

# A Myth Busted: Bestselling Fiction in Europe and Slovenia

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*The paper analyzes adult fiction bestsellers in Europe in 2008 and 2009. The authors develop a method that enables them to measure the impact factors of bestselling authors and describe the mechanisms through which a book becomes a bestseller. In addition, they describe the methods and differences in the creation of bestseller lists and their impact on book markets. The analysis shows that in all European countries analyzed the majority of the books on bestseller lists are written either in local languages or translated from the biggest European languages (English, French, German, Spanish) and Swedish. This is a one-way process because there are no authors from small languages on the bestseller list in the biggest European book markets. The final part of the paper analyzes the Slovenian book market and its special features*

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## What makes a bestseller?

There is no easy answer to the question of what makes a bestseller. According to the Oxford English Dictionary, the term *bestseller* was first used by *The Kansas Times and Star* in 1889, and the first attempts to define a bestseller more clearly date back to the period after the Second World War. Definitions have varied from various statistical determinations (“a bestseller is a book that has been bought by 1 per cent of the total population within 10 years of its publication:” see Mott) to the tautological definition (“best-selling books are books that appear on bestseller lists,” Resa Dudovitz), which appears – as will be seen later – to be the most sensible one from today’s perspective (both quotes from Miller).

Any attempt to analyze a bestseller as a social phenomenon should consider bestseller lists and how they are compiled. As a rule, bestseller lists are considered to reflect the sales figures in a given market – the more copies of a book are sold, the higher it climbs on the bestseller

list representing that specific market. However, it is not always like this. Arguably the most famous bestseller list published today, the one published by *The New York Times* since 1931, is compiled by means of a questionnaire sent to selected bookshops asking about their bestselling books (see Miller 290–291). Bookshops of course have the option of adding a title that they think is selling remarkably well in a specific week, but this box often remains empty. On the basis of such sales figures collected from around 3,000 bookshops surveyed (see Miller 290–291, who otherwise states the number of 4,000 bookshops, and [wikipedia.org/wiki/New\\_York\\_Times\\_Bestseller\\_List](http://wikipedia.org/wiki/New_York_Times_Bestseller_List)), *The New York Times* then compiles the list. Such a methodology of list creation of course allows manipulations and is neither neutral nor accurate in an objective sense. The most famous anecdotal evidence for such questioning of the *Times*' methodology is probably the lawsuit filed by William Peter Blatty in the early 1980s: after his novel *The Exorcist* had topped the list for a considerable time there was every reason to expect something similar to happen to his next novel as well, *Legion*. However, the book did not appear on the list until several weeks after its release, and then stayed there for only one week. In this way, *The New York Times*, according to the complaint brought to the court, had caused damage to the publisher and the author. Blatty and his publisher decided to file a lawsuit but they lost it outright because *The New York Times* publisher argued that their lists had never been claimed to represent the exact situation on the book market. Moreover, they confessed that the list is basically an editorial construct, which allowed their lawyers to refer to the first amendment to the US Constitution, which defines freedom of the press as one of the constitutional freedoms. The court accepted their argument in its entirety and dropped Blatty's case, which basically gave one of the most famous lists in the world a court certificate that it does not reflect the actual sales situation on the book market (Miller 297–298).

### **Compiling bestseller lists**

A real revolution in the compilation of bestseller lists was brought about by the Bookscan system, developed and managed by the Nielsen Company since 1995. In simple terms, the system records each purchase at points of sale in a number and distribution of bookshops considered broad enough to statistically represent a given market. This means that the system records bookshop sales with unerring accuracy. The system currently operates in nine countries: the US, UK, Australia, Ireland,

Denmark, Italy, New Zealand, Spain, and South Africa (see <http://www.nielsenbookscan.co.uk>). It is also used to compile bestseller lists in the weekly British trade magazine *The Bookseller*.

With the introduction of this system, two things became clear: first, there is a systematic distinction to be made between a book market as portrayed by *The New York Times* and the actual performance of individual titles in terms of real sales, and, second, by making public concrete sales of individual titles at regular intervals bestseller lists both indirectly and directly influence the book market, which makes the lists a marketing tool in their own right.

This became apparent when Nielsen Bookscan was introduced to the Australian book market. Until 2000, the most significant and influential list “down under” had been published by the *Australian Book Review* (ABR). This (and similar lists in some Australian dailies) had been edited and compiled by editors of culture pages in the press, who “notoriously filtered” their content (Davis 116) – not only by not including certain book genres on the lists, but also by surveying the sales mostly in bookshops in downtowns and campuses, frequented by a more sophisticated reading audience. As a result, Australian lists were dominated by Australian authors of serious fiction and essays, whereas significant segments were missing altogether, notably “cookbooks, books on how to become rich in a few steps, ... even athletes’ biographies” (ibid. 117).

