

PUBLISHING AND BOOKSELLING IN ARMENIA: AN OVERVIEW

**A summary of a survey
carried out in 2012-2013**

**Book sector survey methodology,
data collection and report**
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Summary of the book sector survey
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The information presented in this brochure is a summary of a survey on the book sector of Armenia conducted in December 2012. The survey was commissioned and monitored by the National Publishers Association of Armenia as part of the Book Platform project. Being the first ever attempt to collect, systematize and analyze primary and secondary data on publishing and bookselling in the country, the survey faced significant challenges. Much of the basic information collected is inherently fragmented and only partly consistent, and thus the survey results rather raise questions than provide answers. Drawing a reliable and a consistent picture of the Armenian book sector remains a task for the future.

Here we offer an overview prepared by Rüdiger Wischenbart on the basic parameters of the Armenian “book ecosystem”. The complete survey report as well as additional comments and clarifications are available electronically at www.bookplatform.org

PUBLISHING AND BOOKSELLING IN ARMENIA: AN OVERVIEW

by Rüdiger Wischenbart¹

1. OVERVIEW

Armenia, with a population of 3.3 million (of which 98 % are ethnically Armenians, and with an Armenian diaspora clearly exceeding the domestic population, by all accounts), is a country in the South Caucasus, bordering Turkey, Georgia Azerbaijan and Iran. A former republic of the Soviet Union, Armenia declared independence in 1990, yet was involved in harsh political and armed conflicts with neighboring Azerbaijan, which severely crippled its economic development. Armenia currently has a nominal GDP per capita of \$ 3,032 (or \$ 5,384 at PPP).

1.1. Key parameters

Deeply hit by the country's recent challenging development, from declaring independence in 1990, to years of armed conflict, to rebuilding its economy, and most recently confronting the fall out of the international (and domestic) economic crisis of 2008, the book sector of the Republic of Armenia shows a staggering up and down movement.

In 1990, at the closing of the Soviet era, more than 10 million copies of books have been distributed, dropping to

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less than half a million in 1995. The number of new title releases - with 831 publications in 1989, and 312 in 1992 - seemed to have largely recovered by the early 2000s, climbing to a remarkable 2064 new titles in 2009, yet falling sharply the year after, to 1770 in 2010. The development of the overall print run had risen to 2.1 million copies by 2007, dwindling to only 1.2 million by 2010, when the crisis had fully affected the book sector. This trend of print runs dropping down severely continues since then, with only 0.9 million copies published in 2012.

While the overall trend of raising number of titles and decreasing print runs is well reflected in these numbers, it must be added that only an estimated half of the production results from commercial publishing, while the other half is commissioned and/or released directly by various government organizations.

The strong direct role of the government is further highlighted by the fact that 80% of the market is in fact textbooks.

The strong involvement of government in the book sector shows certain continuity from Soviet times, insofar the so called system of “state orders” in which the whole print run remains for distribution by the Ministry of Culture still occupies a large percentage of the ministerial funding for the book sector.

1.2. Copyright and legal framework

No legal limitations are in place to set up a publishing company.

Since 1998, Armenia has adopted the ISBN, with numbers provided by the National Book Chamber (www.book-chamber.am), and in 2007, the ISBN-13 has been implemented as a standard.

A Law of the Republic of Armenia on “Copyright and Related Rights” was adopted in 1996. Armenia became a full member of the Berne Convention on the Protection of Literary and Artistic Works on 19 October 2000.

In the last decade, the Republic of Armenia joined all the International Conventions and Directives of the European Union on Copyright and Related Rights.

Currently, the new draft law on Copyright and Related Rights is being prepared, with new specifications notably with exemptions for libraries, educational and cultural institutions.

Armenia is a WIPO member since 1993.

No precise data is available with regard to piracy, but estimates see a significant presence of and impact from illegally disseminated books.

1.3. Professional organizations

The National Association of Publishers (www.bookpublishers.am), founded in 1998 as a non-governmental organization, has 40 members, which together represent 80 % of the country’s book production. In fall of 2011, the organization has been given membership in the International Publishers Association, IPA.

