

## COMMENTS ON THE STUDY RESULTS

by Giorgi Kekalidze<sup>1</sup>

Overall, the survey conducted by Experto may be evaluated positively: the analysis provided has more or less revealed the main trends, problems and positive developments characteristic of the Georgian book market.

It is obvious that the survey has its faults. First of all, in my view, there is little focus on the recent past. When researching books and their readers in Georgia, we have to remember one very important factor. Just two decades ago, the country was still part of the Soviet Union. Despite the appearance of a new generation, the momentum that was characteristic of the book market of the 1990s is still felt... The rest is an absolutely new trend for the country. The first and second factors both require separate surveys. It is noteworthy that during Georgia's Soviet period, high book sales were due to several specific factors: regardless of the print run, not many new books were published, while the motivation for buying books was different: the book was more an item of self-promotion (one had to have shelves full of books) and was not valued for its real function. Accordingly, the small circle of Georgian critics who used to analyze this topic would metaphorically distinguish between the following: the phenomenon of the buyer and the reader as different occurrences. It is obvious that the market and statistics are not interested in knowing whether the person reads the book after he buys it, but the abovementioned attitude became relevant in the period of Georgian independence. Social hardships have deprived citizens of the luxury of buying books for décor. The "real" readers' layer has come to the fore. We have to take into account that after the 1990s, the book market demonstrated a clear growth trend. Georgia is a leading country in the Caucasus from this point of view. It would be interesting to see a little pre-analysis explaining the reasons for this progress and how it developed in towns and villages.

The survey methodology was planned and implemented from the correct angle. In countries like Georgia, despite previously accumulated experience, from this point of view, we often face certain resistance and an uncooperative attitude. Therefore, as a rule, comparatively long interviews normally give better results than short telephone interviews or so called test-calls. The survey range was selected correctly: urban space and big villages. However, the results showed that interviewing people in small settlements would also make some sense. Big villages are still linked to the cities and urban developments, if only partially and comparatively late, but they still reflect such influence. The selection of target groups and so called focus groups was also carried out properly.

Singling out fiction and detective stories in the question about the most frequently read books seems incorrect to me. It is interesting that if you merge them, according to their percentages (1 = 68.2 percent, 2 = 40.9 percent), the percentage received will be much more impressive.

The factors influencing book selection (quality of the book - 84 percent and fashion - 8.7 percent) seem a little dubious to me. These results may sound pleasant for a

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bibliophile; however, reality tends towards a different trend. Naturally, a similar survey should be continued or extension of an existing one would be required to ascertain this.

From this point of view, I consider the answer “I choose myself” to the question “what is your stimulus for reading books?” vague. The high percentage (91.5) shows that respondents have included many factors in this one answer. “I choose myself” surely includes many different reasons.

The question “For what purpose do you buy books?” garnered interesting answers. The percentage distribution here is almost equal (the answers included: interest, deepening my knowledge, enriching my library, pleasure, as a gift). This suggests that a human being tries to use the product he buys with his money in different ways, i.e. it is precious to him.

I think that the book reading and buying frequency shown in this survey reflect reality quite closely.

I think that asking the question “where do you read books?” and proposing separate items for “at home” or “on the Internet (e-books)” was not the right decision. It is highly likely that these two answers are not mutually exclusive, especially considering that the Internet and e-books should have been looked at separately anyway.

The high percentage of fairs (19.4%) among places where books are bought suggests that such festivals and exhibition-sales are important and should be organized more often.

The survey showed that e-books are not yet popular in the country. This is influenced by several factors. Citizens are cautious about spending large amounts of money all at once, even though it may cost them less at the end of the day. The main reason probably still lies in the very reverential attitude that middle-aged and senior citizens hold towards books. This conflict will be resolved sooner or later; however, for some time, it will probably affect the share of the book market. Although the Georgian sector has already seen some brands that are making an effort to introduce electronic books and shops, attempting to make them an integral part of our market. In ten years, some very clear signs will be seen.

In terms of the question about the language of the books and the source country of the literature that Georgian readers read, the results of the survey are generally reliable. Our library experience proves this fact to some extent. There are traditionally very few readers who read literature in the original language. By “Georgian books” they probably meant classical literature (it would be interesting to have this question be a bit more nuanced; for example, to find out which period of Georgian literature is the most read).

The survey results are reliable when it shows that preference is given to children’s book publishers. It is interesting that children’s book publishers are popular even among those categories of people who are not married and do not have children at all.

I think that the book readers' requirements given in the conclusion of the survey are fragmented and require much more rigorous work. For example, "Georgian-Svanetian-Abkhazian-Megrelian Dictionary" still covers the interests of a much more specific reader while "modern literature" is very general. If the survey is continued, these details deserve more attention.

The information about what part of a citizen's monthly budget is spent on books is also interesting. From this point of view, we have a more or less clear picture of reality in terms of the younger generations. This is probably influenced by the student life-style, as the upper age group buys books more spontaneously. It is clear that there are some exceptions, but the number of such exceptions is statistically very insignificant.

For us, just as for the representatives of the library, the fact that readers rarely visit the library because of its uncomfortable environment is important. This makes Georgia very different from other developed countries.

Book shops and the service found there is another issue. According to the survey, the reader pays a great deal of attention to the personnel, i.e. consultations during the book selection process are important, therefore, much work has to be done here.

With the exception of libraries and electronic books, the survey results more or less reconfirm global statistical trends. The survey, obviously, needs to be continued. Bearing in mind the faults of the report presented by Experto, we can conclude that it was merely an attempt to reveal a general picture. More contextualization, thematization of problems and an expansion of the survey is needed to see a clearer picture.