



ERICs – and beyond

FINAL REPORT

**WP2 „SURVEYS“ / SURVEY ON
READING HABITS IN THE EU**

ERICs – and beyond (Final Report WP2 “Surveys”/Survey on reading habits in the EU)

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Authors:

Christoph Bläsi (JGU)
Kristenn Einarsson (NPA)
Luis González (FGSR)
Leon Bleser (JGU)



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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Aldus Up is the European Book fairs network coordinated by the Italian Publishers Association (AIE) for the internationalization of the book sector, with particular attention to the digital shift. This large-scale cooperation project is co-funded in the framework of the Creative Europe program 2014-2020 for a duration of 48 months (September 2020 – August 2024 [originally 42 months]). Aldus Up promotes surveys, research and initiatives addressing translation trends, changes in reading habits and promotions as well as research activities increasing audience development and accessibility of book fairs.

In the Work Package 2 named «Surveys» Aldus Up proposed - among other studies covered in separate documents - the goal of studying reading behaviors in different European countries and make them more comparable. As formulated in the detailed research description of the project: «In two of these areas (reading habits and translation trends), data are currently collected in the different countries independently, with different methodology by different organizations. In those cases, project surveys will include a comparative analysis of national statistics and guidance for developing a common methodology at EU level, piloted in at least one country.»

In this report, we will present the main outcomes of the work done by the Aldus Up Working Group on Reading and what we propose the next steps should be.

ERICs, EuRopean Item Core Set for Reading Surveys, has been developed, tested, and taken into use in three pilot countries. Several other countries are in the process of adapting ERICS. ERICS is the central lever that makes studies on reading behaviour comparable across EU countries. To obtain pan-European coverage further efforts are needed. This is also addressed in this report.

In the course of the work on ERICS - and parallel to very visible societal developments and corresponding discourses concerning the importance of reading - it became more and more clear that it is extremely difficult to dissociate reading surveys from their prime interventional applications, namely to strive for the consensual objective of more and better reading across Europe. Not compromising our primary objective and indispensable first step - to foster comparable European reading surveys -, we therefor also had a look on what is known about reading promotion policies and measures across the EU.

Reading promotion: A structured/categorized data repository of reading promotion policies and measures - based on work we started, not least concerning the categories needed to identify successful benchmark solutions worth copying should be established for further research and for interested parties to learn from the best. Recommendable efforts in this direction are outlined in a sub-report.

The way forward: Generally speaking, there is a need to establish a coordinated approach to this work in Europe. A pan-European project, organized to answer the coming call from the Horizon Europa program will be established and will include the roll-out of ERICS and proposed collection on reading promotion measures. The argumentation here is that for the next step we put reading promotion centre stage and as a point of departure - and see ERICS or the further development and roll-out of comparable reading surveys across the EU, respectively, as a necessary

prerequisite - not taking away anything from the complexity of this task alone. A pre-project is also proposed, financed through Erasmus+. The project will involve key academic centres for reading and publishing studies, organizations working in the field of reading promotion and democracy building, school owners, teachers and pupils as well as producers of content for formal and non-formal education. Other art forms (music, painting, gaming, performing etc.) will also be considered and particular attention will be on young people from disadvantaged background. Such a project, that draws on the pan-European experience of both the academic world and those that work in the field, will be very important in the push forward. There will also be formed links internationally for cooperation.

1. THE EUROPEAN ITEM CORE SET FOR READING SURVEYS (ERICs)

As a start, the Aldus Up Working Group on Reading analysed all regular European reading surveys we could identify. The corresponding findings were published via the K-Hub under the title “Survey on reading habits in Europe: state of the art”). Based on that – and with input from reading researchers on which informations are indispensable to get a grip on the status of reading in a country –, the working group has developed ERICs to facilitate that key data on reading development is collected in the same way across Europe, enabling us to compare and learn from each other. Reading surveys give us the necessary information to consider the progress of the actions taken. Thus, this standard is not aiming at one unified questionnaire, but at enriching existing surveys by creating a common “core” of data which is easily comparable across national borders to deepen our understanding of what today’s readers in Europe do and do not have in common when it comes to their use of printed books, e-books and audiobooks. While implementing ERICs, surveys can still keep their sometimes long-standing diverse emphases. We will present the ERICs framework in the following in its 2.0 version; this slightly updated version is based on the experiences we gathered from the implementation of ERICs (1.0) in Spain, Norway and Italy.

