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The secondary book market in Poland

The subject of this text is the secondary book market in Poland¹. Usually, it has been referred to as the “antiquarian market”, which is a simplifying term, though it has reflected the reality until recently. The dominating entity in this market (in reality and in social reception) was the stationary antiquarian bookshop. Its model was shaped in the 19th and the 20th centuries, but it lost its monopoly at the beginning of the 21st century. It was due to the emergence of the Internet as the platform for exchange and trade. Therefore, the term “antiquarian market” is no longer sufficient.

The concept of the secondary book market comprises institutions and processes related to the antiquarian bookseller’s assortment that has been published and introduced into trading at least once beforehand or, in other words, all library materials that have already been sold or published by a widely defined originator. The originator is here widely understood, because the said assortment includes traded items that are not only books, though they constitute the majority, but also all library materials, i.e. manuscripts, official documents etc., as well as items of a completely different nature, e.g. stationery and artworks. This research covers all known institutions and forms of assortment exchange, its composition and the structure of the offer, sources and methods of sourcing, preparation and marketing as well as sale and the market participants. The latter can generally be divided into service providers (vendors, brokers, organisers of the exchange, experts) and service recipients (the selling party and the buying party), although many participants often play both roles. A special emphasis has been placed on customers who are very active buyers, i.e. bibliophiles, collectors and libraries. Non-commercial activity of stationary antiquarian bookshops seen as cultural institutions is also taken into account.

The second-hand book trade in Poland has been developing and evolving throughout the centuries. The number of recipients was growing along with the quantities of available items and the forms of trading were improving. The 19th century started with street selling, but then a network of stationary antiquarian bookshops emerged in the Polish lands, offering a varied level of services, depending on the assortment quality and the needs of the local communities.

¹ G. Nieć, *Wtórny rynek książki w Polsce. Instytucje, asortyment, uczestnicy*, Kraków 2016.

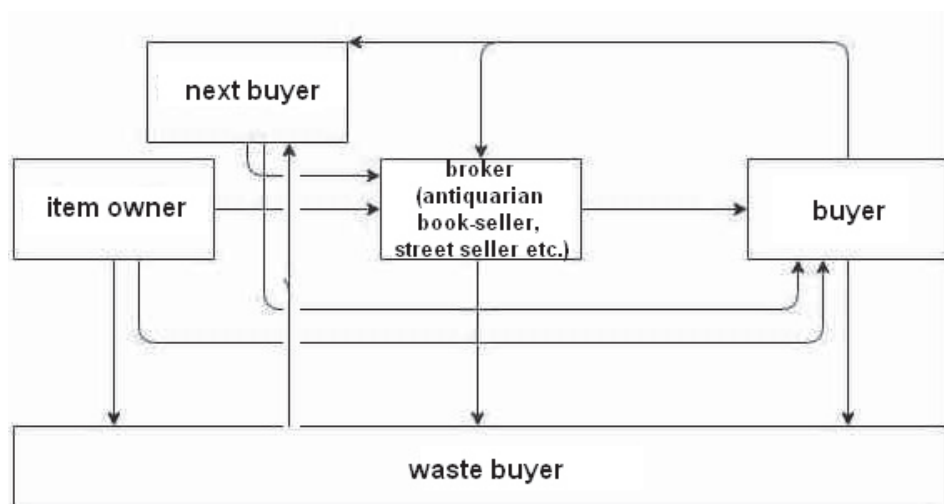


Fig. 1. Diagram of the secondary book market

In general, these activities consisted of trade and dissemination of vintage books, second-hand books and books which were out of print. Trade plays an essential and strategic role for culture and science, which is self-evident and constant, while dissemination comprises replenishment and support of spreading literary production, mainly through creating an attractive alternative to usually quite expensive new books. The significance of this second segment comes to the foreground in the case of social groups whose financial resources would not allow them to fully satisfy their needs of reading, education and collecting books. The larger the group, the more essential this segment becomes. Another equally important question is the use of the growing number of materials which must be sold by their present owners so that they create free room and obtain money for new books.

However, in some periods the secondary book market gains more importance and has more tasks to perform. In the years of Poland's subjection to foreign powers, as well as in the time of occupation and the Polish People's Republic, the institutions of the secondary book market were often responsible for illegal publications² and counteracted (at times very extreme) shortages of other types of publications, resulting either from the restrictions imposed by censorship, or the ineffectiveness of the state publishing institutions. Furthermore, the secondary book market institutions played an important role in reconstructing old libraries and establishing new, public and private libraries after the end of the Second World War.

Gradually, the secondary book market became institutionalised. Immediately after the Second World War, private stationary antiquarian bookshops dominated, especially in the Regained Territories. Following the eradication of independent publishing and book-selling, a network of state facilities was organised and dominated the secondary market, although there remained a number of small private

² S. Pazyra, *Z dziejów książki polskiej w czasie drugiej wojny światowej*, Warszawa 1970, p. 109.

antiquarian bookshops³. This network developed without interruption until the transformation of the political system in 1989, which started a new era in the entire history of the book market in Poland⁴.

