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Book culture in Slovakia after the year 2000

ABSTRACT

The aim of this paper is to provide basic information on the main components of book culture in Slovakia in the first decades of the 21st century. The article starts with a brief overview of the existing volumes on the topic of contemporary book culture in Slovakia. In core, the paper analyses state support for book publishing, structure of publishers, book market, reading, libraries and book awards. Empirical data comes from available official documents and statistics.

KEYWORDS: Slovakia, contemporary book culture, state support for book publishing, book publishers, book market, reading, libraries, book awards

ABSTRAKT

Kultura książki na Słowacji po roku 2000

Celem niniejszego artykułu jest przedstawienie podstawowych informacji na temat głównych komponentów kultury książki na Słowacji w pierwszych dekadach XXI wieku oraz stanu, w jakim się znajdują. Artykuł zaczyna się od krótkiego przeglądu literatury przedmiotu, następnie ukazana została rola państwa, które wspiera liczne inicjatywy wydawnicze, ruch wydawniczy, rynek książki, czytelnictwo, biblioteki i nagrody związane z książką i literaturą. Dane pochodzą z dostępnych oficjalnych dokumentów i statystyk.

SŁOWA KLUCZOWE: Słowacja, współczesna kultura książki, mecenat państwa, ruch wydawniczy, rynek książki, czytelnictwo, biblioteki, nagrody

Introduction

Several factors can be recognized in the background of the current book culture in Slovakia: the Communist Party ruled in the country until 1989, the Slovaks gained state independence only recently (1993), and the period of free market economy is also very short. The book market is small, given by a limited number of users of Slovak language (Slovakia has more than 5.4 million inhabitants according to current statistics).

The aim of this contribution is to provide basic information on the main components of book culture in Slovakia in the first decades of the 21st century: the state support for book publishing, structure of book publishers, book market, reading, libraries and book awards. A number of areas are left sideways, e. g. legislation, professional associations, social status of writers and honorarium policy, book distribution, book culture of language minorities, communication circuits of different book subsystems, image of books in print, radio and television or relation between book culture and cyberculture. Empirical data used in the paper originate from official documents and statistics. The existing thematic literature was also considered.

Literature

Different areas of contemporary book culture in Slovakia are covered by research with uneven intensity. The conditions of libraries are very well described. The Slovak National Library (Slovenská národná knižnica) is publisher of the *Knižnica* magazine with papers on a broad range of topics related to book culture. Systematicity is gradually being reached in the area of reading surveys. Prior to 1989, R. Lesňák specialized on this subject. In *Horizonty čitateľskej kultúry* (1991) he gave a review and analysis of the former Slovak reading surveys. After a long break, reading survey was carried out as part of the project *Reflexia umenia po roku 2000* under the auspices of the National Cultural Centre (Národné osvetové centrum, NOC). This survey was processed by J. Sopóci and L. Hallon.¹ The following survey in the years 2003-2009 was organized by the Centre for Information on Literature (Literárne informačné centrum, LIC) in cooperation with

1 SOPÓCI Ján; HALLON Lubor 2004. Vzťah obyvateľov SR k literatúre, In *Recepcia umenia na Slovensku po roku 2000*, L. Šrámek (ed.). Bratislava: Národné osvetové centrum. Bratislava: Literárne informačné centrum, pp. 56-105.

the NOC. The results were interpreted by P. Rankov and P. Valček.² Since then, a number of youth reading surveys have been conducted.³

Contemporary book culture is partly covered by literary criticism. Synthetic works conventionally contain chapters about literary life. However, these mostly end in the 1990s and mainly concern the influence of politics on literature. An example may be the studies by Štefan Drug collected in the volume *Literatúra a politika po slovensky* (2003). Basic information on the current situation includes *Hľadanie súčasnosti* (2014), edited by R. Passia and I. Taranenková. A detailed overview of the changes in literary life has been attempted by the author of this contribution in the work *Aktéri a tendencie literárnej kultúry na Slovensku po roku 1989* (2015).

As a source of subjective attitudes and experience, there are valuable interviews with literature professionals. J. Štrasser has summarized interviews with selected publishers in collection called *Osem stotočných* (2017). Interviews with various translators are collected in *Deväť životov* (2015), which was compiled by R. Passia and G. Magová. Detailed analysis of conditions in this profession is available in the monograph of M. Djovčoš and P. Šveda *Mýty a fakty o preklade a tlmočení na Slovensku* (2017).

The characteristics of book culture in Slovakia after 1989 have been also described by Czech scholars. Chapters about Slovak book market are included in the history of the Czech book market by Z. Šimeček and J. Trávníček *Knihy kupovati...* (2014). The Slovak situation in the transition years was also dealt with by J. Šmejkalová in the monograph *Knihá* (2000). In the European context, the data on Slovakia and its book culture are evaluated by S. Kurschus in the *European Book Cultures* (2015).

State support for book publishing

From an economic point of view the state expresses its relationship to book culture by means of lowered VAT rate as an instrument for encouraging cultural consumption. In Slovakia, like in most European countries, books

2 Reports for each year are published on the site <http://www.litcentrum.sk/citanie> [accessed. 2018-12-26].

3 GAŠPAROVIČOVÁ Anna; HRDINÁKOVÁ Ludmila; KOPÁČIKOVÁ Judita; RANKOV Pavol. 2009. *Čítanie mládeže v Bratislavskom kraji. Interpretácia výsledkov výskumu*. Bratislava: Centrum vedecko-technických informácií SR. HRDINÁKOVÁ Ludmila; KOPÁČIKOVÁ Judita; RANKOV Pavol. 2017. *Text a čítanie, mládež a knižnice*. Bratislava – Košice: Slovenská asociácia knižníc – Technická univerzita v Košiciach. KOPÁČIKOVÁ Judita; HRDINÁKOVÁ Ludmila; GAŠPAROVIČOVÁ Anna. 2011. *Čítanie mládeže v Slovenskej republike*. Interpretácia výsledkov výskumu. Bratislava: Slovenská asociácia knižníc.