After Australian media began publishing Nielsen BookScan lists in 2000, a different picture of the Australian book market started to emerge. For example, in 2004, during the Christmas shopping season, only four fiction books (in 9th, 65th, 103rd, and 104th place) and three nonfiction books by Australian authors (in 35th, 74th, and 114th place) appeared among the top 130 titles. Suddenly, it appeared as though Australians had changed their reading preferences, swapping domestic fiction for easy reading by foreign authors such as Dan Brown (who had not even appeared on Australian lists until then!), and starting to buy en masse “cookbooks and books about cricket players” (Davis 118) – and all this without any empirical evidence that the sales of serious fiction changed dramatically during the same period.

However, the apparent decline of domestic fiction is not only a result of more accurate compilation of bestseller lists. Davis argues that this period saw a significant change in the system of values in Australia and the entire media landscape (suddenly, fiction was no longer understood as a major tool for maintaining Australian identity, resulting in reduced public subsidies to authors and publishers of such works; other media started eroding reading and school books; the share of reading among

all recreational activities dropped from twenty-nine to twenty-five percent; the prevailing social paradigm of the time was neoliberalism, which established unusually high profit expectations for the book industry as well, which led publishers to focus on titles that were expected to earn them higher profits; and so on; Davis 120–127). In other words, new and more accurate bestseller lists appeared in Australia at a time when domestic fiction was losing its social reputation and impact due to altered social circumstances. Therefore, former bestseller lists lost their authoritative status not only because more accurate information tools had appeared, but primarily because domestic and literary fiction suddenly ceased to be the mainstream book genre. The shift towards the new lists, in which genre titles were prevailing, says Davis, functioned as a self-fulfilling prophecy: once it had become obvious which book genres sell well, publishers – in accordance with the prevailing atmosphere of the time – placed increasingly more emphasis on them because it appeared that this was the only way to make desirable profits. In line with sales trends, as shown by rankings, they started to change their publishing strategies. For example, the Australian subsidiary of Simon & Schuster announced in 2004 that it would cease to publish Australian authors' first books, and the biggest Australian publisher, Allen & Unwin, published sixty fiction works by Australian authors in 1996, compared to only twenty-eight in 2004 (Davis 120). This shift was further facilitated, says Davis, by the internal shift of values within Australian publishers, as marketing departments were becoming more important than editorial departments (Davis 120).

## **Deciding what to publish**

This leads to another barely explored issue within publishing studies: how publishers make decisions about what to publish and how this decision-making process indirectly affects the bestseller lists. One of the most convincing descriptions of the mechanisms that change books into bestsellers was written by Malcolm Gladwell, who came up with the hypothesis that book bestsellers (but also film and music hits) and fashion trends spread through society like epidemic diseases. Such diseases, says Gladwell, are usually triggered by a narrow group of individuals with many social contacts and with the ability to spread the virus. As an example of such a spread of an epidemic disease, he cites an epidemic of gonorrhoea in Colorado Springs in 1986. An analysis revealed that by far the most people had been infected by a group of 168 individuals, who

were otherwise unrelated but frequented the same bars and had many social contacts. The situation is similar with bestsellers and fashion trends, says Gladwell: irrespective of marketing investments, a book, piece of music, or accessory begins to spread through society once it has been adopted by a handful of people that – for one reason or another – have a strong influence on a fairly wide circle of people. In addition, a bestseller starts spreading only if it conveys a message that will touch the intended recipient more deeply than others – similar to some viruses that are significantly more infectious than others. Furthermore, it is logical that epidemics in some environments spread more quickly than in others: altered hygienic conditions practically eradicated plague and cholera in Europe. Similarly, altered cultural circumstances in modern Europe made chivalric novels and troubadour lyric poetry obsolete and read only by literary historians.

In short, according to Gladwell, the spread of a bestseller depends on the power of its message, the environment that provides conditions for spreading a certain type of message, and the people that spread this message.

### **The book virus**

Let us speculate that the minority that triggers the “book virus” in the book world and starts to infect readers is to be found among book professionals such as editors, sales representatives, booksellers, librarians, other authors, and those that write about books in all sorts of media. In other words, if a work by itself does not persuade an editor that it is publishable, the editor will simply not recommend it for publication. Moreover, if editors are enthusiastic about a work – if it “infects” them heavily – they will try harder to give it appropriate status within the publisher’s line and obtain more marketing resources for it compared to other works that are worth publishing but with a smaller “infectious” potential. The situation is more than similar in bookshops. Among tens of thousands of titles, it is physically possible to promote only a few books, and the ways in which the books are arranged in bookshops not only reflect the attitude of booksellers towards the salability of a title but, as shown by Claire Squires, has a significant indirect effect on customers and their perception of book genres (Squires), and it also shows the attitude of bookshop keepers towards the salability of a title.