After a dozen years of intensified changes, a network of antiquarian bookshops emerged that was hardly resembling the one from the time before 1989, especially in the areas outside the largest academic and cultural centres. This network has lost its former significance due to the partial or complete transfer of numerous book-selling entities to the Internet, as well as the emergence of many new entities which do business exclusively online. The offered assortment has been profoundly revalued, as certain types of publications and topics have been depreciated, and it has affected nearly all market participants. Antiquarian booksellers are no longer the providers of deficient products, and many owners of private collections that often required a great deal of efforts and expenses are becoming aware of their significantly lower value.

The contexts and conditions in which the secondary book market in Poland has been taking shape and functioning after 1989 is very complex and multi-threaded⁵. The changes which started in the last decade of the previous century were happening simultaneously in many areas: economy (implementation of market principles), social life and culture (democratisation, new life styles, transformations in the education system and science)⁶, technology (distribution of new tools and forms of communication, especially the Internet)⁷, laws (taxes, conditions for transporting historic items abroad)⁸. These changes influenced the secondary market indirectly. Direct factors are structural and qualitative transformations of publishing and book-selling. They have contributed to a considerable growth and diversification of the present offer and, in consequence, to the satisfaction of demand and elimination of many years' shortages⁹.

³ G. Nieć, *Antykwaryat Przedsiębiorstwa Państwowego „Dom Książki” w latach 1951–1989 w świetle polskiej prasy księgarskiej*, „Roczniki Biblioteczne” 2012, 56, p. 137–171.

⁴ B. Klukowski, M. Tobera, *W tym niezwykłym czasie. Początki transformacji polskiego rynku książki (1989–1995)*, Warszawa 2013.

⁵ M. Bałtowski, *Gospodarka socjalistyczna w Polsce. Geneza – rozwój – upadek*, Warszawa 2009, p. 287–290.

⁶ M. Jacyno, *Style życia*, [in:] A. Giza, M. Sikorska (eds.), *Współczesne społeczeństwo polskie*, Warszawa 2012, p. 271–312; J. Snopek, *Czyściec czy piekło? Miejsce polskiej inteligencji po 1989 roku na tle jej dziejów*, [in:] H. Domański (ed.), *Inteligencja w Polsce. Specjaliści, twórcy, klerkowie, klasa średnia?*, Warszawa 2008, p. 103–126.

⁷ M. Juza, *Kultura Internetu w Polsce. Od akademickich początków do upowszechnienia zjawiska*, Kraków 2012.

⁸ P. Ogrodzki, *Zmiany w zasadach wywozu zabytków za granicę na stałe. Projekt nowelizacji ustawy o ochronie zabytków i opiece nad zabytkami przyjęty przez Radę Ministrów*, „Cenne, Bezcenne, Utracone” 2009, no. 2, p. 11–13; P. Podniesiński, *Biblioteka – antykwariat – prokuratura. Obrót książkami z „wadą prawną” w handlu antykwarycznym*, [in:] A. Kamler, D. Pietrzakiewicz (eds.), *Dziedzictwo utracone – dziedzictwo odzyskane*, Warszawa 2014, p. 63–75.

⁹ S. Siekierski, *Książka we współczesnej kulturze polskiej*, Pułtusk 2006; I. Korys, O. Dawidowicz-Chymkowska, *Spółeczny zasięg książki w Polsce w 2010 roku. Bilans dwudziestolecia*, Warszawa 2012; O. Dawidowicz-Chymkowska, D. Michalak, *Stan czytelnictwa w Polsce w 2012 roku. Transmisja kultury pisma*, Warszawa 2015; J. Kostecki et. al. (eds.), *Książki w codziennym życiu Polaków. Raport z badania Polskiej Izby Książki „Kierunki i formy transformacji czytelnictwa w Polsce”*, Warszawa 2015; J. Trávniček, *Překnížkováno. Co čteme a kupujeme (2013)*, Brno 2015, p. 87, 100, 161.

The organisational structure of the secondary book market in Poland comprises three basic segments: stationary institutions, non-stationary institutions and the Internet. They differ as to the forms of activity and the assortment, but there exist various interrelations. Some institutions limit their activities to one segment, while others are active in more than one segment. The difference between them is based on the offer and its level of preparation, the organisational structure and facilities, as well as the efficiency and quality of services.

The spatial placement of facilities included in the segments of the secondary market is differential. The density level of book market stationary institutions in the given territory depends mainly on the character and cultural potential of the given city, the assortment quantities, as well as on tradition and on how deeply-rooted the businesses are, and how they relate to the academic and cultural environment. For these reasons, the top ranking places are the largest academic cities and agglomerations with population exceeding 300 thousand inhabitants. Here one must distinguish two cities, Kraków and Warsaw, both for the market's quality and volume. Nearly all of the leading facilities in the sector are located in these cities and almost 90% of antiquarian actions take place there. However, it is sometimes the case that relatively minor antiquarian bookshops play an important role in their cities. They always contribute to the atmosphere of the historic city centre and constitute its necessary attribute. A good opportunity for antiquarian book-sellers and bouquinistes (street book-sellers) who want to do business in attractive sites of the city is to become involved in non-commercial activities and participate in cultural projects, especially if they promote reading. The cultural politics of communes (management of facilities for rent, the rent rates, taxes) also influences the spatial structure of the network of antiquarian bookshops and the attitude of local governments and communities towards book market institutions. Disproportionate spatial distribution of antiquarian bookshops is to a large extent compensated by the Internet, which allows virtually everyone to become the book market participant.

