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doi: 10.55159/tri.2024.0105.12

Transformations of Reading and Readership in the Czech Republic from 2007 to 2023

Abstract
This study delves into the Czech Republic’s reading habits from 2007 to 2023, specifically looking at how digital technology has affected reading. Especially among younger audiences, who are showing a marked preference for digital forms, the author’s findings reveal significant shifts in readership demographics. Among certain age groups, the report shows a worrying decline in conventional reading. On the other hand, it does recognize that the rise of digital platforms has contributed to more engagement with audiobooks and e-books. Reading habits are strongly associated with educational possibilities and access to technology, according to the study, which also links these reading tendencies to larger socio-economic variables and academic accomplishments. The author stresses the importance of reading in creating digitally literate, critically thinking people and suggests specific educational initiatives to increase digital literacy. This larger view sheds light on how reading is evolving and highlights the need for an all-encompassing strategy to promote literacy in the face of fast technological change.

doi: 10.55159/tri.2024.0105.12
Submitted: 29.01.2024 / Accepted: 20.02.2024
Keywords

The Czech Republic, readership research, book reading, book acquisition, media utilization, library usage, library services

Even though the reading habits of the Czech population have slightly deteriorated in recent years, books and reading still maintain a strong tradition and respect in the Czech Republic. Books and reading were of extraordinary importance during the Czech National Revival, which took place from about the last third of the 18th century to the second half of the 19th century. This process was politically culminated in 1918 with the establishment of the national state. The aim of this movement was the restoration of the Czech language and its recognition as equal to German. It was certainly no coincidence that one of the first laws adopted after the creation of Czechoslovakia was the library law, which mandated all municipalities to establish and operate libraries. This led to the creation of an exceptionally dense network of public libraries, which continues to operate to this day. The importance of books for contemporary society was also supported by the Czech parliament, which passed a law to abolish the value-added tax on books starting from the beginning of 2024.

The issue of reading literacy, readership, and the public’s relationship to books and libraries has been a topic of long-term interest in society. For centuries, written, and later printed, text was one of the basic tools of human communication and education, also ensuring the transfer and preservation of information over space and time. A significant portion of our communication has shifted to the digital space, which in many respects emphasizes the importance of visualizing information and offers new educational tools. Although it might seem at first glance that the significance of textual documents and text communication is in long-term decline, the reality is quite different. The importance of literacy, and especially comprehension, is on the rise and is becoming increasingly vital due to the growing volume of information, including the rising scene of disinformation.
Learning to read and understand text is a skill we cannot inherit but must learn, sometimes with considerable difficulty. Reading is not just the foundation of a significant part of our information exchange and lifelong learning but also a pathway to personal development and an important tool for social interaction and participation in society. Digital technologies significantly expand our possibilities to access a vast amount of textual, audio, and visual content. On the other hand, some studies suggest a decline in certain reading skills, such as critical and mindful reading and reading long texts, particularly books.

In the Czech Republic, reading literacy and reading have been closely monitored for a long time. The Czech Republic has been participating in international surveys on reading literacy focused on primary school students for several years. Since 2013, nationwide representative surveys on the relationship of children and youth (ages 6 to 19) to reading, readership, books, and libraries have been conducted (Prázová, I. et al., 2014), (Friedlaenderová, H. et al., 2018), (Friedlaenderová, H. et al., 2021). Similarly, readership among the adult population aged 15+ is monitored. Surveys of adults are conducted by the National Library of the Czech Republic in collaboration with the Institute for Czech Literature of the Czech Academy of Sciences. The latest survey was conducted in 2023, marking the fifth investigation – previous ones took place in 2007, 2010, 2013, and 2018. Some thematics can be observed over a longer time frame, as we have the results of the 1996 survey, which was narrowly focused on the issue of the public’s relationship to libraries (Public Libraries, 1996). This contribution is dedicated to selected topics of Czech readership we have been monitoring over a 17-year long horizon. The overall results of the surveys are published in monographs from individual research by Jiří Trávníček. Publications are released by the National Library of the Czech Republic in collaboration with the “Host” publishing house (Trávníček, J., 2008; 2011; 2013; 2019). The results of the 2023 research are presented in a research report (Readers and Reading 2023, 2023). In 2024, a separate monograph with the results of the 2023 survey will be published again. Further information is provided in a brief overview (Readers and Reading, 2023).
Survey Methodology

The research was conducted through quantitative data collection. In 2007, 2010, and 2013, data collection was carried out using a printed questionnaire and direct questioning of respondents. In 2018, the research was done CAPI (Computer Assisted Personal Interview), and in 2023, the data collection method was adjusted to a combination of CAPI and online questioning (CAWI – Computer Assisted Web Interviewing). Respondents who do not use the internet and economically disadvantaged internet users were approached using the CAPI method. Respondents were selected based on quota sampling, with quotas set based on gender, age, education, size of residence, and region. Respondents for the CAWI part were selected from the Czech National Panel. In total, 2010 respondents were approached in the 2023 study, of which 502 were through the CAPI method and 1508 through the CAWI method. Like in 2018, the research focused on the general target population of the Czech Republic aged 15+. The field data collection took place from May 21 to June 20, 2023. The 2023 data file is consistent in many respects with the 2018 file. However, the results may be partially influenced by a different data collection method.