are among the goods covered by the reduced VAT rate. (The evolution of VAT in the years 2000-2018 is presented in Chart 1.). Exceptions were the years 2004-2006, when the reduced tax rate was abolished within the framework of the tax reform. An increase of book prices followed.⁴ Slovak VAT for books ranked among the highest in Europe. Returning to a rate lowered to 10% in 2007 did not bring down book prices. But for publishers it created space for improvement in their economic situation and the increase of number and variety of titles. It is also estimated the reduced rate did hold back the future rise in book prices.⁵

The relationship of the state to that part of the book culture, which also has as an artistic value, is at the economic level expressed by the existence of a special subsidy system. The literature is supported together with other arts in a system of different programs. Direct subsidies support about 2 to 3% of the total annual production of the book market.⁶ But precisely due to these sources the book offer is diverse including titles with low sales, but with high artistic, cognitive or educational value. For non-commercial literature this is vital also due to a lack of other sources. There are no legislative frameworks to promote cultural and art sponsorship, which is the usual way sport is funded. Furthermore several foreign foundations that promoted independent art in the 1990s as a part of their stimulation of civil society development have moved to other regions of the world.

Until 2015, the allocation of grants for artistic activity fell under the Grant System of the Ministry of Culture of the Slovak Republic. Some serious negative aspects were typical for this system, e. g. administrative difficulty, slow decision-making of expert committees or limitation of grants for only one year. Instead of this institution, a public Slovak Arts Council (Fond na podporu umenia, FPU) was established in 2016. The aim of the FPU is to serve as a modern instrument for supporting artistic creation, publishing, promoting, research, etc. The institution also grants scholarship to writers. For the subprogram specialized in supporting cultural and artistic events, it is possible to apply for two- or three-year grants, which is beneficial for creating a stable organizational background. Sub-program for online culture magazines also emerged. Besides that, exceptional challenges highlight themes that represent current cultural priorities.

4 BÁNOCIOVÁ Anna. 2009. „Analýza vývoja dane z pridanej hodnoty v Slovenskej republike“. *Ekonomie a management* 4: 108.

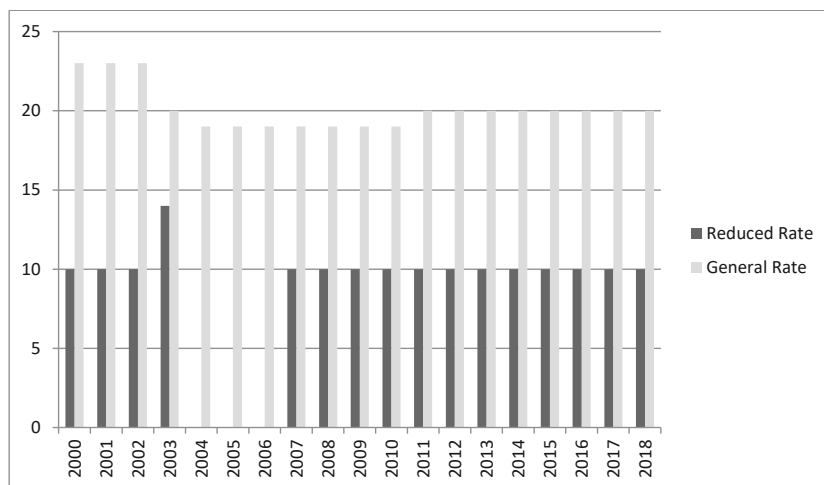
5 JANČÍK Luboš. 2007. *DPH klesne, knihy nezlacnejú*, <https://www.sme.sk/c/3611038/dph-klesne-knihy-nezlacneju.html> [accessed. 2018-11-19].

6 *Koncepcia podpory pôvodnej literatúry*. 2013. Bratislava: Ministerstvo kultúry Slovenskej republiky, p. 20.

Serious and protracted problem of direct state support for book culture from public sources is the insufficient amount of financial resources (Table 1). The moderate steady increase in allocations in recent years has been accompanied by a stronger increase in the number of applications supported. Due to the development of inflation, the ongoing rise in prices, wages and other costs, the financial system continues to stagnate. The problem is also the tendency of commissions to satisfy as many applicants as possible, resulting in smaller sums allocated to individual projects and in relativization of their quality.

Similar problems are accompanying activities of other institutions such as the Centre for Information on Literature (focused mainly on the promotion of Slovak literature in Slovakia and abroad), the Literary Fund (maintained with intention to support authors and creation in literature, science, journalism, theater, film, and radio) and LITA (copyright management agency and administrator of royalties). Hence an oscillation of many writers, publishers, editors etc. between the status of elite professionals and enthusiastic amateurs has become the persistent sign of book culture in Slovakia.

Chart 1. VAT rate development in Slovakia 2000-2018.



Source: BĀNOCIOVÁ Anna. 2009. „Analýza vývoja dane z pridanej hodnoty v Slovenskej republike”. *Ekonomie a management* 4, p. 109.

Table 1. The state support for book publishing (the Grant System of the Ministry of Culture of the Slovak Republic till 2015, and the Slovak Arts Council since 2016).

Year	Received requests	Amount requested (Euros)	Supported projects	Allocated funds (Euros)
2011	555	3 997 373	248	1 052 800
2012	503	3 359 782	279	1 158 300
2013	521	3 521 629	273	1 177 800
2014	585	3 841 695	319	1 249 100
2015	547	3 483 382	322	1 248 261
2016	481	2 844 827	362	1 277 098
2017	542	2 661 157	382	1 388 846

Source: Ministry of Culture of the Slovak Republic, reports are available here: <http://www.culture.gov.sk/podpora-projektov-dotacie/dotacie-178.html/> [accessed. 2018-12-02].