The secondary market after political and economic transformation has regained its regular, formerly known role and the demand for particular types of items. It mainly depends on the value of the given item to bibliophiles and collectors, as well as other external factors, though to a lesser extent (e.g. seasonal assortment).

The problems that effectively hinder the development of the secondary book market in Poland include, on the one hand, a limited number of the most popular items sought by bibliophiles and collectors, and on the other hand, a shortage of attractive assortment, especially vintage books, that would appeal to customers and provide more businesses with larger profits. For obvious reasons, this shortage cannot be eliminated, but one can and one in fact should draw the buyers' attention to sections and groups of items that are not popular, even though they deserve popularity judging by the merits of the contents¹⁰. For this to happen, we need coordinated and ongoing activities modelled on similar initiatives in the Western countries. Such activities can be carried out by dynamic sector organisations which Poland unfortunately lacks. A sufficient example of the existing opportunities is the extreme disproportion between the prices of the first editions of books by the leading Polish

¹⁰ M. Maksymiuk, *Antykwarstwo lat 90. Charakterystyka, „Perspektywy Kultury”* 2010, no. 2 (1/2010): *Supermarket i antykwariat – bieguny współczesnej kultury*, p. 49–54.

authors of the second half of the 19th century and the 20th century in comparison to their Western counterparts. The classics of Polish literature are some of the most popular subjects in Polish bibliophile collections, especially those dated from the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Old Polish and Enlightenment prints enjoy a long established position as auction rarities. Similarly, the first editions of works of Romantic writers are in high demand, as well as works from the second half of the nineteenth century, which address particular themes and fulfil specific needs¹¹.

The customers of the secondary book market are divided according to the intensity and characteristics of their purchases. The buyers include: occasional buyers, seasonal buyers, moderately active buyers and active buyers, as well as those who often (even systematically) visit antiquarian bookshops and street sellers, but make no purchases. The largest group among the moderately active and active buyers includes people with cultural competences above average and knowledge about the items and methods of purchase. This group can be defined as a group of widely understood bibliophiles who can be subdivided into: general bibliophiles, who gather books related to various topics, not necessarily to their interests or profession; specialised bibliophiles, who gather books related to their profession, academic career, artistic endeavours or social activities; and collectors, who gather items on the basis of given types or topics. These groups form the majority of customers in the secondary book market, although the share of specialised bibliophiles is diminishing, since they have many resources available on the Internet.

Throughout the years, many forms of trade in used books and historic books emerged. Nearly all of them have survived, even though their role and significance vary depending on the given place and time. It is difficult to judge whether some of these forms will triumph and dominate, while others will go into oblivion, although certain very suggestive and convincing publications or partial analyses and comparisons could lead to such conclusions. For instance, the Internet has become the leading mode in some areas of the market, marginalising more traditional modes, but on the other hand it is the Internet that actually creates new, previously unknown opportunities for those traditional modes. Moreover, the Internet has also boosted and popularised the secondary book market which was formerly limited to antiquarians bookshops and street sellers' stands for long centuries. Never before has the trade in the book assortment achieved this scale, which is actually without limits as regards space or quantities. It was the Internet that tapped into the unexplored layers of assortment remaining outside the traditional cultural and commercial centres; it was also the Internet that has made virtually everyone who buys a book online exposed to the offer of the secondary book market.

On the other hand, if the book in its paper form is soon replaced with electronic carriers, as has been recently predicted, then the secondary book market will gain even more significance. It will become the key repository of books in their traditional form which, as it appears, will not be abandoned in the nearest future.

¹¹ G. Nieć, P. Podniewski, *Sienkiewicziana na współczesnym polskim rynku antykwarycznym*, [in:] T. Bubnicki, J. Majchrzyk (eds.), *Henryk Sienkiewicz w szkole, bibliotece i muzeum*, Warszawa 2015, p. 321–322.

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Abstract

The text is a concise outline of the functioning of the secondary book market in Poland, which was shaped on the basis of the network of public and private secondhand bookshops, which operated before 1989. This market includes the institutions and processes that are linked to turnover of already produced and introduced at least once in trade assortment of antiquarian bookshop, or otherwise – any library materials that have been previously sold or issued by the widely understood manufacturer. Although most of the objects that are the subject of this trade are books, but next to them the same product range includes all library materials, also manuscripts, official documents etc. Today, the market is developing in three areas – stationary institutions (antiquarian bookshops), extramural (booksellers and other forms

of occasional trade) and the Internet. The analysis of those phenomena was based on press reports and the Internet, broadly defined market offer observations, and interviews with the participants, carried out through several years, especially in the period of 2012–2015, when I made a research program NCN no. 2011/03/B/HS2/03908.

Key words: the secondary book market, bookselling, antiquarian bookshop, political and economic transformation in Poland

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