In short, using Gladwell’s theory to describe the birth of a bestseller, it becomes obvious that in many cases the publishing professionals play an important role in the process of bestseller creation. This means that in

many cases it is the editors – no matter what they think about the nature of their work – that are the first marketers of a title because they have to “infect” those that will be directly or indirectly engaged in its marketing and sales. In addition to the ability to recognize an interesting and sellable text, one of the conditions for successfully performing the editor’s job is thus the ability to exert influence on other publishing professionals. In Bourdieu’s terms, what an editor primarily needs is to control a huge amount of social, symbolic, and cultural capital.

From here on, two more hypotheses come to mind: first, the existence of the book market as a precondition for cultural openness. Namely, if there are many publishers that employ editors with different levels of resistance to different “book viruses,” then chances are significantly higher that an innovative and unconventional book will find its way to readers and possibly become a bestseller, in contrast to the situation with only a few types of publishers and editors. Second, one can reasonably assume that different “book viruses” spread across different social environments in different ways. It is worth pointing out that, according to Alberto N. Greco, the organizational structure of a publisher and consequently the power relations inside it largely depend on the size and structure of the market where the publisher operates. In other words, in highly structured book markets such as Slovenia with a large number of sales channels (Kovač, “Meje rasti”), commercial success will also depend on successful sales coordination, which makes publishers’ sales departments stronger – regardless of the value-oriented environment – compared to the situation in Denmark, for example, where most books are sold through bookshops. This means that bestsellers in culturally diverse environments will not be different only because book tastes in Slovenia are different than in Denmark, but also because the Danish book market is larger and differently structured than the Slovenian one and, consequently, decision-making mechanisms at Danish publishers are different from those in Slovenia.

In short, in order to better understand the logic that turns books into bestsellers, one should become familiar with the nature and internal power relations of the publishers that publish them, and the “individual histories” and track records of various European bestsellers should be examined. This would require a much more extended research project than our current resources allow. Therefore, the second part of this text carries out a kind of exemplary infrastructural study, well aware of the shortcomings of its means, but with a broad scope of relevant questions in mind: it examines the differences between a set of European bestseller lists and at least tries to indicate what patterns and forces govern

the works that appear on these lists. This preliminary approach makes it possible to test yet another hypothesis about the modern entertainment industries – that is, whether bestseller lists are dominated by English-language books that belong to uniformly similar genres, and which are (as products of cultural industries) interchangeable and replaceable. In addition, the hypothesis will be tested whether English is the main intermediary in promoting and transferring bestsellers across European language borders: this would be a plausible assumption based on the fact that English is also the main communication language in the publishing world (Thompson 40–44).

Through this comparison and analysis of European bestsellers we will therefore determine how diversified European book markets really are: do they really function according to the aforementioned criteria of the cultural industry, or, as Gladwell's and Greco's writings suggest, are these markets and their associated reading tastes significantly more diversified and subject to more sophisticated rules of the cultural industry that cannot be captured in a few simple formulas?

## **Western European book markets**

In Europe, bestseller lists differ significantly: although they have a fairly long history in western Europe, the tradition of their compilation is much shorter in central and southeast Europe. On top of this, no country there has a system in place similar to Nielsen Bookscan. Due to this difference, we chose to deal with data from the two regions separately, and not consolidate them into one overall sample.

The first results of the study on European bestseller lists based on data from March 2008 to April 2009 were already discussed by the authors of this text in an article in *Publishing Research Quarterly* (Kovač and Wischenbart). We analyzed lists published in Great Britain by *The Bookseller*, in Holland by *Boekblad*, in Germany by *Buchreport* and *Der Spiegel*, in Spain by *El Cultural*, in France by *Livres Hebdo/Ipsos*, and in Sweden by *Svenske Bokhandel*. In the second part of the study, which took place between October 2008 and September 2009, an Italian list prepared by *Informazioni Editoriali* was added. With the exception of *The Bookseller*, which uses Nielsen Bookscan data, the majority of the lists mentioned above are based on point-of-sale data coming from chain and independent book stores (and some online sales, at least in Sweden) representing around thirty percent of the book market. They can therefore be considered fairly accurate. In central Europe, we used data from each country's



largest chain bookstore, which cover between ten and thirty percent of the respective markets.