2. THE ARMENIAN BOOK MARKET

2.1. Trade publishing

Currently, around 300 publishers are listed for Armenia, of which around 140 are seen as “professional” commercial entities. Their combined production amounts to around 1500 new titles per year (yet only around 70 to 80 re-editions annually), with a total print run that had peaked in 2007 at slightly over 2 million copies, dropping continually since then, to only 888,000 in 2011.

**NUMBER AND PRINT RUN OF TITLES
RELEASED IN ARMENIA IN 2000-2012²**

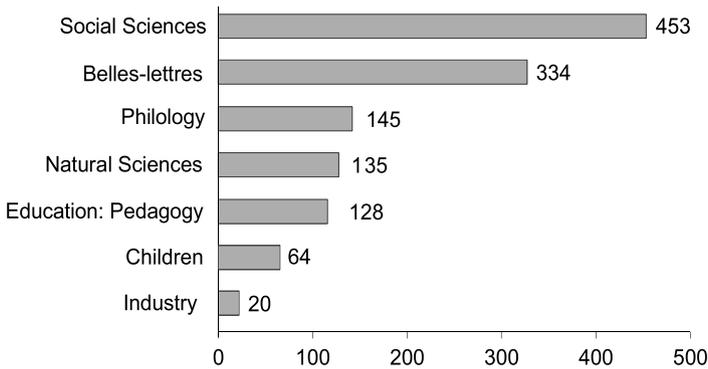
Years	Number of titles	Print run (1000)
2000	676	464
2001	922	970
2002	1017	392
2003	1581	928
2004	1595	699
2005	1349	945
2006	1334	823
2007	1804	2165
2008	1848	2324
2009	2064	2392
2010	1770	1207
2011	1765	888
2012	1549	993

As title production decreased relatively less than the total of distributed, the average print run fell sharply from 1242 in 2008 to a mere 641 copies in 2012.

² The table data has been provided by the National Book Chamber of Armenia. According to the researchers, this data covers app. 70-80 % of the whole production.

This widening gap between new releases and the average print run of a title can be observed across most categories. In fiction, for instance, an annual output of 125 new titles has resulted in 50,300 distributed copies in 2008, against 168 new titles in a print run of only 45,500 by 2012. Similarly, of around 470 new titles in Social Sciences, the total print run nose-dived from 362,500 in 2007 to 138,500 in 2012. Only publications in Natural Sciences remained largely stable, as are nonfiction titles according to another set of available data.

The annual output by category - as listed by the Book Chamber of Armenia, for the most recent year of 2012 shows a strong dominance of titles in Social Sciences vis-à-vis all other categories, including literature.



Most of the books are published in Armenian language, with Russian editions however accounting in 2012 for around another 10 % and English editions for about 3%.

The number of books translated into Armenian is remarkably limited, with only 89 titles translated in 2012 (or 6% of the total book production). Of these, translations from English lead (32 titles in 2012), followed by Russian (17 titles in 2012). However, the country translates also into English (22 titles for 2012), into Russian (28 titles) and into a number of other languages. This way, the overall

percentage of translations published in Armenia for 2012 raises to 12 % of the overall book production.

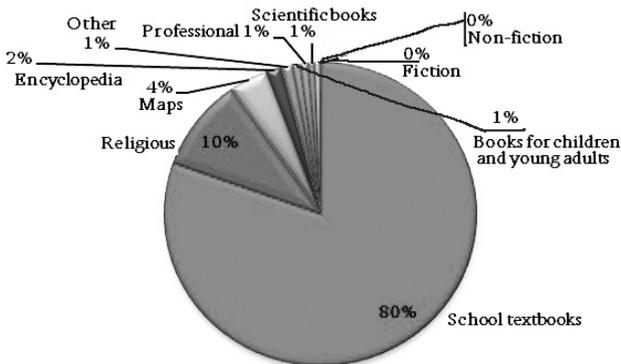
The Armenian publishing sector is characterized by a significant degree of consolidation; with the top 2 publishing houses, which are both privately owned, also have a strong share in retail and distribution - accounting for around half of the market. While both market leaders show a decline in the total numbers of copies of books which they brought to the market, mirroring the shrinking of that market, “Science”, the state owned publishing arm of the National Academy of Sciences, could remarkably record significant as well as steady growth over the past five years.