Book publishers

After the change of the political regime and the economic system in 1989, the eruptive growth of the publishing sphere began. Compared to 25 pre-november state publishing houses, there were already 350 registered publishers in 1990 and approximately 600 different subjects in 1993.⁷ At the beginning of the new millennium, more than 900 publishers were registered in the ISBN register maintained by the Slovak National Library. In 2017, at least one title was issued by 1,673 different subjects (Table 2). The fluctuation in the current trend seems to be linked to the milestones in the country's economic system and in the book market itself: in 2004, VAT was unified to 19%, in 2009 Slovakia moved to the Euro and in the years 2012-2013 several book distributors have gone into liquidation causing considerable problems to publishers in the form of unpaid and unreturned stock.⁸

As for the titles produced annually, despite fluctuations there is a clear trend of increasing the number. Two years after the launch of economic transformation, in 1991, 3,305 titles were published in Slovakia.⁹ In 2004, it was more than 8,000 titles and since 2012 the production has been continuously higher than 10,000 titles a year. (Detailed development in 2002-2017 is shown in Chart 2). The increase is also apparent when looking at the population: in 1991 it was 0.7 titles per 1,000 inhabitants, in 2004 it was

7 ŠMEJKALOVÁ Jiřina. 2000. *Kniha. K teorii a praxi knižní kultury*. Brno: Host, p. 138.

8 *Správa o slovenskom knižnom trhu 2014*. Bratislava: Združenie vydavateľov a knihkupcov Slovenska, https://zvks.sk/wp-content/uploads/2018/03/Knizny-trh_2014.pdf [accessed. 2018-12-02].

9 ŠMEJKALOVÁ Jiřina. 2000. *Kniha. K teorii a praxi knižní kultury*. Brno: Host, p. 138.

1.5 and from 2012 over 1.9 titles per 1,000 inhabitants (in 2014 even 2.3 per 1,000 inhabitants). The share of new titles on the total number of titles issued annually has traditionally been maintained at more than 80%, even 87.3% in 2008. In 2014, the year after the disturbances in the distribution sphere a disproportion (only 61.4%) is obvious. Since then, the two curves have been converging again, in the last years the ratio is $\frac{3}{4}$ (75.3 and 75.4%). This high share is indicative of the market orientation on a wide range of new products and on the fact that it is difficult to predict, which titles will prove to be attractive.

Another relevant figure is the number of copies produced annually by Slovak publishers. At the beginning of the new century, the total number of copies was in the weaker years below 12 million (2007: 11,685,797 for 7,808 titles) and in stronger years more than 13 and 14 million (2008: 14,222,185 copies for 9,171 titles), the next maximum was 2016 with 14,795,609 copies (for 10,736 titles).¹⁰ Data show that the increase in the number of titles produced annually is accompanied by a fall in the number of copies. This seems to modify the structure of total book production inward, in the face of diversity. Simply put, under normal circumstances a large number of titles are published in a low number of copies. At a time of economic uncertainty, publishers limit the number of titles to those with higher number of copies. On the contrary, the boom encourages publishers to give space to more small editions.

The proportion of translations in total production has been increased from about 1/6 to 1/3 in ten years. (Development shows Table 3). If we leave out the extremes, this share is above 20%. Translations from English are steadily dominated (every year they represent more than half of total production). This prevalence is common in a European context. International fashions ranging from the J.K. Rowling series on H. Potter through the Nordic criminal novels to the fiction and diaries of Sándor Márai are taking part on this trend. The overall focus on translations shows the participation of Slovak book culture in a globalized book market at least as far as the import vector is concerned. On the contrary, Slovak literature is virtually invisible on an international scale. One of LIC committees, SLOLIA, has a purpose to provide grants and stays in Slovakia to foreign translators and scholars with interest in Slovak literature and language. Important area of LIC activities is to organise exhibitions of Slovak books at international book fairs and to facilitate the participation of

10 Reports on the results of the state statistical survey in the area of culture and, in this context, also in the area of non-periodic publications with data on the number of titles and copies can be found on the website of the Ministry of Culture of the Slovak Republic: <http://www.culture.gov.sk/ministerstvo/statistika-kulury-1a8.html> [accessed. 2018-12-02].

Slovak publishers at these events. So far, promotion projects with an impact in Central Europe are considered to be significant achievements.

Slovak annual production statistics record all ISBN publications in one basket. In these statistics appear universities as high-powered producers of new titles. Yet, most of their production is not part of a regular distribution and retail network.¹¹ The most titles per year (more than 1,000) are produced by the Matej Hrebenda Slovak Library for the Blind in Levoča, unique nation-wide library which creates a fund for blind and partially sighted citizens in Braille and in other forms.

In terms of publishing profile, Slovak publishers are in the interval between production for comparatively large target groups and for minor circles of readers. The largest commercial Slovak publishing house is Ikar founded in 1990. By 2009, it published more than 300 titles annually, since 2010 more than 400 titles, in 2015 more than 500 and in 2016 almost 800 titles per year. Ikar's catalogue is wide, with an emphasis on reader-friendly and selling titles. Recently Ikar has bought the Slovenský spisovateľ publishing house and is also strong in other areas of the book market. The second traditional and by Slovak standards large publishing house is Slovart, which also gives opportunities to titles for smaller target groups. Others are Slovenské pedagogické nakladateľstvo – Mladé letá, Príroda, Motýľ, Remedium, Perfekt, Fortuna Libri, Fragment, Svojtka & Co. etc. The last two have Czech owners. There are more branches of foreign publishing houses, but they are not dominant. But in the future, the expansion of the major Czech publishing group Albatros Media could bring important changes.