These markets were selected for several reasons. Despite being relatively similar in some of their main demographic indicators (such as people's level of education, gross domestic product, development of media infrastructure, etc.; see Kovač, "Meje rasti"), these markets differ significantly in population, their languages (and these language's reception in the rest of Europe), and their potential for cultural exports. By European standards, the domestic British book market has the most muscle in terms of exports, whereas the German and French markets predominate in import capacity and in certain parameters such as the number of book stores catering to a highly differentiated reading population. Spain and Italy happen to have somewhat similar balances and preferences between domestic authors, translations from non-English languages, and overall market size. The Dutch and Swedish markets are among the smaller western European book markets but are both highly differentiated, with a very significant culture of (incoming) translations as well as readers reading in foreign languages, yet they differ profoundly by the impact of domestic fiction – which is extraordinarily large in Sweden and relatively modest in the Netherlands. (Kovač and Wischenbart). In addition, altogether the surveyed markets belong to very different language groups and reflect very diverse cultural and political traditions and cultural environments. In short, they are diverse enough that they can serve as a representative sample for the entire western European book market.

A relatively simple methodology was used: the sample was taken from the top-ten titles of each market's list. The focus was put on authors because some of them appeared with several titles on different lists. To make lists comparable as well as to allow a consolidated meta-list across all the markets surveyed, a measuring system was introduced, assigning an author a number of points for each presence on a monthly top-ten list, with a number one in one month on one list giving an author fifty points, forty-nine points for a number two, and so on. The goal of this methodology was to measure an author's impact on one or several markets over a given period of time.

A glance at the list of the most successful authors between October 2008 and September 2009 in western Europe (Table 1) reveals a typical long-tail picture: two authors received more than one-third of all points, whereas the top ten received no less than sixty percent of total points during the period considered.

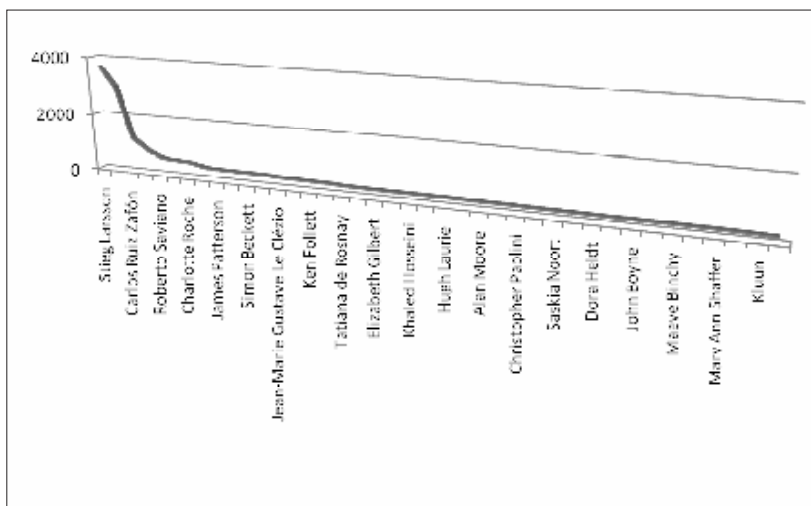


Table 1. Top-ten bestselling western European authors.

Rank	Oct. 2008/Sept. 2009	Impact Factor	Accumulated points (%)
1	Stieg Larsson	3697	19.13
2	Stephenie Meyer	3012.5	15.59
3	Carlos Ruiz Zafón	1161.5	6.01
4	Paolo Giordano	805.5	4.17
5	Roberto Saviano	552.5	2.86
6	Charlotte Roche	527	2.73
7	John Grisham	497	2.57
8	James Patterson	384.5	1.99
9	Herman Koch	368	1.92
10	Simon Beckett	360	1.90
(Top 10)			58.83
(Top 5)			47.76

Translating these data into a graph, a long tail becomes even more obvious:

Figure 1. Top-ten bestselling western European authors.



It becomes obvious that during the period surveyed only a handful of these authors were simultaneously on several lists, indicating a strong impact in several markets during one year of observation. Despite some exceptions, Table 2 also shows that the author's factor of influence is inversely proportional to the number of lists where his or her books appear:

Table 2. Authors' influence, March 2008–April 2009.