1.1 THE ERICs FRAMEWORK

The framework provided by ERICs 2.0 recommends the following methodology: The data collection is not generally limited to one particular approach, instead each country has to find the right balance between three questions: What is the best way to reach the relevant target group? Which method provides the best answers? What are the costs? More importantly the chosen methodological approach and the main findings should be translated to English in order to facilitate the access to and comparison of the data. While we don’t propose a specific sample size, it requires representativeness. Additionally, the minimum age should be set at 16, as parental consent is generally no longer required from this age in most European countries. Logically, data on children’s reading behavior should be collected separately.

The items we propose to integrate in the respective questionnaires are as follows:

Questionnaire Items

1) Socio-demographic variables

1a) Which gender do you identify with? [single code question; answer required]

- Male
- Female
- Non-binary

1b) How old are you? [answer required]

_____ years [numbers only]

1c) Where do you live? [answer required]

Please indicate your postcode _____ [numbers only] and city of residence _____
[letters only]

1d) What is your highest level of education? [single code question; answer required]

- No formal education
- Primary school or equivalent
- Secondary school or equivalent
- Vocational school or equivalent
- University or equivalent

2) Reading variables

2a) When you think of the books you read or listen to in your leisure time, which of the following formats do you use? [multi code question; answer required]

Please note that this only refers to fiction or non-fiction books (including e.g. comic books) that you yourself read or listen to for pleasure. Books that you read or listen to for school, study or work, reference books which you refer to from time to time (e.g. recipe books, travel guides, manuals), and books which you read to/with other people (e.g. young children) are NOT included in the following questions.

- Print books
- Ebooks
- Audiobooks
- None of the above/I don't read or listen to books in my leisure time

2a1) Print books [conditional questions; only if "Print books" was answered in 2a)]

2a1.1) Approximately how many print books have you read in your leisure time in the last year? [single code question; answer required]

- _____ print books [numbers only]
- I don't know

2a1.2) How often do you usually spend time reading a print book in your leisure time? [single code question; answer required]

- every day or almost every day
- a few times a week
- a few times a month
- a few times a year or less
- I don't know

2a1.3) When you think about last week, approximately how much time have you spent reading print books in your leisure time? [single code question; answer required]

- ____hours____minutes (numbers only)
- I don't know

The same pattern (2a1.1 – 2a1.3) applies accordingly for e-books and audiobooks:

2a2) E-books

2a2.1) Approximately how many e-books have you read in your leisure time in the last year?

2a2.2) How often do you usually spend time reading an e-book in your leisure time?

2a2.3) When you think about last week, approximately how much time have you spent reading e-books in your leisure time?

2a3) Audiobooks

2a3.1) Approximately how many audiobooks have you listened to in your leisure time in the last year?

2a3.2) How often do you usually spend time listening to an audiobook in your leisure time?

2a3.3) When you think about last week, approximately how much time have you spent listening to audiobooks in your leisure time?

Supplement 1: Optional ranges for questionnaire items

Collecting exact numbers is the preferred option. If your survey method requires presenting ranges to respondents to avoid them from answering "I don't know", please use the ranges below.

2a1.1) Approximately how many print books have you read in your leisure time in the last year? [single code question; answer required]

- ____print books (numbers only)
- Hard to say

2a1.1a) Approximately how many print books have you read in your leisure time in the last year?

[conditional question; only if "hard to say" was answered in 2a1.1); single code question; answer required]

- 1-4 print books
- 5-12 print books
- 13-24 print books
- 25-52 print books
- more than 52 print books
- I don't know

2a1.3) When you think about last week, approximately how much time have you spent reading print books in your leisure time? [single code question; answer required]

- ____hours____minutes (numbers only)
- Hard to say

2a1.3a) When you think about last week, approximately how much time have you spent reading print books in your leisure time? [conditional question; only if "hard to say" was answered in 2a1.3); single code question; answer required]

- less than 30 minutes
- 30 minutes to 1 hour
- 1-3 hours
- 3-7 hours
- more than 7 hours
- I don't know

The same pattern applies accordingly for e-books (2a2.1, 2a2.3) and audiobooks (2a3.1, 2a3.3).

The recommended variables consist of four socio-demographic (gender, age, place of residence, level of education) and four reading items: (1) the use of the different **formats**: printed books, e-books and audiobooks; (2) the **frequency** at which people tend to read or listen to books; (3) the quantity, i.e. the number of **units** consumed over the course of one year; (4) how much **time** is spent on these activities in an average week. Please note that the overall focus is on reading for pleasure, while reading for educational or professional purposes is not part of the basic reading variables, nor is quickly consulting reference books or reading books to or with others such as children or older people. Furthermore, reading materials other than printed books, e-books and audiobooks such as newspapers, magazines, blogs, etc. are explicitly excluded in the ERICS standard.

