

The Book Sector in 2000 in Eastern Europe and Central Asia

The surveys, conducted by the Open Society Institute with regard to the calendar years 1995, 1996, 1998, 1999 & 2000, are a unique source of information on the book sector in the countries of east central Europe and Central Asia. The information was collected with an active cooperation of Soros Foundations in these countries. The methodology is as simple as possible, in order that it could cover such a huge geographical and contents area and be repeated year after year: one questionnaire per country is responded, with the involvement of experts and practitioners of the respective fields. (See list of respondents.)

The fifth survey covered the state of the book sector in the year of 2000.

The preparation and administration of the surveys has taken considerable efforts on behalf of the OSI Center for Publishing Development since 1995. Initially, little energy was left for the analysis of the data. This fifth round has been given the greatest amount of follow-up, which also highlighted certain difficulties and shortcomings of the surveys.

All through the survey two conditions were repeated again and again, both by those, who asked, and those, who responded. One thing is the often total absence of reliable statistics, the other is the difficulty of defining the indeed non-existent "average", the typical. However, it is exactly these circumstances, which make the estimations valuable - especially if they are authentic, coming from professional sources. Some of the respondents have gone through a special kind of "in-service training" by having participated in the survey for a number of occasions.

A special difficulty was created by the very large scope of the survey. Few experts could cover all areas, even by reaching out for additional sources.

Considering all circumstances, it is still astonishing that information is so difficult to gather in most of the countries. Also, that in spite of the experience accumulated during the long years since the first OSI book sector survey was launched, often basic categories are extremely difficult to use. Since this survey does not cover western countries, where the book sector has always been an integral part of market economy, we can only guess that in those places the questions relating to cost analysis or sales figures would create less confusion than what we experienced with our questionnaire. The mission, therefore, of the survey is not only in communicating the *answers* (the collected data), but also in bringing home the relevance of the *questions*. Without clear notions of the economic and financial characteristics and dimensions of the book sector, its social and cultural impact is less likely to keep momentum.

The processing of the data needed a lot of guesswork, in quite many cases interpretative autonomous decisions, since chances for feedback were rather limited. Of course the original responses are carefully kept and open for consultation. The greatest absurdities were weeded out. However, quite a few unrealistic estimates have been left in the tables, when they nevertheless convincingly express tendencies.

In spite of all these difficulties and doubts, we are convinced about the necessity to go along and continue this iterative process, which – we very much believe – besides the provision of information, is an important learning process as well for the sectors in these countries. Especially if the comparative data are studied, discussed and contested by many sides, within and outside of the countries concerned.

The findings are presented in the next nine chapters.