Who in the Czech Republic Does Not Read Books?

To identify those who do not read books, we use a simple criterion where no book has been read in the last 12 months. According to this criterion, a “non-reader” is a respondent who has not read a single book over the course of one year. The same criterion is applied in quantitative surveys of a similar focus. The results of the latest survey show that since 2013, there has been a gradual increase in the proportion of adults who state that they have not read a single book over the year, from an initial 16% in 2013 to 27% in 2023, i.e., an increase of 11 percentage points (hereinafter referred to as p.p.).

Different trends can be observed across various age categories in “non-reading”. The fewest non-readers in 2023 were found in the youngest age categories of 15–24 years (14% of them) and 25–34 years (22% of them). There have also been no significant changes in these categories since 2007. The stability of reading among younger age
categories likely relates to these being age groups influenced by the need to read books during their education period. Conversely, significant changes have occurred after 2013 among the middle-aged and older generations. Here, the last ten years have seen an increase in the proportion of non-readers by ten percent or more. In 2023, 30% of the 35–44 age group, 34% of the 45–54 age group, and 31% of 55–64-year-olds, were considered “non-readers”. The proportion of non-readers also rises in the senior generation over 65 years, where 15% of them were non-readers in 2013, but they increased to 26% non-readers in 2023. The increasing proportion of non-readers in this age category could be influenced by a number of factors, among which the impact of digital competition and the associated change in leisure activities are worth mentioning. The growing availability of various online content today offers older generations other forms of entertainment, which can be an attractive alternative to reading books. It has long been the case that strong readers often include people with higher education, those in intellectual types of employment, those with higher income, and also economically inactive people who have more time for reading books.

**Strong and Weak Readers**

A decrease in the popularity of reading can be observed in terms of the number of books read per year. In 2018, each adult aged 15 and over read 12.55 books annually, but in 2023, this number dropped to just 9.87 books. Significant changes can also be noted among groups of strong and weak readers. The proportion of frequent readers, who read 13 or more books a year, has markedly decreased (from 29% in 2007 to only 18% in 2023). The share of regular readers, who read 7–12 books a year, has slightly declined (from 16% in 2007 to 12% in 2023), while the number of those classified as sporadic readers, who read 1–6 books a year, has increased (from 39% in 2007 to 43% in 2023). Encouragingly, the proportion of the strongest readers, who read 30 or more books a year, remains stable.

Daily, a total of 16% of readers read books (nearly twice as many women as men), about two-fifths of readers read books several times a week, and roughly half of the readers do so at least once a week.
Significantly more often, books are read by the oldest age categories, the generation of readers aged 65 and older, who are mostly retirees and thus have more time for reading books. People with higher education and those whose type of work is “intellectual” are also more frequent readers. Although most parents (as we know from the Czech Children as Readers 2021 research (Friedlaenderová, H. et al., 2021)) read to their children when they are young, parents themselves (and especially men) tend to be below-average readers in terms of both the number of books read per year and the frequency of reading. The decline in reading is also evidenced by the frequency of book reading among readers, i.e., those who have read at least one book in the past 12 months. The proportion of readers who read books at least once every two weeks fell by 8 percentage points to 62%, while the proportion of those who read books once a quarter or a year increased by 9 percentage points to 24%.

For Czech readers, a significant difference between the reading habits of women and men is characteristic. While women read an average of 12.8 books in 2023, men significantly approached half of this number, reading an average of only 6.8 books per year. Among women, 23% were non-readers in 2023, but the proportion of men who did not read a single book in a year approached one-third (31%). On the other hand, the proportion of non-readers among both men and women is rising at approximately the same rate of 5%.

The decline in interest in reading books is also reflected in the evaluation of this phenomenon in Czech society as a whole. The vast majority of respondents believe that people do not read as much today as they did in the past. Among the strongest reasons for the decline in readership (as suggested by the research results themselves) is likely that people prefer other forms of entertainment to reading books in their free time. Today, reading books competes not only with television or radio but faces significant competition from a wide range of media activities, often occurring in the digital space. This includes watching movies, series, and video content on various paid and unpaid platforms like YouTube, Netflix, HBO Max, etc., playing electronic games (often on a mobile phone, which is always at hand), or communication and entertainment on social
networks. As we know from the research study “Reading during the Coronavirus Pandemic” (Friedlaenderová, H. et al., 2022), the pandemic did not significantly affect the readership of the Czech population aged 15+, but it largely shifted media behavior towards online activities, such as watching movies and series or using social networks. The research results thus confirm certain changes in leisure preferences; instead of reading books, which requires some peace and concentration, today people prefer less demanding entertainment and relaxation, which is offered by watching various video content. Moreover, in recent years, the offer of video content on demand has significantly increased, providing viewers with a plethora of different movies or series to watch. Today’s “hectic” lifestyle of part of the population (especially those of working age) also plays a role. People are overwhelmed with information or disinformation of all kinds, are busy with work, family obligations, and other activities, and may thus have less time (and peace) for focused reading of longer texts, such as books. A certain part of the population (31%), especially non-readers (45%), perceives reading books in the age of computers and the internet as less important than before. It is essential to realize that different factors can have different impacts on different people, and that the rise or decline in book reading is usually the result of a combination of many variables. Finally, we must also take into account the change in research methodology, which could have reflected on the comparison in the past years.