Typical publishers of non-commercial literature – original and translated literary fiction, poetry, philosophy etc. – in Slovakia are small, often called one-man publishers. Such small poetry publishers are Modrý Peter, Drevo a srd, Ars Poetica or Skalná ruža etc. Together with several publishers of cultural associations, which were also mostly created during the 1990s, they are focusing on Slovak literary fiction, poetry, essays, etc. At the beginning of the 21st century, structure of this subsystem and the focus of its most important members have been changed. For instance Kalligram, which published more than 100 titles annually both in Slovak and Hungarian, during its best years even 130 titles, gave up publishing in Slovak in 2015. Koloman K. Bagala, publisher of original literary fiction,

11 For the issue of book publishing by universities, see the more detailed passages in ŠRANK, Jaroslav. 2015. *Aktéri a tendencie literárnej kultúry na Slovensku po roku 1989*. Bratislava: Vydavateľstvo Univerzity Komenského, pp. 74-75. Analogical Czech situation see in ŠIMEČEK, Zdeněk; TRÁVNÍČEK, Jiří. 2014. *Knihy kupovati... Dějiny knižního trhu v českých zemích*. Praha: Academia, pp. 422-423.

went bankrupt twice after the year 2000, but every time renewed his activity. Marenčin PT has rebuilt its business profile by focusing on romance, thriller or celebrity journalism to cover the losses accompanying the publishing of literary fiction or local history.¹²

The prices of books in the retail network copy the price recommended by the publisher. But the recommended price is not always listed on the book. Larger deviations from the recommended price are mainly due to online sales. The paradox is that Slovak readers prefer hardbacks, which are usually more expensive in terms of production costs. Yet, in Slovakia, these books are also sold at low prices compared to other markets. There is still a vivid experience with a rapid rise of prices in the 1990s and with a weak public interest in books, especially titles by Slovak writers. The limited purchasing power of Slovak book customers in periods of economic fluctuations is also apparent. The concern of customer loss persists even in the period when the book business has been moved from stagnation to annual growth. A small space to increase the prices has its consequences.¹³ In a small market the popular title also gives the publisher less profit than in a larger market. This also means less willingness of commercial publishers to include non-commercial literature in their catalogue as well. Publishers of titles for small number of reader feel the pressure of high unit costs on low-cost titles very strongly. They are economically almost totally dependent on public finances from subsidy programs. Their annual publishing plan derives from grant committee decisions; books for which they do not receive funds will be postponed to another year.

Table 2. Publishers in Slovakia 2002-2017

Year	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009
Number of publishers	901	973	820	944	1155	1233	1389	1236

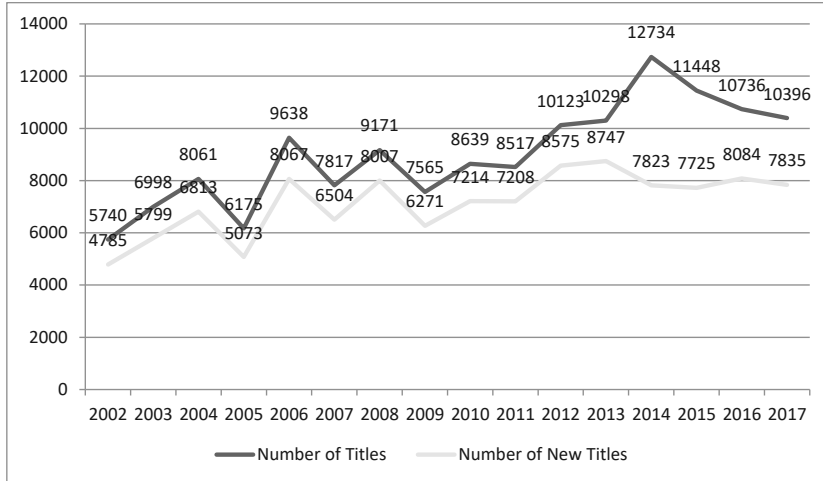
Year	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017
Number of publishers	1520	1518	1657	1494	1635	1733	1809	1673

Source: Ministry of Culture of the Slovak Republic, <http://www.culture.gov.sk/ministerstvo/statistika-kultury-1a8.html> [accessed. 2018-12-02].

12 ŠTRASSER Ján. 2017. *Osem vytrvalých. Rozhovory s knižnými vydavateľmi na Slovensku*. Bratislava: Literárne informačné centrum, pp. 132-145.

13 ŠTRASSER Ján. 2017. *Osem vytrvalých. Rozhovory s knižnými vydavateľmi na Slovensku*. Bratislava: Literárne informačné centrum, pp. 67-68.

Chart 2. Number of titles published per year and number of new titles published per year by Slovak publishers 2002-2017.



Source: Ministry of Culture of the Slovak Republic, reports on the results of the state statistical surveys in non-periodicals publications are available here: <http://www.culture.gov.sk/ministerstvo/statistika-kultura-1a8.html> [accessed. 2018-12-02].

Book market

At the beginning of the 21st century book market has been affected by a number of events, such as a multiannual increase in VAT or the adoption of the Euro. There have also been changes in the structure of distribution and retail network. In 2012-2013, two distributors, Marsab and LB Story went into liquidation as well as the large distribution company TK Belimex and the extensive TK Libri retail network linked to this distribution. The audition also threatened Panta Rhei, which is the largest book chain. At present, the book market is consolidated and is experiencing continuous growth. This follows from the reports published by the Association of Publishers and Booksellers of Slovakia (Združenie vydavateľov a kníhkupcov Slovenska, ZVKS), the main sources of data in this part of interpretation.¹⁴ The dark side of this prosperity is the secondary insolvency as the phenomenon typical for entire sector, but most affecting small publishers.¹⁵

14 Reports for 2014-2017 are available on the site <https://zvks.sk/knizny-trh/> [accessed. 2018-12-02].

15 For comparison see ŠIMEČEK, Zdeněk; TRÁVNÍČEK, Jiří. 2014. *Knihy kupovati... Dějiny knižního trhu v českých zemích*. Praha: Academia, pp. 421.