Author	Title	Original language	Bestseller lists	Total points
Stieg Larsson	<i>Millennium</i> (3 parts)	Swedish	F, SP, SE, NL, UK	2601.5
Stephenie Meyer*	4 titles + <i>The Host</i> (adult UK)	English	I, SP, D, UK	2156.5
Khaled Hosseini	2 titles	English	NL, SE, D	1172
Roberto Saviano**	Gomorra	Italian	I, D, F, SP, NL, SE	1104
Carlos Ruiz Zafón	El juego del angel	Spanish	SP, NL, I, D	893.5
Ken Follett	World without End	English	F, D, SE, SP	825
Muriel Barbery	L'élégance du hérisson	French	F, D, SP	786
Charlotte Roche	Feuchtgebiete	German	D, NL, UK	709
John Boyne	Boy with the Striped Pajamas	English	SP	527
Cecelia Ahern	The Gift	English	UK, D	465
Elizabeth Gilbert	Eat, Pray, Love	English	NL	430
Henning Mankell	Kinesen	Swedish	SP, SE, D, NL	404
Anna Gavalda	La consolante	French	F, D, SP	401
Liza Maklud	En plats i solen & Livsstid	Swedish	SE	374
Paolo Giordano	La solitudine dei numeri primi	Italian	I, SP, NL	368
Jean-Marie Le Clézio	Ritournelle de la faim; L'Africain	French	SE, F	334
Jens Lapidus	Snabba Cash	Swedish	SE	321
Andrea Camilleri	Mehrere Titel	Italian	I, SP, D, UK	289.5
Jean-Louis Fournier	Où on va, papa?	French	F	287
Eduardo Mendoza	El asombroso viaje de Pomponio Flato	Spanish	SP	285
Mark Levengood	Hjärtat får inga rynkor	Swedish	SE	285
Katie Price	Angel Uncovered	English	UK	284
Siegfried Lenz	Schweigeminute	German	D,	282
J.K. Rowling*	Beedle the Bard; Deathly Hallows	English	SP, D	243
Jan Guillou	Men inte om det gäller din dotter	Swedish	SE	243
Marc Levy	Toutes ces choses qu'on ne s'est pas dites	French	F	240
Simone van der Vlugt	Blauw water	Dutch	NL	239
Guillaume Musso	Je reviens te chercher	French	F	234

\*Titles are aimed at all age groups. They were dropped from further comparison because in some countries they appear on children's or teenagers' bestseller lists.

\*\*Classified as fiction in Italy, elsewhere as feature writing.

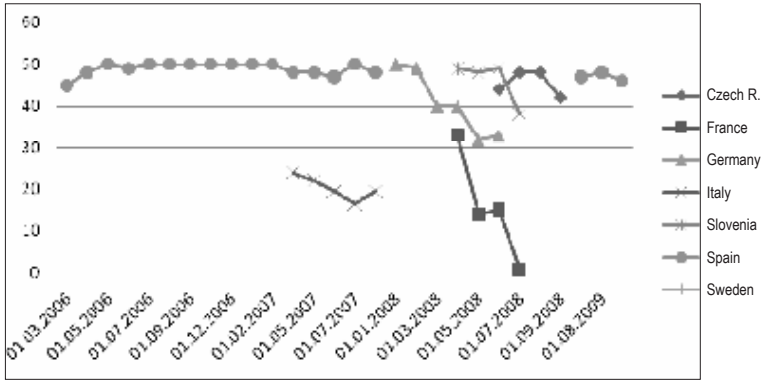
Table 2 shows two additional language-driven facts: first, eight out of thirty authors write in English, whereas all the others write in other European languages. The survey for the period from October 2008 to September 2009 showed similar proportions, with nineteen out of forty authors with the highest impact factors writing in English and twenty-one in other European languages (see [http://www.wischenbart.com/en/cac/index\\_cac\\_en.htm](http://www.wischenbart.com/en/cac/index_cac_en.htm)). However, aside from Swedish, only translations of books written in major European languages seem to cross language barriers and climb to the top of bestseller lists.

Second, even without a detailed analysis of titles at the top of European bestseller lists, it is possible to say that the top-ten European authors were writing in very diverse genres: Muriel Barbery's *Elegance of the Hedgehog* is a novel with a strong philosophical notion, Stieg Larsson's novels are socially critical thrillers, Stephanie Meyer is an author of bestsellers that Hollywood has recently turned into global blockbuster movies, Paolo Giordano's *The Solitude of Prime Numbers* is a novel on complex human relations, and Charlotte Roche is the author of an autobiography with rather explicit sexual content.

A detailed look at bestseller lists also reveals that the books that move from one list to another follow two different models. Authors such as Ildefonso Falcones, Stieg Larsson, Muriel Barbery, Carlos Ruiz Zafon, and others were initially particularly successful in their local environments, staying in the first position of domestic lists for several months. Once their books had been translated and published in other European markets, two models of movements up and down bestseller lists appeared.

