro and generates 45% of sales, an increase of almost 80% compared to the first half of the previous year. The cities where most orders are placed are Bucharest, Cluj, Timisoara, Iasi, Brasov, Constanta, Ploiesti, Oradea and Craiova. In the first six months of this year, Libris.ro has sent over 250,000 orders to readers across the country. The average value*

*of an order placed on Libris.ro increased by 9% compared to the same period of 2017, up to the threshold of 72 lei.*

*(...) The first half of this year was marked by investments in three strategic directions: the new Libris deposit, optimization of site conversions and improved customer and visitor experience, as well as the #RespectYourself education campaign. Give your reading time, which encourages reading and presents reading as a form of respect for one's own person. "*

It is important to note that Libris is not an exclusively online actor, nor has he emerged from nothing. One of the most important bookstores in Brasov - Șt. O. Joseph, excellent positioned on Muresenilor St., wore the first brand of Libris. Then there was a spring book fair that had already 15 editions and the Festival of Books and Music (summer in the Council Square) already has 10 editions. The Libris Cultural Association that organizes them also organizes a folk and a poetry festival. But Libris is stretching more and more because there is already a Libris Editorial with a production of several titles per year and partnerships or participations in Local Book Fairs (e.g. Alba - Alba Transilvania, together with the county library) or the Festival SIMFEST Târgu Mureș (documentary film and independent television).

Although I admit that I do not like monopoly politics and Libris Editorial's production seems rather heterogeneous, however, Libris is a serious and extremely powerful player in the entire book market. Incorporating all these activities under one big hat has the chance to harmonize the potentially critical moments of one or other of the components as needed.

### **Brief conclusion**

Between the lack of interest in reading and the development of functional illiteracy at an extreme and the rapid technological development at the other extreme, the Romanian book market is still in the search for a faithful public and methods to approach the written text no matter how it is presented - printed book or e-book and regardless of how it is published or distributed. Target audience the main issue of the book market, need to read - remains an undisclosed puzzle in 2018.

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