The retail sale of books in Slovakia takes place mainly in the network of specialized stores, whether it is a bookshop or online bookstore. The total annual turnover from the sale of books in Slovakia, according to qualified estimates, has risen from 100 to 110 million Euros in recent years. Traditional bookshops account for about 55% of this amount. Gradually, the share of online bookstores is growing. Turnover with textbooks is stable. On the other hand, sales of books in supermarkets as well as door-to-door sale and other supplementary methods are falling (Chart 3).

There are three major book chains in the retail store. Panta Rhei is the largest of them. Through a joint owner, the J & T financial group, it is linked to the Ikar publishing house and its own distribution company, which is dominating the book distribution sector. The Panta Rhei network, which has 49 facilities in 22 Slovak cities, takes about half of the total turnover of all bookshops.¹⁶ As an alternative to the three major book chains can be regarded Artforum, the chain consist from 7 bookshops that focus on titles for intellectual customers. Together with other (around 150) independent sellers, their share from the total turnover is around 30-25%.¹⁷ Estimates indicate that there are currently around 230 bookshops in Slovakia with a wide assortment,¹⁸ and a total of 350 sale places.¹⁹ In terms of online sales, there is a number of active companies, but Martinus.sk clearly dominates the market. In 2018, this position was further highlighted when the company took over the second strongest brand, the Gorila.sk. Martinus.sk is one of the ten largest online sellers in the country. With nine large-scale stores, it is also the second strongest chain of bookshops after Panta Rhei.

Other phenomena are also involved in the overall structure of the Slovak book market. The import character of the local market is not expressed only by proportion of translations. Sale of foreign books in the original language in the Slovak retail network is also relevant. It concerns especially the Czech titles both original and translations from other languages. For example, there is Albatros Media Slovakia and its Distri.sk distribution active in Slovakia; Albatros Media is the largest Czech publisher. Other Czech publishers are distributed by Kosmas. At the beginning of the 21st century, Czech books accounted for 20-25% of total sales in the Slovak book market, but estimates of booksellers are about the gradual decline

16 *Správa o knižnom trhu 2017*. Bratislava: Združenie vydavateľov a kníhkupcov Slovenska, https://zvks.sk/wp-content/uploads/2018/11/Knizny-trh_2017.pdf [accessed. 2018-12-02].

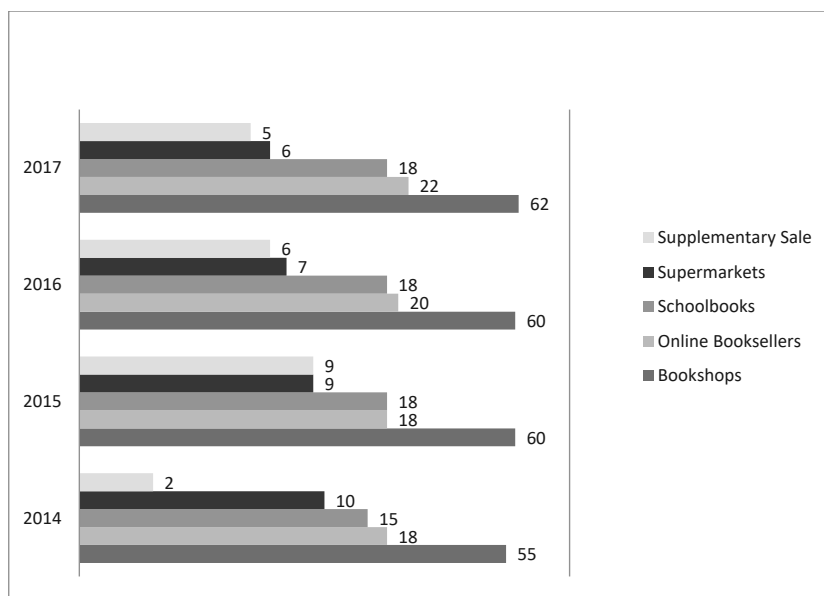
17 *Správa o slovenskom knižnom trhu 2016*. Bratislava: Združenie vydavateľov a kníhkupcov Slovenska, https://zvks.sk/wp-content/uploads/2018/03/Knizny-trh_2016.pdf [accessed. 2018-12-02].

18 *Správa o slovenskom knižnom trhu 2015*. Bratislava: Združenie vydavateľov a kníhkupcov Slovenska, https://zvks.sk/wp-content/uploads/2018/03/Knizny-trh_2015.pdf [accessed. 2018-12-02].

19 *Koncepcia podpory pôvodnej literatúry*. 2013. Bratislava: Ministerstvo kultúry Slovenskej republiky, p. 13.

of this figure. It is caused by the new flexible policy of Slovak publishers when acquiring foreign licenses, e. g. for mainstream and genre fiction.²⁰ But in some disciplines, the share of Czech translations is high and their coverage by Slovak translations is weaker and less systematic. For example, number of Slovak translations of foreign literary criticism has long been on a minimum level and without a systematic concept.

Chart 3. Share of retail channels in total turnover (in millions of Euros) 2014-2017.



Source: Association of Publishers and Booksellers of Slovakia. An optimistic estimate is used. Book Market Reports for 2014-2017 are available on the site <https://zvks.sk/knizny-trh/> [accessed. 2018-12-02].

Reading

Compared to Slovak reading surveys prior to 1989, the current surveys focus not only on fiction but also on reading literature and periodicals as well as on the use of electronic media. Due to the strong place of TV and

20 ZÁBORSKÝ Ján; HORVÁTHOVÁ Jarmila; JESNÝ Martin. 2006. *Ani bestseller nemá vopred vyhrané*, <http://www.ectrend.sk/ekonomika/hladanie-strateného-knizného-trhu.html> [accessed. 2015-12-22]

internet culture in Slovakia, these are important frameworks. Particular attention has recently been paid to data relating to youth.

