

INTRODUCTION

Maite Comalat
comalat@ub.edu
Universitat de Barcelona

Lluís Agustí
agusti@ub.edu
Universitat de Barcelona

This is the second edition of the *Yearbook of the Observatory on Libraries, Books and Reading*. As proposed when the first edition was released a couple of years ago now, the aim of the *Yearbook* is to periodically record the state of the question and the results of actions carried out in the various areas of the Observatory, which was officially founded on 14 July 2008 and is part of the University of Barcelona's Faculty of Library and Information Science.

The *Yearbook* gives a general impression of actions related to reading and publishing in the libraries, schools and bookshops of Catalonia during 2010 and 2011. In addition, it summarizes the studies and research published in this period. The articles have been written by professionals and researchers whose work is related to these topics, to ensure the quality and consistency of data. The first section contains articles that examine publishing during the period, with a particular focus on books for children and young adults. Articles in the second section describe the actions and activities carried out in libraries and in relation to reading promotion. Finally, articles in the third section analyse studies and research on publishing, reading, and children's and young adult books. This edition of the *Yearbook* concludes with a bibliography of documents collected by the library of

the Faculty of Library and Information Science.

The *Yearbook* is therefore comprised of various articles that have been written individually. As a result, and due to the fact that a few of the topics are very similar, there may be some repetition. For example, some of the exhibitions organized by public libraries are activities that have been carried out, but are also the results of research. We consider that this repetition is inevitable and reflects the aim of an in-depth analysis of the agents involved in the reading process, including publishers, intermediaries such as libraries, schools and bookshops, and the results published by researchers.

Unfortunately, in this edition we could not include an article on the use, production and distribution of electronic books in Catalonia. We will work to ensure that this topic is addressed in the next edition, as it forms an essential part of an overview of the reading and publishing world.

The *Yearbook* begins with a study of the most notable contributions on the history of the manuscript, the printed book, typography and the graphic arts, engraving, illustration and book binding, circulation of works and reading, libraries, archives and documentary heritage. Publications in monographs, scientific studies,

conferences, workshops and exhibitions are described for each of these subjects.

In general, we can state that the quantity and quality of studies on historical subjects in these two years are similar to those described in the preceding period, as a small number of authors continue to have a high output. However, their contributions are analysed and evaluated in depth in this edition of the *Yearbook*, in contrast to the previous edition in which they were only listed.

The next contribution presents the forms of collaboration between publishing companies and libraries that have begun in this period. The article, which focuses only on printed publishing in Catalan, highlights some of the main trends in this area. For example, statistical data show that there has been a gradual increase in the number of titles published, at the same time as a considerable decrease in the number of copies. This imbalance is notable in fiction and non-fiction and in the very low number of copies of science and technology books, which is clearly dropping.

In terms of libraries, their relationships with the publishing sector and the development of collections, the article describes changes in the investments in material made by two library services –that of the Regional Government of Catalonia and that of Barcelona District Council– between 2008 and 2011. This period is longer than the two years addressed in the *Yearbook*. However, the data were not included in the previous edition and give a clearer picture of the trend. In addition, the article highlights the publication of several documents on the development of collections in some town library networks. It describes the increase in work on collections through the creation of blogs and resources that increase their visibility on the internet. Finally, initial areas of collaboration between libraries and publishing companies are presented.

The next three articles focus on the publication of children's and young adult books. They reveal a generally positive trend, although not excessively so, in terms of the number of books and reprints published, as well as the awards given. These activities encourage the publishing of interesting new books or the recovery of classics. There is increasing interest in picturebooks and they have a loyal following among the public. In

the genre of picturebooks, including comics and others, the number of translations published in Catalonia is higher than the number of original works in Catalan. Children's poetry in Catalan has made good progress during the two-year period, as new authors, themes and collections have emerged, and there has also been an increase in the number of titles in the original language and quality translations. The market for children's and young adult books is dynamic, as the large well-known publishers have been joined by smaller companies in this area.

The easy-to-read project deserves its own paragraph. After ten years of activity, this project has become increasingly well-established in Catalonia. The existence and rise in number of easy-to-read materials and activities throughout Catalonia during the two-year period confirms the importance of this project, which is carried out by the Easy-to-Read Association (ALF) in schools, libraries, associations, publishing companies and public institutions.

The second section is made up of articles on all of the developments in public and school libraries, which are two of the main agents in the promotion of reading. In this period, public and school libraries have taken advantage of the opportunity to continue to grow, in terms of the number of facilities and initiatives, to become one of the key elements in reading promotion.

The actions that have been carried out by public libraries are listed. The information includes: the plans for the main town libraries in Catalonia that have been reviewed and updated; the number of new facilities and existing facilities that have been improved or extended; actions promoted to encourage reading in various sectors of the population and to strengthen the educational role of the public library; the professional resources; publications and research on the subject; and the presentation of experiences at conferences, carried out by working groups formed by professionals.

The description of these diverse activities indicates that, compared to the previous two-year period, the number of available facilities has continued to rise, as have the number of renovations and extensions of existing facilities. However, all the signs show that improvements will slow down in the next few years,

as they are the last results of initiatives begun before the recession, which has halted the construction of new libraries and the extension and renovation of others. Nevertheless, the number of new users and visitors continues to increase, and their evaluations of library services get better. In fact, users' opinions of library services have improved even more than in the previous years. Finally, the desire to develop can still be observed in the constant presence of libraries in social networks and in initiatives aimed at increasing the number of online services for users.