With regard to sales channels, roughly one third of books are distributed by publishers directly to retailers, plus another third through wholesalers, while direct sales from publishers account for ca. 21 % of revenues.

2.2. Educational publishing

Overall, textbooks are estimated to account for 80 % of the Armenian publishing market, as shown in the chart:

Copies of the titles published and sold by publishing organizations in 2012



Textbooks are acquired by the Ministry of Education from publishers, following on a public tender, with a “Disciplinary Commission for Book Evaluation” assessing the submissions, and a subsequent approval by the “General Commission of Evaluation”.

As for university (higher education) textbooks, no new titles have been released by the government in the recent period of 2007 to 2012, but such educational materials can also be released by a publisher at its own initiative and risk, hence without interference or support from the government.

2.3. Digital publishing and distribution

6 of a total of 24 surveyed publishing houses reported to have already released digital editions of their titles, mostly in PDF and ePub formats, with a total of 424 titles in Armenian, 9 in Russian and 11 in English being released in 2012 (against 33 in Armenian and 2 in English the previous year).

“Edit Print”, the fourth largest publishing house, is seen as the by far leading house for ebooks at this point.

As of February 2012, 72 % of the population in Armenia’s capital Yerevan have had access to the Internet.

According to a survey conducted in November 2012, the penetration of smartphones or tablet computers is very low (ca. 9 % for smart phones).

2.4. Libraries

Armenia currently entertains 1500 public libraries (against ca. 3000 in the Soviet era).

The National Library of Armenia (NLA), the National Children's Library as well as the Music Library operate under the supervision of the Ministry of Culture of the Republic of Armenia. The NLA has a collection of 6.8 million units, which includes the largest Armenian book collection worldwide. NLA is a member of IFLA.

2.5. Book selling: Distribution and retail

The capital of Yerevan is home to only about 20 bookshops, the majority of which offer also stationary and a limited number of books. Only three or four outlets are exclusively dedicated to books but they charge a higher discount of up to 60%. Bookselling business consists mainly of small-sized companies, with over 80% of it being divided between companies with a combined annual turnover of under 90 000 euro.

The five largest booksellers are “Antares”, “Zangak-97”, “Edit Print”, “Manmar” and “Printinfo”, controlling collectively revenues of AMD 250 million (or app. 456 000 euro).

2.6. Imports and exports

An assessment of imports and exports of books is limited by the fact that these are measured in weight (kg), not in item, as it was the norm in the Soviet era.

The United Kingdom is the largest original market for book imports, followed by the Russian Federation and Germany, the imports from Russia showing a continuous decline over the past 5 years, and imports being halved.

3. Outlook: Opportunities and challenges

Armenia is home of a strong and long literary tradition, yet the modern book market is characterized by fragmentation between groups of small stakeholders on the one hand, and a few larger publishers and retailers who largely dominate this small market. Also imports notably from Russia form a significant competition to local actors. In addition, the recent turbulent political history of the country has led to deep economical shakeups, discouraging a transition to modern standards in organizing these businesses.

Much of the basic information collected is inherently fragmented and only partly consistent, so that putting it into context for this study is a significant challenge.

In this perspective, professional training is certainly of the highest priority for its future development, and so in several regards.

First of all, it will be advisable to provide a sponsorship for young booksellers and publishers for professional training courses abroad, and at the same time, to hold seminars on best practices in the context of major annual gatherings of the industry in the country.

To improve the understanding of market research and developing statistics in accordance with international standards, cooperation with departments of economy and/or social sciences at the University of Yerevan can help to improve the mapping of a truly complex domestic book market.

Last but not least, it seems advisable to include imports, notably from Russia, into the topics to be analyzed and better understood in the Armenian publishing community, so that a complete representation can evolve over time.