Reading data in Slovakia are also the subject of surveys carried out at European level. Stephanie Kurschus in *European Book Cultures* interprets statistics from the 2007 Special Eurobarometer 278 *European Cultural Values*. According to them there are 80% readers and 43% avid readers in Slovakia.²¹ This means the 8th place in both categories among 28 countries, with a European average of 71% for readers and 37% for avid readers. However, the criteria for this survey have been set very low. It considers everyone who reads at least one book a year as a reader and more than five books as an avid reader.²²

Major Slovak surveys are based on a different definition of reader based on the reading frequency. Table 4 gives an evaluation of the answers to the general question: How often do you read books? according to the one-time NOC survey of 2004, along with the results of the ongoing LIC and NOC survey of 2008. Regarding fiction, the results of the joint LIC and NOC survey are available (Table 5 and Table 6). Specialists conclude that the number of those for whom fiction is a daily need is decreasing.²³ It is particularly striking that a small group of daily fiction readers among young respondents has fallen to zero. At the same time, number of occasional or sporadic readers is expanding. Adverse, in some ways, are the results of continuous comparison of the number of daily readers and non-readers between women and men (Table 7). But due to the discontinuity in obtaining data these tendencies or their interpretations have to be taken with a grain of salt.

Findings about Slovak writers preferred by Slovak readers are also interesting. Despite the different survey methodologies and circumstances, data from the results of three surveys are available (Table 8). In the oldest one from 1970s, the classics of Slovak literature and the official writers of the previous communist regime predominate.²⁴ Apparently, it is a consequence of the current education system and the regulated culture. However, the first modern Slovak best-selling fiction author, Jozef Nižnánsky, took the first place thanks to his adventurous novels written in 1930s. As

21 KURSCHUS Stephanie. 2015. *European Book Cultures. Diversity as Challenge*. Wiesbaden: Springer VS, p. 137.

22 KURSCHUS Stephanie. 2015. *European Book Cultures. Diversity as Challenge*. Wiesbaden: Springer VS, pp. 182-185.

23 RANKOV Pavol, VALČEK Peter. 2008. *Čítanie. Výskum súčasného stavu a úrovne čítania v SR*. Bratislava: Literárne informačné centrum, <http://www.litcentrum.sk/citanie2008> [accessed. 2018-12-26].

24 LESŇÁK Rudolf. 1991. *Horizonty čitateľskej kultúry*. Bratislava: Slovenský spisovateľ, pp. 164-166.

the standard of Slovak literature for the masses he is present also in the results of current survey. Yet, in the first place, current popular writers are gradually getting in: H. Zelinová, P. Nagyová-Džerengová, and especially T. Keleová-Vasilková. Considering the top twenty the share of current best-selling authors is nearly one third. It is an expression of the response of the Slovak mainstream and genre writers among the readers. Slovak publishers have begun to publish low- and mid-brow fiction written by Slovak writers in the early part of the century; so far the offer of popular fiction consisted almost exclusively of translations. Among the top five there is only one classic, Martin Kukučín, followed by Nižnánsky, other classic writers have fallen to lower positions in the ranking. Overall, the composition of the writers, which emerged from the answers of contemporary readers, is more differentiated than in older survey.

Table 4. Frequency of reading books.

How often do you read books?	2004	2008
every or almost every day	11,8%	9,5%
several times a week	13,2%	14,1%
once a week	8,5%	9,6%
less than once a week	7,5%	10,2%
once a month	8,7%	11,4%
less than once a month	27,1%	27,3%
never or almost never	19,5%	14,8%

Source: RANKOV Pavol, VALČEK Peter. 2008. *Čítanie. Výskum súčasného stavu a úrovne čítania v SR*. Bratislava: Literárne informačné centrum, <http://www.litcentrum.sk/citanie2008> [accessed. 2018-12-26].

Table 5. Frequency of reading fiction.

	2003	2004	2006	2008
every or almost every day	8,9%	7,9%	7,3%	5,5%
several times a week	10,5%	10,0%	12,8%	11,7%
once a week	7,7%	7,9%	9,9%	9,6%
once a month	10,5%	11,7%	12,3%	11,0%
once a three months	8,7%	8,4%	9,6%	7,2%
once a six months	9,8%	9,5%	7,8%	8,5%
once a year	9,3%	12,4%	10,4%	9,6%
never or almost never	34,6%	32,3%	29,9%	37,0%

Source: RANKOV Pavol, VALČEK Peter. 2008. *Čítanie. Výskum súčasného stavu a úrovne čítania v SR*. Bratislava: Literárneinformačné centrum, <http://www.litcentrum.sk/citanie2008> [accessed. 2018-12-26].

Table 6. Frequency of reading fiction in a group of 15-17-year-olds.

	2003	2004	2006	2008
every or almost every day	2,3%	8,0%	5,6%	0,0%
several times a week	9,1%	6,8%	11,2%	7,0%
once a week	9,1%	4,5%	12,4%	8,1%
once a month	17,0%	22,7%	21,3%	16,3%
once a three months	14,8%	10,2%	13,5%	12,8%
once a six months	6,8%	14,8%	10,1%	14,0%
once a year	12,5%	14,8%	7,9%	9,3%
never or almost never	28,4%	18,2%	18,0%	32,6%

Source: RANKOV Pavol, VALČEK Peter. 2008. *Čítanie. Výskum súčasného stavu a úrovne čítania v SR*. Bratislava: Literárne informačné centrum, <http://www.litcentrum.sk/citanie2008> [accessed. 2018-12-26].

Table 7. Everyday readers versus non-readers of fiction by sex in percentage terms.

	2003		2004	
	Readers	Non-readers	Readers	Non-readers
Women	12,5	21,9	12,1	19,7
Men	5,1	48,3	3,3	45,7

	2006		2008	
	Readers	Non-readers	Readers	Non-readers
Women	11,4	16,8	11,4	16,8
Men	2,7	44,2	2,7	44,2

Source: RANKOV Pavol, VALČEK Peter. 2008. *Čítanie. Výskum súčasného stavu a úrovne čítania v SR*. Bratislava: Literárne informačné centrum, <http://www.litcentrum.sk/citanie2008> [accessed. 2018-12-26].