For further details on how to then process the numbers, see the data sheets in the appendix.

1.2 AN IMPORTANT DEVELOPMENT STEP

As mentioned, we had revisited ERICS to incorporate our learnings from the three pilots resulting in ERICS 2.0 which had been published on October 18th 2023 via the K-HUB under the title “ERICs 2.0. New guidelines for collecting comparable data on book reading in Europe”).

The evaluation of the ERICS-compliant surveys run in Norway, Spain and Italy (and the feed-back given by the people responsible for those) led e.g. to the understanding that people sometimes feel unsettled by the question, how many books they had read in the past year – if they are not sure (who is, really ?), they prefer to tick a box with a range of numbers (see the example from ERICS 2.0 above). With respect to the (evaluation) methodology, it is true that ERICS-compliant surveys do not necessarily have to include the exact items proposed – it must only be possible to map the items used to the ERICS ones. The experiences in Norway, Spain and Italy showed that future items can be modified in a way that not as many mapping and evaluation efforts are required. It also turned out that a harmonisation of internal reference units can make things easier: it is e.g. obviously a difference, if the percentage of e-book readers is specified as a share of readers or as a share of the sample as a whole ... Not least and as a matter of course, the evaluation confirmed what we had known all along: reading issues are complicated indeed. There are e.g. a whole range of individual and cultural specificities that can have their bearing on the results: is reading only higher-level reading or is reading a fashion blog on the web also reading? Is reading a book in a foreign language the same

as reading one in the mother tongue (this issue has been raised in small markets with a high share of English-language editions like in Slovenia)? All this has been communicated back to the organisers of the surveys.

1.3 ROLLING OUT ERICS

After the development, the test and the improvement of ERICS, implementing the item core set in more and more European reading surveys in collaboration with respective partners has been a challenging task. In what follows we try to describe the current state of development for each country.

Countries where ERICS has been implemented for periodic reading surveys

As mentioned, ERICS, particularly ERICS 2.0, has been developed in close collaboration not least with key stakeholders in three pilot countries (**Italy, Norway and Spain**); it is now fully implemented in their national surveys, allowing us – and in principle any other interested institution – to monitor the development of reading in these three countries, on the basis of common variables. The work in these pilot countries gives clear evidence that it is possible that ERICS can be implemented (even including maintaining the longitudinal comparability with prior surveys in the respective countries, if the necessary measures are taken) and enables obtaining reading data that are directly comparable with those from other participating countries.

Countries currently in the process of implementing ERICS

Latvia: A survey run in cooperation with the Latvian National Library is being carried out right now. Results will be provided by the survey company at the end of August 2024 and a detailed report will follow in the autumn of 2024. Unfortunately, there is no guaranteed funding to ensure the regularity of this survey, but the new director of the National Library is very motivated to obtain the necessary means.

Slovenia: Slovenia plans to run its updated (and ERICS-compliant) reading survey in June 2024 and will most likely publish the results in November (together with a set of international comparisons) in the format of a book. The Slovenian survey is planned to be run every 5 years and is based on an initial survey from 1979 which gets continuously adapted according to the media and societal circumstances – or of course initiatives like ERICS. The next survey is expected to be run in 2029.

Ukraine: In 2023, the Ukrainian Book Institute reached out to us as they planned to launch a new regular reading survey which they wanted to make ERICS-compliant. In October 2023, the relevant data sheets were shared with us. UBI and Info Sapiens will run the next, 2024, survey soon, once again including all ERICS items.

Countries still on their way in the direction of ERICS ...

Many contacts in different countries we have been in talks with showed interest in ERICS but are not in the stage of having an ERICS-compliant survey run in their respective countries any time soon due to different reasons. This applies to the Czech Republic, the Netherlands and the UK (although not in the EU any longer). Decisions are pending on a political level in Denmark, Portugal, Slovakia and Sweden. The states reached in the respective conversations are well documented, to be used by the body taking over the responsibility for ERICS after the end of Aldus Up. In some countries – among them Finland, Germany, Greece and Romania – preparations have not started yet or a reading survey is not on the current agenda. For the case of Germany – represented with two partners in Aldus Up – the current state is to have a future annual, ERICS-compliant reading survey (in Germany, there is no periodic one yet at all!) harboured within an evolving interdisciplinary German reading research and reading promotion center. Preparations are made to get in contact regularly with the countries mentioned to follow up. With some countries – Bulgaria, Hungary, Iceland, Lithuania, Belgium, France and Poland – WGOR was in contact, but with no immediate perspective of a collaboration in the near future – constructive contacts have been established nonetheless. Furthermore, WGOR talked to relevant people in Australia as well as in South Korea to present ERICS; there is a general interest to have and contribute to comparable data about reading habits also outside of Europe.