Various developments in school libraries give a positive view of this period. These include the «Puntesdu» School Library Programme, which has facilitated the organization of workshops and courses to promote libraries and share experiences, and projects to create municipal networks of school libraries, often in collaboration with public libraries. In addition, various publications, monographs and journal articles reveal an interest in reflecting on the function of school libraries. The results show a high level of activity in this field.

Due to their close relation with the areas in which the Observatory works, we wanted to highlight in particular actions related to reading promotion in libraries, schools and bookshops. The following three articles reflect this objective.

The article on reading promotion in public libraries describes the initiatives that have been carried out during the two-year period. The number of reading promotion programmes has been maintained, as has the quality that continues to characterize them. Initiatives include institutional reading plans and specific actions promoted directly by the libraries, either individually or in regional networks, to encourage children, young people and adults to read. Finally, the article describes activities with a more informative objective that have been carried out in workshops, professional meetings and exhibitions, as well as the most important publications on reading and libraries during the period.

The article on reading promotion at schools describes all the activities that have been carried out that reveal the concerns and interest of the educational community in creating new curricula and implementing new initiatives to improve reading skills. As described in the article,

good examples are the progressive implementation of school reading plans (PLEC) and various institutional plans promoted by the government and municipalities. Interest in this area is also demonstrated in an analysis of initiatives undertaken by various entities and in the number of projects and groups that are working in the area of reading promotion, which has led to thought-provoking studies that are also discussed here.

Logically, this is followed by an article on activities that have taken place in bookshops. It is well known that Catalan bookshops have always aimed to be much more than local businesses and that they play a key role in the circulation of books to the population. This topic was not addressed in the previous *Yearbook*, but we hope it will remain in future editions. The aim is to give a more complete picture of actions carried out to encourage reading. Specifically, the article discusses the Catalan government's Active Bookshop Plan, by which bookshops are to be considered special facilities for cultural dissemination in Catalonia. Then, examples are given of the activities that are carried out by bookshops. Finally, general promotion activities are described, such as the Diada de Sant Jordi (Saint George's Day), the Setmana del Llibre en Català (Catalan-Language Book Week) or more specifically, the Premi Llibreter, a relatively recent award, but of unquestionable prestige.

The third section of the *Yearbook* is comprised of articles that analyse studies and research carried out during the two-year period on publishing and reading habits, reading, and children's and young adult books. The results are numerous and interesting, and show that there is increasing reflection and study in this field with a focus on new models of reading associated with the new forms of electronic communication and publishing.

The first of the articles in this last section is on reading and is also new to this edition of the *Yearbook*. It describes research on reading in the broadest sense of the term, as a phenomenon, as a concept, and as a changing reality due to the new technologies, but also as a basic and essential element, at the heart of the learning process. Catalan and associated Spanish studies and reports are listed. Indicative data are provided on reading activity in Catalonia, including the reading rate, reading type and languages used in reading. In addition, academic projects and research are reported, as are centres and

observatories that are up and running in Catalonia and scientific and informative publications.

As this is the first time that this section on reading has been included in the *Yearbook* we cannot make comparisons with the previous two-year period that would give us an idea of the trends. Nevertheless, we are convinced that the technological changes that affect the use, habits and forms of reading will make this a topic of unquestionable importance.

The second article on studies and research focuses on analysing publishing and the promotion of reading habits. This specific study is also new to the *Yearbook*, as in the previous edition it was in a more general section on reading promotion. Here, studies on publishing activity in Catalonia and the reading habits of the Catalan population are described, most of which were carried out on behalf of public institutions. The article refers to research groups and research results in the form of scientific publications, conferences, seminars and awards on publishing activity and reading promotion. Finally, the author describes the main publications in the areas of publishing, reading habits, reading promotion and reading promotion plans. It is no accident that there is a particular focus on the Catalan reading plan 2012-2016, and its ambitious objective of increasing the Catalan reading population from 62% to 71%.

This last section on studies and research ends with works on children's and young adult books. The author describes and discusses in detail the reports and studies, groups and projects and all research and dissemination on this area carried out in the form of conferences, presentations, awards and publications. University courses related to children's and young adult literature are also described.

Under a more general title, the aim of this article was included in the last *Yearbook*. Consequently, we can deduce that the research, dissemination and education on children's and young adults books in Catalonia between 2010 and 2011 is the same in quantity and quality as in the preceding two-year period. The output in terms of articles, studies and theses has continued to be similar. However, some new developments have been detected, such as the increase in studies on the relationship among children's books, picture books and aspects of learning

to read and reading promotion, as well as the impact of new forms of publishing in this sector.

Finally, the *Yearbook* includes the list of monographs that have been acquired in these two years by the library in the University of Barcelona's Faculty of Library and Information Science, to which the Observatory is attached. In addition to the materials included in this publication, the library has an updated [online guide](#) on reading habits, which includes other resources related to the topics dealt with in the *Yearbook* for other geographic areas. These resources could be of interest to readers of this publication.