

COMMENTS ON THE STUDY RESULTS

by Masho Samadashvili¹

The first survey of readers is indeed a positive event which should be encouraged and which can show us a broader picture, since sometimes we can see and comprehend only some small pieces of it. It should be mentioned here that the results of the survey were more or less anticipated; however, there are some issues that are of great interest to me and I will try to discuss them below.

First of all, we have to talk about the trend that has already established itself - Georgian readers mostly read fiction; nevertheless, I think that 68 percent is still a very high share. It is even a bit alarming that demand for professional and scientific literature is so low, to say nothing of non-fiction, which is almost not published at all.

“Fashionable literature” that attracts Georgian readers today is another interesting issue covered by the survey. We can recall many examples, such as Orhan Pamuk, whose books are translated promptly (currently, his seven novels have been translated into Georgian) and who is read by Georgian readers with great enthusiasm.

I think that one of the key issues is a very high demand for Georgian books (65 percent), including books translated into Georgian but also written in Georgian. The majority of Georgian readers read in Georgian and their inclusion in world literature largely depends on the goodwill of publishers.

We have to mention another trend as well. Even though the world has now shifted to online reading, Georgian readers remain faithful to printed books. This is proven by the 72 percent of readers who could not answer the question: “How many books do you read online?”

We can see from the survey that 27 percent of readers say that they read several books every month, while 31 percent buy books several times a month. I have heard from publishers that retail sales are not yet proportional to the reading index, and this is further proved by the qualitative part of the survey, because readers often borrow the books they read. However, as Bakur Sulakauri has mentioned recently, ten times more books were sold during the past few years than in the beginning of the century; this obviously indicates a growing culture of reading and buying books.

The survey shows that readers, when buying books, pay attention to the price, while at the same time, the price is also the biggest complaint that we have heard from readers. It is true that some books are indeed very expensive; however, we should not forget that lately they have adopted the European practice of publishing books with a soft cover. For example, Umberto Eco’s *The Name of the Rose* initially was sold for 29.90 Gel, while in its second edition, its price was 15.90 Gel. Bakur Sulakauri’s publishing house’s approach of selling books at fixed prices seems to be an attempt to solve this problem.

¹ Masho Samadashvili is a literary journalist.

Reader's criticism/desire that Georgian publishers publish more commercial literature than really valuable literature is partly true, and I myself used to claim that too. However, in the 21st century we should not forget that book publishing is a business just like any other business, thus publishers, when making choices, must take into account market demand in the first place. It is also noteworthy that successful commercial projects make the publication of truly high-quality literature possible.

At the same time, we can talk about the problem of libraries: it seems that the majority of Georgian readers are not attracted by libraries and note their "uncomfortable environment" as the main reason for this. Nevertheless, we must mention that today, the Public Library is quite a comfortable space, while university libraries cannot "be blamed" for lack of comfort either.

I think that the objective reason for not reading at libraries is lack of time, since people are pressed for time, thus a fifteen-minute reading break at work or on public transportation seems more optimal than several hours spent in the library's reading hall.

Finally, we need to comment on readers' wish to see a better supply of books reaching the villages in the future. As the survey shows, cities lead villages in all respects, whether in book reading or selling. The situation is aggravated by the fact that there is a lack not only of high-quality libraries, but of average ones as well, thus readers living outside the capital often have no idea about processes occurring in contemporary literature.

I think that this is the most problematic issue and that the state together with publishers must make an effort to resolve it.

Overall, the survey may be evaluated positively, as it has been one of the first efforts to form an in-depth and substantiated understanding of problems in the sector. That is why I think that the topics that have been broadly discussed in various unofficial circles have now gained a new and broader discourse.