1.4 USING ERICS – FIRST ENCOURAGING RESULTS OF COMPARISONS ACROSS COUNTRIES

The vision behind ERICS is undoubtedly an international one that fosters European (and global) cooperation. Countries, that for the longest time went their own, separate ways when it came to surveying reading habits, are offered a collaborative add-on in form of a unified core that doesn't diminish individual emphasises. This enables to compare data on reading behaviour patterns across borders, identify national differences and similarities and then analyse the possible reasons to why

certain countries can be seen as role models and others may be in need of changing their reading strategy and programmes.

This can be exemplified by a sneak peek into results we found looking at the Norwegian, Italian and Spanish surveys from 2022, where comparison of some variables was made possible by ERICs for the first time. The data tells us that the percentage of leisure time readers was very similar in Italy (66%) and Spain (67,9%) with Norway taking the crown at 83%. A closer look into format specifics shows that there were significant differences in the details: Italy had the biggest share of e-book readers (33%) doubling Norway (15%), where audiobooks had become a more popular format (22.3%). While audiobooks reached similar numbers in Italy (20%), Spain in contrast made little use of the format (5.2 %).

	ITALY	SPAIN	NORWAY
TOTAL READERS	66 %	66.7 %	83 %
NON READERS	34 %	35.6 %	17 %

FORMATS	ITALY	SPAIN	NORWAY
Print books	52 %	56.2 %	76 %
Ebooks	33 %	27.2 %	15 %
Audiobooks	20 %	5.2 %	22.3 %
None of the above	34 %	35.4 %	17 %

Further differences appear when looking at reading with regards to age, as elaborated in an K-Hub article by WGOR’s Owena Reinke: ”In Spain the age groups between 25 to 59 years showed a relatively even share of readers (around 67%), rendering the graph into a broad, central plateau with two inverse little ‘wings’ at both ends (upward for the 14-24 year old and downward for the

seniors). The Italian graph, on the other hand, appears more classical, starting with a remarkable 90% among the 16-24 year olds, and decreasing more or less gradually with each group to reach its lowest point in the upper age spectrum. In Norway, the situation was very much the opposite. Here, the share of leisure time readers is significantly higher, yielding a total average of 83%. And it is the seniors boosting this total upward, not the young adults. What we see is a steady increase from 77% among the young adults (16-19 years) to 89% among those aged over 69. Just looking at the high Norwegian average (83%) would mean to ignore the declining popularity in books across the younger generation that will eventually decrease the overall numbers.”

These few examples show, that looking into the subsets is necessary to gain insight beyond the first layer averages, to identify (concerning) national trends. By having an idea where ones country is in the European context, seeking improvements by adopting best practices of other countries being transparently graspable through ERICS is far more accessible.

1.5 CONTINUING ERICS

Due to the predetermined duration and funding of Aldus Up, neither our Working Group specifically nor the overarching project was intended to act as a permanent data aggregator which gathers the harmonized surveys and presents comparisons. With ERICS being implemented in several countries now and the seed having been planted in various others, it must be assured that this initiative doesn't fizzle out due to a lacking communication infrastructure. In the years to come ERICS data need to continuously get publicly shared in English language and member institutions have to be aware of each other and who to get in touch with when exchange is needed.

2. THE FUNDAMENTAL LINK TO READING PROMOTION – A CROSS REFERENCE

We had first identified the fundamental link between surveying reading on the one and promoting reading on the other hand back in 2021 when our working group published the “Survey on reading habits in Europe: state of the art”; in this document, we claim „[...] [R]eading surveys and their results will be related to normative considerations on how and what to read, attempts to explain behaviour as well as changes in behaviour and overarching current developments with respect to reading/book reception, e.g., audiobooks and reading from screens.“ This was further emphasized in a white paper

by Christoph Bläsi, Dörthe Fröhlich and Owena Reinke of the Working Group on Reading: “Based on a common understanding that reading is something important and positive, it is necessary to have reliable insights into what, how, etc. people read in a respective country, not only for market participants of the book trade, but especially also for policy makers. [...] Not least, systematic reading promotion certainly can benefit from better and more comparable reading surveys.” In the Ljubljana Reading Manifesto, the authors also stress this link between promoting and surveying reading: “All policy making that involves reading needs to be based on an awareness of this intrinsic value of reading, but also on wide ranging solid empirical knowledge about reading. In order to understand its role and impact on contemporary societies, it is important to chart and analyse the development of reading skills, and to invest in further reading research, including especially of higher level reading and how to teach it.”