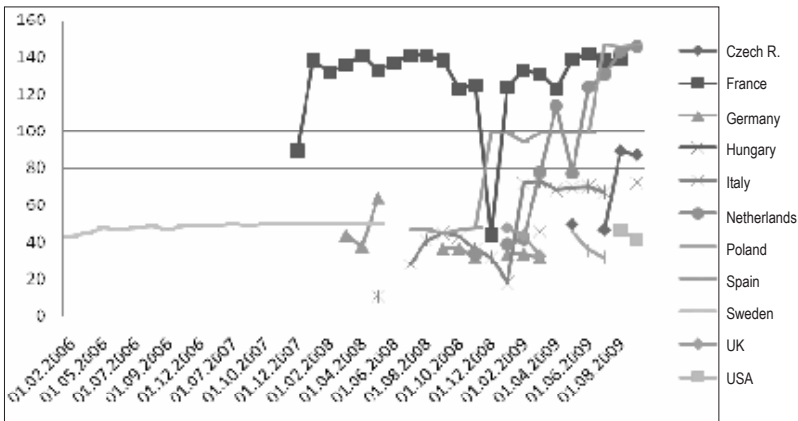
As Figure 2 shows, Ildefonso Falcones' novel *La catedral del mar* (The Cathedral of the Sea) made it onto the bestseller list in most countries, but it then also disappeared from them very quickly. This suggests that – compared to other books – their publishers invested proportionally more in its promotion, hoping for it to create a similar “infection” of readers on other markets as on the Spanish one. However, this did not happen: the book made it onto bestseller lists, but after a strong initial push the book also disappeared from these quite quickly.

Figure 2. Bestseller rank of Ildefonso Falcones' *La cathedral del mar*.



Stieg Larsson’s novels followed an altogether different scenario: having dominated at the top of the Swedish bestseller list for more than a year, they moved to most other European book markets and made their presence felt almost as successfully as on the Swedish market. In addition, there are strong indicators of French success in having triggered the international takeoff of the books, and not (as in many other examples of recent Scandinavian crime fiction) that the German market played that role of an accelerator (or, to use a more medical term close to epidemiology, an incubator).

Figure 3. Bestseller rank of Stieg Larsson's *Millenium trilogy*.



These two examples point to the conclusion that both works had different “infectious powers.” Falcones successfully infected Spanish

readers, which was followed by the recognition that the message of his work would not attract readers in other European environments en masse. On the other hand, Larsson infected not only Swedish but also European and American readers: his works are among the very few examples of translations that recently climbed to the top of the American bestseller list.

Discussions about what in Larsson's text attracted such great attention of European and US readers and what in Falcones' text did not is of course beyond the scope of this text. For our purpose, it is enough to conclude that marketing support is not enough to turn a book into a really successful bestseller: in Gladwell's terms, it takes the right message in the right environment. At least in the case of Falcones' translations, these two factors obviously did not coincide properly. Nevertheless, one must add that Falcones' relatively strong success had not been anticipated at all by his original Spanish publisher at the time of the book's initial release.

A glance at Figures 2 and 3 also reveals that the works traveled from the original to different European languages without the intermediary role of English and, similar to other authors, their works are being published by publishers of very different sizes (see Kovač and Wischenbart).<sup>1</sup> All of this leads to the conclusion that book markets in western Europe are open enough to be penetrated by small publishers and by a variety of books that belong to very different genres. On the other hand, English is by far not the only transfer language or, in many cases of works written in other languages, not the predominant transfer language, as many would assume. In addition, these markets are so different that Europe as a whole had only a handful of really common bestsellers during the period considered.

### **Eastern European book markets**

The situation is almost identical for the Czech, Hungarian, Polish, Serbian, and Slovenian book markets. Here also only thirteen out of forty authors with the highest impact factors were writing in English during the period considered. Ten were writing in other European languages and seventeen were domestic authors.

Table 3. Polish, Czech, Hungarian, Slovenian, and Serbian authors.

Rank	Author(s)	Points	Rank	Author(s)	Points
1	Stephenie Meyer	2,419	21	László L. Lőrincz	276
2	Rhonda Byrne	1,289	22	Bernhard Schlink	268
3	Khaled Hosseini	1,349	23	Helen Exley	267
4	Zdeněk Svěrák	674	24	Wojciech Cejrowski	262
5	Michal Viewegh	674	25	Randy Pausch, Jeffrey Zaslow	234
6	Carlos Ruiz Zafón	610	26	Raymond Kluun	227
7	Paulo Coelho	576	27	Tone Pavček	220
8	Stephenie Meyer	558	28	William P. Young	192
9	Roberto Saviano	550	29	Muriel Barbery	196
10	Jaroslav Kmenta	548	30	Lenka Lanczová	194
11	Stieg Larsson	546	31	Agatha Christie	194
12	Gorica Nesović, Jelica Greganović	397	32	Stephen Clarke	192
13	Goran Vojnović	393	33	Vlastimil Vondruška	190
14	Vladimir Pištalo	384	34	Spiró György	188
15	Marie Poledňáková	378	35	Csernus Imre	188
16	Hugh Laurie	376	36	Jostein Gaarder	186
17	Marija Jovanović	369	37	Haruki Murakami	186
18	Małgorzata Kaliścińska	363	38	Jonathan Littell	182
19	Felix Francis	300	39	Kate Mosse	181
20	Sherry Jones	326	40	Dana Čermáková	180

