

Summary



Phones that Talk / The Spoken Word, Smartphones and AI – The Leading Trends of 2018 in the Media Industry Make it a Year of Dying Ideas (Boris Hänßler)
(pp. 546 – 549)

This was no good year for start-ups in the media industry. Sobooks, a company founded by the Internet pioneer Sascha Lobo to offer e-books on an independent online platform, had to close as a result of bad business decisions. PaperC, a portal for borrowing digital academic literature, has filed for insolvency. The free e-book provider Readfy has introduced austerity measures. And the Dutch platform Bookchoice, a digital book club, has folded. Start-ups seem to be perishing like flies, even though mobilized communication – with the increase of smartphones – is ceaselessly on the rise and people are more digital-savvy than ever before.

The trends of the past twelve months are indeed sobering. At the centre of it all is not a mere hype, but the spoken word. Many people enjoy listening to audio books, radio plays or podcasts, and the smartphone plays a key role in this. One trend is now the increasingly common cross-linkage of apps, and a rise of communication between apps themselves, such as with the appearance of further suggestions from Google while visiting any other website.

The smartphone is an attractive device for communication, for watching films, viewing photos, listening to music and playing games; therefore time is spent with smartphones which people would otherwise have spent reading books. This possibly applies to spending money, too. Apps are cheap. Hence, readers expect digital books to be similarly inexpensive. Although readers bought one million more ebooks on the popular reading market in 2017 than in the year before, sales figures have fallen. This was caused by lower prices, which now average 6.38€ per ebook. And the number of ebook buyers is also declining, from 3.8 million customers in 2016 to 3.5 million in the past year.

Peripheral Regions of Former Empires Are Moved to the Foreground / Analogue and Digital Records about Georgia at the Leibniz Institute for East and Southeast European Studies (Tillmann Tegeler)
(pp. 554 – 557)

Despite any disagreements which may arise with regard to the question of Georgia being part of Europe, it is indisputable that this Caucasian country is on the outskirts of Europe. Whether within or without, that is in the eye of the beholder. Its peripheral location is the reason that the Leibniz Institute for East and Southeast European Studies (IOS) – which, though founded only a few years ago in Regensburg, has roots going back much further – had rarely given serious attention to this small country on the Black Sea. Usually it was viewed within the scope of whatever empire it was a part of at any given time.

At the Eastern European Institute (OEI) in Munich, one of the predecessor institutions of IOS, economic analyses of the entire Soviet Union were prepared during the cold war years, in which the member republics were regarded merely as subjects of the union. With regard to its history, in the other discipline pursued at OEI, no monographs have been written about Georgia. One might suspect that this has had repercussions for the library's collection. And, in fact, literature about Georgia, this year's guest of honour at the Frankfurt Book Fair, seems at first glance to be relatively scanty in the IOS library's overall holdings of 330,000 items. Nonetheless there are, for example, statistical year-books documenting its socio-economic situation and fundamental studies in history and geography, albeit mainly in Russian.

The Presence of the Past / The New Exhibit of the German Exile Archive 1933-1945 at the German National Library (Jan-Pieter Barbian)
(pp. 558 – 562)

A newly designed and curated exhibition of the German Exile Archive has been on display at the German National Library in Frankfurt a.M. since March 2018. When looking at the past, to the years 1933 to 1945, it is clear how ever-present the themes of expulsion and flight remain today.

When the collection of »Exile Literature«, then under the direction of Werner Berthold (1921-2017), was first shown in 1965 at the German Library, it encompassed 8,000 books and periodicals. Today the collection has grown to include more than 19,000 books and brochures, 13,000 periodical volumes, nearly 34,200 newspaper cuttings, 1,700 flyers as well as other miscellanea. Extending beyond the collection »Exile Literature 1933-1945« at the German Library Leipzig, the German Exile Archive in Frankfurt am Main provides documentation regarding the wide range of fates, encounters and activities which emigrants experienced, the conditions under which they found places of exile in which they could live and work, the involvement of politicians and various exile organisations in opposition to the National Socialist dictatorship, and the possibilities available for a return to Germany after 1945.

Since the 1960s there have been a variety of exhibitions and numerous programme events devoted to a range of themes stemming from the collection, such as the countries of exile, exile organisations, specific individuals or larger groups of Jewish emigrants, on the activities of publishing houses in exile, or about how circles of emigrants related to the classical works of Goethe. Since March 2018 there is now a permanent exhibition with the title »Exile. Experience and Testimony« located in the 800 square-meter lobby of the German National Library which displays 250 original objects from emigrants' estates and more than 300 publications.

Translated by Martha Baker