Because of these insights and inputs, we have – within Aldus Up – taken a few steps to recognize this connection between surveying and promoting reading. These will be covered in a subreport of this report, called “Working off of each other: Reading surveys and reading promotion activities”.

3. THE WAY FORWARD

The way forward we are advocating will, first of all, consist of convincing more European countries to use the core set provided by ERICS for their reading surveys. Moreover, the connection between surveying and promoting reading should be more than a connection systematically identified by professional observers – it should be a connection brought to life in a project (or more than one project) that brings together the beneficial effects of reading (recently the preservation of democracy has been added as a beneficial effect in the intellectual and societal discourse), the need for reading promotion that results from that and reading surveys as problem detection, benchmarking and intervention controlling tools.

To conclude with another quote calling the “Democracies depend on reading” discourse from The Ljubljana Reading Manifesto: “Today’s sophisticated society is not just the product of reading; it depends on reading for its future survival and continued resilience”. We need to “appreciate that reading is our culture’s central training technique for cognitive and social behavior and a precondition for a properly functioning democracy”.

4. APPENDIX

ERICs template for central results shares

** Please specify whether your survey defines READERS as users of (a) printed, e-book and audiobook; (b) printed and e-book; or (c) other*

READERS TOTAL

All shares refer to the total number of respondents to maintain comparability.

Shares in %					
	NON-READERS*	PRINTED BOOKS	E-BOOKS	AUDIOBOOKS	READERS*
TOTAL					
USING ONLY THIS FORMAT					
GENDER					
MALE					
FEMALE					
NON-BINARY					
EDUCATION					
LEVEL 1					
LEVEL 2					
LEVEL 3					
LEVEL 4					
LEVEL 5					
AGE (basic) <i>Required as a substitute if detailed data (below) cannot be provided</i>					
<25					
25-44					
45-64					
65+					
AGE (Detailed)					
16-17					
18-19					
20-24					
25-34					
35-44					
45-54					
55-64					
65-74					
75+					

All data which does not correspond with the exact margins given is left blank.

UNITS PER ANNUM

All quantities refer to the sample of those who actually use the format(s) in question (not to the total).

Averages in numbers (#.#)

	NON-READERS*	PRINTED BOOKS	E-BOOKS	AUDIOBOOKS	READERS*
TOTAL					

GENDER

MALE					
FEMALE					
NON-BINARY					

EDUCATION

LEVEL 1					
LEVEL 2					
LEVEL 3					
LEVEL 4					
LEVEL 5					

Shares in %

	NON-READERS*	PRINTED BOOKS	E-BOOKS	AUDIOBOOKS	READERS*
groups					
0 units					
1-4 units					
5-12 units					
13-24 units					
25-52 units					
53+					
Don't know					

Please differentiate "N/A" (option not available) and "0" (no-one chose this answer).

FREQUENCY (total)

All shares refer to the total number of respondents to maintain comparability.

Shares in %

	every day (or almost every day)	a few times a week	a few times a month	a few times a year (or less)	"Don't know"
TOTAL					

Please differentiate "N/A" (option not available) and "0" (no-one chose this answer)

GENDER

MALE					
FEMALE					
NON-BINARY					

EDUCATION

LEVEL 1					
LEVEL 2					
LEVEL 3					
LEVEL 4					
LEVEL 5					

AGE (basic) *Required as a substitute if detailed data (below) cannot be provided*

<25					
25-44					
45-64					
65+					

AGE (Detailed)

16-17					
18-19					
20-24					
25-34					
35-44					
45-54					
55-64					
65-74					
75+					

TIME PER WEEK

All durations refer to the sample of those who actually use the format(s) in question (not to the total)

Averages in hh:mm

	NON-READERS*	PRINTED BOOKS	E-BOOKS	AUDIOBOOKS	READERS*
TOTAL	0				

GENDER

MALE	0				
FEMALE	0				
NON-BINARY					

EDUCATION

LEVEL 1	0				
LEVEL 2	0				
LEVEL 3	0				
LEVEL 4					
LEVEL 5					

Shares in %

	NON-READERS*	PRINTED BOOKS	E-BOOKS	AUDIOBOOKS	READERS*
groups					
0:00 - 0:29	100				
0:30 - 0:59	0				
1:00 - 2:59	0				
3:00 - 6:59	0				
7:00 +	0				
Don't know	0				

Please differentiate "N/A" (option not available) and "0" (no-one chose this answer).

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