It is a little surprising that local authors are even more dominant on lists in eastern Europe. Nevertheless, similar to western Europe, most translations come from English, followed by Spanish, German, Swedish, Italian, and Dutch. Regarding the translated authors with the highest impact factor, almost the same names appear in both central and western Europe. Moreover, similar to western Europe, most successful authors in central Europe belong to a variety of genres. Marija Jovanović, for example, writes a Serbian version of chick-lit, Goran Vojnović writes about the disadvantaged in modern Slovenia, Zdenek Sverak is a humorist, Michal Viewegh lightheartedly addresses human relations in the modern Czech Republic, Vladimir Pištalo is the author of a romanticized biography of the scientist of Serbian origin, Nikola Tesla, and so on.

However, our research indicated an important difference between western European and central European bestseller lists: during the period considered there was not a single work originally written in an eastern European language to be spotted on western European bestseller lists,

and no bestseller translated from other eastern European languages was discovered on eastern European lists. In other words: together with the obvious English, similar to western European lists, central European bestseller lists featured only the major European languages plus Swedish.<sup>2</sup> In this case, too, the works of the bestselling translated authors belonged to extremely different genres. Therefore, at least from a wider European perspective, discussions about the uniformity of book production are a matter of rather simplified views because the dominant role of some European book cultures manifests itself through a complex pattern of book genres and publishing practices.

## **Slovenia**

What is the situation in Slovenia like? Since 2009, the Booksellers Association has compiled its bestseller list by collecting data from fifteen selected bookshops. Instead of questionnaires, each bookshop submits information on its top-ten bestselling books. The list also does not differentiate between fiction and nonfiction, and so it sometimes includes publications that are classified as books according to the UNESCO Classification – although in their marketing they are more similar to paper accessories such as books published by the British publisher Exley. Judging the Slovenian list for the period between June and December 2009 by similar standards as other European lists, Slovenian Goran Vojnović (135 points) is the outright winner, followed by Dutch Ray Kluun (105 points) and two English authors, Kate Moss (72 points) and Elisabeth Gilbert (56 points). At the bottom are the Finnish author Aarto Paasilina (48 points), Serbian Mirjana Mojsilović (26 points), Spanish Carlos Ruiz Zafon (22 points), and the Americans Kathleen Woodiwiss (16 points) and Julie Garwood (13 points). The list ends with Slovenian Feri Lainšček (12 points).

A look at the publishers that publish bestselling authors (Table 4) including nonfiction reveals an interesting picture. Summing up the points of all bestsellers published by a particular publisher and without regard to the genre, Mladinska Knjiga publishers is the outright winner, followed by two family-owned publishers, Vale Novak and Učila, and the nonprofit Študentska Založba:



Table 4. Slovenian publishers and bestsellers.

Publisher	Bestsellers by month							
	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sept	Oct	Nov	Dec	Total
Mladinska Knjiga Založba	59	64	50	29	39	41	46	328
Vale-Novak	49	31	19	30	15		20	164
Učila International			13	31	30	33	33	140
Študentska Založba	20	20	20	20	20	20	15	135
Iskanja		13	14	18	18	19	16	98
Sanje			11	27	16			54
Modrijan	12				17	16		45
Didakta	15	16						31
Ara		11	12					23
Anu Elara			16					16
Finance						14		14
Azimut							13	13
Tehniška Založba Slovenije						12		12
CZ							12	12

The ratios are even more interesting when only the scores of fiction authors are considered. With only four relatively low-ranked nonfiction bestsellers on the list, Mladinska Knjiga remains in first place, whereas Študentska Založba comfortably wins second place with its megahit Vojnovič's *Čefurji raus*, which collected twice as many impact points as Učila with all their fiction works on the list.