Table 8. Slovak writers preferred by Slovak readers according to reading surveys. Percentage is shown where available.

	1972-1973	2002	2008
1.	Jozef Nižnánsky	Hana Zelinová 15,2%	Táňa Keleová-Vasilková 23,3%
2.	Martin Kukučín	Jozef Nižnánsky 11,0%	Petra Nagyová-Džerengová 4,8%
3.	Margita Figuli	Táňa Keleová-Vasilková 6,9%	Jozef Nižnánsky 4,8%
4.	Pavol Országh Hviezdoslav	Margita Figuli 6,1%	Maxim M. Matkin 4,6%
5.	Andrej Sládkovič	František Hečko 6,1%	Martin Kukučín 3,8%
6.	Vladimír Mináč	Martin Kukučín 5,0%	Pavol Országh Hviezdoslav 2,9%
7.	František Hečko	Vincent Šikula 4,7%	Hana Zelinová 2,7%
8.	Jozef Gregor Tajovský	Milan Rúfus 4,4%	Boris Filan 2,7%
9.	Peter Jilemnický	Ladislav Mňačko 3,9%	Vincent Šikula 2,1%
10.	Janko Jesenský	Pavol Dobšinský 3,8%	Margita Figuli 1,9%

Sources: First column: LESŇÁK Rudolf. 1991. *Horizonty čitateľskej kultúry*. Bratislava: Slovenský spisovateľ, pp. 164-166. Second column: SOPÓCI Ján; HALLON

Lubor. 2004. Vzťah obyvateľov SR k literatúre, In *Recepcia umenia na Slovensku po roku 2000*, L. Šrámek (ed.). 69-72. Bratislava: Národné osvetové centrum. Bratislava: Literárne informačné centrum. Third column: RANKOV Pavol, VALČEK Peter. 2008. *Čítanie. Výskum súčasného stavu a úrovne čítania v SR*. Bratislava: Literárne informačné centrum, <http://www.litcentrum.sk/citanie2008> [accessed. 2018-12-26].

Libraries

The library system in Slovakia currently consists of the Slovak National Library in Martin, which is a top librarian institution, a documentation centre, a bibliographic agency and a preservation and digitalization workplace, furthermore there are 8 scientific and 59 academic libraries, more than 300 special libraries, more than 1,500 public and around 1,500 school libraries.

The next description will be restricted to the area of public libraries only. (The selected data includes Table 9.) In the new millennium, the decline in the total number of public libraries, which was established in the 1990s (and historically even earlier), continues. The main reason for this trend is lack of finances by their founders (municipal administration: counties, towns, villages). A high number of stagnating libraries is alarming too.²⁵ The number of active library users and the total number of library visitors are also decreasing. With the loss of users, the amount of loans is also decreasing.

The descending curve of public libraries covers not only the public demand for library and information services. Adverse evolution of the quality of library collections is also apparent. Active fund renewal by purchase is at a very low level, and libraries are largely dependent on donations. Because of the low level of overall acquisitions, library funds have become obsolete and their attractiveness for readers, educational value and documentary value is falling. Overall, the state of library funds can be considered to be critical.²⁶ Partial assistance for libraries is the grant program Acquisition of Libraries of the Ministry of Culture of the Slovak Republic. It also includes a criterion for libraries to use a percentage of the subsidy to purchase more valuable literature (usually titles promoted by public funds).

25 KILÁROVÁ Iveta. 2017. „Analýza vývoja knižničného systému Slovenskej republiky v rokoch 2007-2016“. Knižnica 3, p. 14.

26 KILÁROVÁ Iveta. 2017. „Analýza vývoja knižničného systému Slovenskej republiky v rokoch 2007-2016“. Knižnica 3, p. 23.

As far as the library equipment is concerned, the entire system cannot keep up with the digitalization of services and funds. A visible exception is the project for digitalization of the national cultural heritage in the Slovak National Library. Internet access in public libraries has improved (to 43.8% in 2016), but in recent years the number of users has dropped due to a high internet accessibility in country.²⁷ The number of public libraries with their own website for the entire period did not exceed 11%. Space facilities of many libraries are in alarming situation, many buildings are no longer fit for library purposes.²⁸ Number and salary evaluation of library staff is also inadequate.²⁹

In these complex conditions, libraries are trying to act as cultural centres and attract the public through numerous educational events, particularly focusing on promoting reading among children and youth. Since 2002, Slovak libraries have been involved in *Noc s Andersenom* project.³⁰ The first Slovak national event took place in 2006 and the number of participants in the international comparison is continuously second highest after the Czech Republic, where the event originated.

In 2011 there was one library per 2,818 inhabitants and in 2017 the number has risen to 3,570 inhabitants. Slovakia is still among the European countries with the most extensive network of public libraries.³¹ However, the data on their functioning shows that the system is falling both financially and materially. The hope for now lies in the flexibility and persistence of the library staff.

Table 9. Selected parameters of public libraries in Slovakia 2006-2017.

Year	Functioning libraries	Libraries with own website	Number of active users	Number of visitors	Number of library units	Number of loans
2006	2231	76	563 341	5 651 404	17 597 761	20 819 305
2007	2153	68	546 778	5 580 781	17 406 761	20 102 704
2008	2116	79	523 639	6 206 096	17 262 649	19 098 030
2009	2061	62	512 958	6 215 674	17 044 947	18 519 384

27 KILÁROVÁ Iveta. 2017. „Analýza vývoja knižničného systému Slovenskej republiky v rokoch 2007-2016“. Knižnica 3, p. 18.

