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A world tour of the international book market

Although measuring the international book markets in 2019 has not yet been fully completed, the figures available for the past year present a thoroughly positive picture. The global spread of the corona crisis is disrupting all forecasts for 2020. But when, if not now, is a good time to reach for a book?

In Europe, revenue growth in 2019 came in between 1 and 2.4 percent. In the UK, in particular, sales of printed books increased by 3 percent last year (191.6 million books/GBP 1.66 billion). The big winners in the UK were non-fiction books, including self-help books, posting a plus of 6 percent, with the food and drink division having a record year. The „Pinch of Nom“ diet cookbook became an absolutely stellar seller, with more than 1 million copies sold. For the UK, 2019 was the fifth consecutive year of value appreciation and the second consecutive year of higher sales.

The Spanish market once again recorded sales growth of 2 percent in 2019 and saw the sixth consecutive year of growth in the print sector. Nevertheless, it has not (yet) been possible to make up for the drop resulting from the financial crisis, which hit Spain particularly hard.

The German market was in the European midfield and recorded an increase of 1.4 percent. Thanks to the positive Christmas business, France is also turning its sales figures into growth territory at 1.3 percent. The increase in sales in Europe is largely due to higher prices and only to a lesser extent to an actual increase in sales volumes.

The USA lacked a bestseller

In the US, [NPD BookScan](#) determined a drop in sales of 1.3 percent for printed books. However, it must be emphasized at this point that the market has been growing steadily over the past five years. The figures from the US, however, also show how difficult it is to distinguish market trends from special economic cycles. Bestsellers such as Michelle Obama's biography don't fall from the sky every year. In 2019, the US book market clearly lacked such a bestseller. The positive trends in adult literature include graphic novels, which posted growth of 16 percent. The consolidated industry turnover leveled off at USD 13.5 billion.

In Brazil, book sales slumped by over 6 percent due to the bankruptcy of the Saraiva and Livraria Cultura bookstore chains. It is pleasing to note that sales of printed books in January 2020 were 8 percent up on January 2019, which means some catching up has been achieved. In China, 70 percent of the total trade volume already goes through the virtual shop counter. Although the number of new publications fell by 7 percent according to [OpenBook 2019](#), total sales rose by 14 percent to almost USD 15 billion compared to 2018.

An outlook in turbulent times

The global spread of the corona crisis is disrupting all forecasts for 2020 – and the book market is no exception. Cultural and public life has almost come to a standstill and has been confined to one's own four walls. This is actually a perfect time to pick up a book to escape the constant stream of news and dispel any upcoming boredom.

But things are not quite that simple. Publishers have lost high-street book sales. However, the German book trade, for example, experienced panic purchases even before corona measures were passed because people wanted to stock up on reading material.

Since shops are closed in many countries, the high-street book trade is trying to score points with new forms of distribution – and, for example, further expand its already partial online trade. In some cases, shipping costs are covered in full, while some booksellers have even set up their own delivery service. Classic novels like «The Pest» from Albert Camus are cresting the bestseller lists. First in France and Italy, but meanwhile also in Germany, this book isn't deliverable any more anymore, according to an article of the German magazine «Der Spiegel». That's why Rowohlt is just publishing the 90th edition of the famous book.

Reading books – an inspiring pastime

In March and April, many publishers launched/will launch their new publications, which is not easy in the current environment. Some publishers have postponed publication dates, and the thematic planning of programs also needs to be adjusted. Publishers are largely holding back on new publications, but demand for books is certainly there. Some dedicated book manufacturers, for example, are reporting good capacity utilization – which is partly due to production relocations.

Reading a book is a pleasant and hopefully inspiring pastime in times like these, but it is also an important step toward preserving the book – and the printed one at that – as a cultural asset.

Your

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