In total, this suggests that the Slovenian book market is identical to all other European markets in terms of bookshop bestsellers. Genre-wise, it includes a range of highly diverse translated authors (such as Zafon, Paasilina, or Mojsilović) and only three women writers that could conditionally belong to the "Hollywood bestsellers" category (Woodvis, Moos, Gaarwood), whereas the outright winner of the list is local author Goran Vojnovič. Moreover, the biggest publisher in the country is indeed the outright winner of the combined list. However, the success of the small and nonprofit Študentska Založba is proof that both the Slovenian book market and the Slovenian readership are open enough to allow a peripheral publisher and an author – a marginalized individual by his own ideology – to produce a megahit. In short, the situation in Slovenia is similar to that elsewhere in Europe as far as bookshop bestseller lists are concerned.

Compared to most European countries, Slovenia has the advantage of very precisely monitored library lending, which is of utmost importance because the library network is significantly better developed than the bookshop network. Moreover, library lending rates are considerably

higher than book sales (see Kovač, “Patterns and Trends”). Library lending data for 2009, available at the Maribor Institute of Information website ([http://home.izum.si/cobiss/top\\_gradivo](http://home.izum.si/cobiss/top_gradivo)) show a significantly different picture compared to bookshop sales. Not counting required school reading and teenage fiction and nonfiction, the top-ten borrowed adult fiction authors include authors from the English-speaking world, dominated by women authors of romantic novels: Kathleen Woodiwiss with 52,690 loans holds the lead by a wide margin, followed by Julie Garwood (35,911 loans), James Patterson (27,082 loans), Amanda Quick (26,595 loans), Nora Roberts (23,199 loans), Danielle Steel (20,149 loans), Nicholas Sparks (19,767 loans), Dan Brown (19,240 loans), Anita Shreve (19,077 loans), and Stephenie Meyer (17,897 loans). The bestselling and the most frequently borrowed Slovenian author, Goran Vojnović, is far down on the list in twenty-first position.

Furthermore, the list of the most frequently borrowed books is dominated by a single English-speaking author, Kathleen Woodiwiss, with no fewer than five books among the top-ten most frequently borrowed books. Adding Julie Garwood with two titles among the top ten shows that genre pluralism of the most frequently borrowed books is significantly lower than that of the bestselling ones. At least at first sight it seems that, with regard to bestsellers and “best-loans,” Slovenia has produced a considerable paradox: whereas Slovenian bookshops and publishers maintain a rather high level of pluralism, libraries have established an almost perfect cultural uniformity, with the most frequently borrowed books dominated by translations of American romantic novels. From this point of view it therefore seems that the private sector in Slovenia is significantly more open and plural than the public one.

However, one should not jump to conclusions: in contrast to many other EU countries, the number of library loans in Slovenia far exceeds book sales (see Kovač, “Patterns and Trends”), and the number of library loans of Kathleen Woodiwiss’ works topped the 36,000 mark in 2009. According to available information, the sales of her works were almost ten times lower and the bestselling Slovenian book in 2008 and 2009, *Čefurji raus*, barely sold 10,000 copies in two years, which is almost 2,000 copies fewer than the number of the most widely borrowed book in 2009 alone. On the one hand, this confirms the hypothesis, already described in 2002 (Kovač, “Meje rasti”), that library loans in Slovenia have assumed the role that paperbacks have on large and more developed markets. In other words, library loans in Slovenia are a substitute for mass-market paperbacks. In this connection, one should also not forget that next to nothing is known about book sales at gas stations, megamalls, and kiosks.

Should these points of sale also become connected in a system similar to Nielsen's, it is quite possible that the fiction bestseller list will become similar to fiction best-loans list. However, this is only speculation: we know almost nothing about how library loans complement book sales elsewhere in Europe because such data are almost nonexistent and, consequently, it is not possible to draw any analogies.

Regardless, it is fitting to conclude that the Slovenian book market is as open and plural as the European one. At the same time, the prevailing taste of bookshop customers is different from that of library patrons, which takes us back to our original hypothesis: that we know very little about reading habits not only in Slovenia, but also in Europe. At this point, we find ourselves in an almost completely unexplored research field. With all the interrelations between differences and forms of domination, this still unexplored research field probably best embodies what makes Europe different from the rest of the world.

#### NOTES

<sup>1</sup> Larsson, for example, is published by Actes Sud – a medium-sized, Arles-based publisher. In England it is MacLehose Press, a small independent publisher specializing in translations, and his German publisher is Heyne, part of the largest media conglomerate, Random House. An analysis of other European bestselling books reveals a similar picture.

<sup>2</sup> This fact indicates that during the period considered Swedish literature was in a state of a unique expansion in Europe. The reasons for this would require a special analysis, which has not been addressed in this article.

#### ONLINE SOURCE

Nielsen Bookscan: <http://www.nielsenbookscan.co.uk/controller.php?page=48>

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