28 STASSELOVÁ Silvia. 2012. „V akých budovách a priestoroch sídlia slovenské knižnice v 21. storočí?“. Knižnica 11-12, pp. 23-31.

29 KILÁROVÁ Iveta. 2015. „Analýza vekovej, kvalifikačnej a mzdovej štruktúry odborných pracovníkov knižníc SR. Výsledky prieskumu“. Knižnica 4, pp. 35-44.

30 STASSELOVÁ Silvia. 2010. „Päť ročníkov mediálne najúspešnejšieho podujatia na podporu čítania detí na Slovensku. Noc s Andersenom na Slovensku v rokoch 2006-2010“. Knižnica 9: 24-40.

31 KURSCHUS Stephanie. 2015. *European Book Cultures. Diversity as Challenge*. Wiesbaden: Springer VS, p. 192.

2010	1990	117	506 248	6 012 431	16 854 591	18 127 505
2011	1916	188	485 822	5 945 505	16 534 607	17 475 143
2012	1891	105	470 321	5 649 499	16 388 061	16 899 062
2013	1789	93	445 061	5 417 402	16 030 662	16 112 766
2014	1726	105	431 401	5 231 977	15 788 931	15 256 208
2015	1625	174	423 418	4 923 431	15 450 403	14 837 323
2016	1581	166	404 816	4 871 145	15 374 349	14 680 255
2017	1252	134	399 138	4 910 919	15 128 511	14 270 816

Source: Ministry of Culture of the Slovak Republic, reports on the results of the state statistical surveys in libraries are available on the site <http://www.culture.gov.sk/ministerstvo/statistika-kultery-1a8.html> [accessed. 2018-12-02].

Book awards and events

The system of awards can be seen as a bipolar one. Book awards represent one pole. They express the understanding of the book as one of consumer goods and are aimed at the majority audience. Their organizers and laureates come from commercially oriented side of book culture. On the second pole there are literary awards that emphasize the artistic dimension of writing. They are sheltered by professional organizations, universities or academics and are reaching out to a specialized minority audience.

Regarding the state's direct initiative for valuation, writers are among the laureates of honours awarded annually by the President of the Republic or the Award of Minister of Culture of Slovak Republic. However, these are not specialized book and literature promotion instruments such as the State Award for Literature in Czech Republic. The reason for this may be the experience with the negative implications of the state valuation of literature before 1989, but also in the 1990s. But the vacuum also represents the low current interest of the state in granting recognition to the book culture.

The bookshop chains, commercial publishers, and mainstream media are particularly focused on charts and polls based on the sale numbers or vote of readers. The poll with the longest tradition is the Book of the Year established in 1991 by the *Knižná revue* magazine. The largest are the Panta Rhei Awards established in 2009. In six categories readers vote and the best-selling book is announced on the basis of sales in the Panta Rhei network.

Awards for high-brow literature are decided by expert juries. Fragmentation is typical for this area, in accordance with variety of cultural institutions, writer associations, publishing houses and magazines. The most respected are the prizes established by the Literary Fund, which cover a wide

range of categories. Among the contests, the competition *Poviedka*, which has been organized by the LCA publisher (K.K. Bagala) since 1996, has an exceptional status. This event, rigorously based on the anonymity of participating stories, has become synonymous with literary competition in Slovakia. Winners receive not only the financial prize, the organizer also promises to publish their books. The Most Beautiful Books of Slovakia competition, founded in 1965, since 1993 organized by Bibiana, an international art house for children, has an aim to support the artistic qualities and printing standard of books. The most prestigious is the Anasoft litera prize for the best work of fiction. Since 2005, the award has been housed by a neutral non-governmental organization, a constant general partner and sponsor, and a different expert jury each year. The winner receives the sum of 10,000 Euros, which is the highest financial award in Slovakia for writers.

Complementary elements are incorporated into both categories of awards. Anasoft litera as the most significant literary award also includes a poll for readers and a poll for high school students. In last years some popular writers have also appeared among the Anasoft litera finalists. For the *Panta Rhei Awards*, there have been added two categories, in which winners are recognized by jury.

A number of events have become an important element of book culture in recent years. Book business organizes one part of them. The largest presentation and commercial event is the *Bibliotéka*, a fair in Bratislava which has been established in 1992. Its alternative is the Bratislava Book Festival (*Bratislavský knižný festival, BRaK*), which is focused on small non-commercially oriented book creators, e. g. writers, publishers, designers. Non-commercial publishers and magazines are agile in organizing literary festivals that often have a multi-genre character. They are financially supported mainly by public funds. Several events have evolved from the background of international cultural programs. In 2013 the second largest Slovak city Košice became site of the project *European Capital of Culture*. Many local cultural initiatives, including book and literature activities, which have originated by this occasion, are still running.

Conclusions

The Slovak book culture is proportionally small, but comparatively – considering the number of inhabitants – dense and apparently diverse with a number of partial book cultures. It represents an open system in which conditions are created to ensure that some of its subsystems are managed

not only from an economic point of view but following also importance of cultural values. There are two opposing tendencies existing at the same time: a tendency towards homogeneity and the other towards diversification. As a whole, the system does not show signs of ideological intervention. Despite improvements, financial resources are a permanent issue for Slovak book culture.

Stabilization of book market takes place in particular as consolidation of the business by the strongest companies in the given sector, motivated by an effort to maximize economic profit. On the other side there are small non-commercial publishers who have become accustomed to the fact that their financial resources mainly come from public funding schemes. Although the results of reading surveys are not the most desirable, it is indisputable that reading – or, at least, book shopping – has become a fairly popular version of consumer lifestyle in recent years. It is questionable how the Slovak library system will be able to promote and cultivate reading, unless its economic situation changes. The area of book awards – as possible landmarks – is atomized. The high number of awards dilutes the prestige of being a prize-winning book. In coexistence with other media, the book calls for public attention as a component of numerous events. Apparently, this also demonstrates the adaptability of the book culture. Books are still open.

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