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Kovač occasionally lectures at various European and American universities and is one of the partners of the European Masters programme in Publishing at Oxford Brookes University. He has also worked as a consultant to textbook publishers in Slovenia, Serbia, and Montenegro, and participated as a textbook specialist in the World Bank Mission in Georgia (former Soviet Union). From 2005–09 he edited the Slovene edition of National Geographic magazine, and from 1990–2004 he published more than 500 columns on Slovene political and cultural life for the Slovene daily and weekly press. He is the author of two books on book history and book publishing in Slovene and one in Croatian. In 2008, his first book in English Never Mind the Web: Here comes the book was published by Chandos in Oxford.

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Miha Kovacˇ The end of codex and the disintegration of the communication circuit of the book

Introduction

The aim of this paper is to look at the changes in organizational structure within publishing houses over the last 20 years as a result of changed patterns in book production and consumption. As little research was published on these changes during the 1990s and in the first 5 years of the new millennium, it is challenging to construct incisive hypotheses. Accordingly, I will use a rather unorthodox methodology. Rather than pose hypotheses, I will analyse personal accounts on developments within publishing from books and magazine articles, collect available data from organizations such as the Book Industry Study Group in the USA or the Publishing Market Watch research project in Europe, and cite the few academic journals on the book industry that exist—such as *Logos* and *Publishing Research Quarterly*—or monographs printed in the last five years. In all this, I will look for trends and patterns that appear, both in publishing suburbia and publishing capitals. In other words, I will bypass traditional scientific epistemology in favour of what might be called a ‘googley kind of science’ (Goetz 2010): I will collect data first and then hypothesize. On this basis, a set of seven hypotheses will be formulated for further discussion and research.

1.0. Changes in publishing suburbia

In the spirit of this formative analysis, let me therefore start with a personal account. A long time ago, deep in the socialist era, when I began working in what was at that time one of the biggest Slovene publishing houses, I triggered a small management revolution. One of the rituals there was the preparation during the autumn for the following year’s catalogue. Editing of the catalogue was a kind of a list-creation process, as neither a database of titles selected for publication nor a production database existed. Such information was safely kept in the editors’ heads and retrieved in conversation when necessary (which wasn’t very often).

Production of the catalogue was therefore the first serious attempt to put together a definitive list of books that were to be published in the forthcoming year. The catalogue was then discussed in sometime bizarre debates (‘Gosh! When did we decide to publish this book?’), and the first attempt was made to evaluate production finances. This, too, created rather bewildered questioning about the financial sustainability of the list (‘Oh my goodness! Will we run out of money for wages if we publish all this?’). And last, but not least, the list was discussed by the publishing house’s board of trustees, which consisted of writers, politicians, and employees and acted as a kind of censorship body (although a soft one, as in Yugoslavia at the time it was possible to publish almost everything, with the minor exception of works of a small number of domestic dissidents and international liberal and conservative thinkers).

Such late list preparation created many problems, the main one being the fact that it was hard to plan cash flow without knowing what would be published in the forthcoming year. As the Yugoslav model of socialism was a combination of market economy and collective ownership, such planning was necessary even in the socialist era. When both socialism and Yugoslavia started to approach their end, cash flow control became part of the daily agenda, and such relaxed list planning was coming to be considered unacceptable by management staff.

As a young deputy editor in chief, I decided that each year I would start preparing a list of future titles more than a year in advance. Even more radically, I decided that the list wouldn’t only be kept in my head, but it should also exist in written form and contain all necessary data about the production process. This list was typed on an old typewriter and occasionally photocopied for editors and designers. We marked the changes on it in pencil after every editorial meeting, and re-typed it every time we decided to change its structure (which didn’t happen very often, as I didn’t have a secretary).

This change was not accepted warmly by all of the editors. Some of them considered it a cruel attack on their editorial freedom, and an attempt to exercise control over their work (which, as a matter of fact, it was). However, in the long run, a list in printed form as a tool for planning and production control was accepted as a necessity by everybody. When the company switched to PCs and it became easy to update and rearrange the list, it became used almost on a daily basis.

When I moved to the biggest Slovene publishing house in the mid-1990s, I encountered a similar list there. As time passed by, we upgraded and re-designed...