**Printed Books, E-books, and Audiobooks**

The traditional view of book readers has significantly changed in the last few decades. Whereas previously a reader was inseparably linked to the volume of a printed book, now e-books read on computers, e-readers, or mobile phones, as well as audiobooks, which were traditionally distributed on physical CD carriers but are now mostly acquired online, are significantly entering the readers’ world. All this is related to the development of the digital world connected by the internet.

Research results show a slight decline in regular readers of printed books (by 6 percentage points), an increase in e-book readers (by
13 percentage points), especially among weak, irregular readers. The share of listeners of audiobooks (audio) has significantly increased in the Czech population (by 23 percentage points). Currently, in the Czech population, there are 72% readers of printed books, 31% readers of e-books, and 37% listeners of audiobooks.

Printed books still clearly dominate the taste of Czech readers. Only 1% of readers stated that they never read printed books. Furthermore, the results show that regular book readers are also more often regular readers of e-books and regular listeners to audiobooks. E-books and audiobooks are thus more of a complement and an extension of the options for accessing literary content rather than a threat to the extinction of printed books.

On the other hand, the majority of the Czech adult population in 2023 does not expect that the printed book would lose its significance and could be replaced by an e-book. The strong preference for printed books among the Czech public is shown by the results of the following chart. Only 16% of the Czech population aged 15+ agrees that printed books are no longer needed and that they can imagine reading books only in electronic form. Comparing the responses to this question asked in 2010 and 2013, we can conclude that even though the digital space is dynamically developing, trust in the printed book essentially remains unchanged.

In 2023, a higher level of agreement with this statement can be found especially among the youngest generation of 15–19 years (29%), men (20%), and readers who use other devices for reading books (27%). Conversely, the least in favor of replacing traditional books with electronic ones are the “classic” readers of printed books (6%). Younger generations often use electronic and audiobooks also due to greater flexibility and the possibility to read or listen to content on various devices. These generations are also usually less technologically sceptical and have fewer concerns about using modern technologies. Differences in preferences may also relate to varying time demands and lifestyles. Younger generations may have less time for traditional, long-term reading, and therefore opt for quicker and more flexible forms of content. On the other hand, older generations often have more free time, and thus the opportunity to enjoy traditional book reading.
Overall, it can be said that the choice between printed, electronic, and audiobooks depends on the individual preferences, experiences, and lifestyle of each generation. Each format has its advantages and offers a unique “reading” experience that meets the needs and views of different age groups. It can also be evaluated that people generally recognize the importance of the printed book and gradually learn to use its diverse forms to better utilize books for their entertainment and work activities.

**Devices for Reading E-books**

Although it may have seemed years ago that the right device for reading e-books would be a device specifically designed and developed for this purpose, such as an e-book reader or tablet, this is not the case. Developments in recent years show that e-book readers increasingly prefer to read books on a mobile phone. At least sometimes, 61% of Czech e-book readers (those who read books in electronic form at least occasionally) use a mobile phone for reading books, representing a significant increase of 18 percentage points compared to 2018. Conversely, the share of readers using e-readers dropped by 8 percentage points to the current 27%, and the share of readers using tablets for reading decreased by 9 percentage points. Today, significantly fewer readers use an e-reader for reading compared to a computer/laptop. These devices are used by 48% of readers for e-books, and between 2018 and 2023, they also saw a significant increase of 9 percentage points.

The research results also show that many readers read e-books on multiple types of devices. The device used by the most readers is unequivocally the mobile phone, especially considering the easy availability of this device, which most people carry with them at all times. However, compared to the average e-book reader, frequent readers more often use an e-reader (34%) for reading e-books and somewhat less often use a mobile phone for reading books (58%).

The preference for reading e-books on a mobile phone over e-readers can be explained by several factors. Mobile phones are multifunctional and commonly available devices that allow reading anytime and anywhere. People always carry their phones with them, making
reading easily accessible. Applications for reading and content synchronization further facilitate reading on phones. Although the display quality is more suitable for reading on e-readers than on phones, it seems that for many readers, this is not enough motivation to purchase an e-reader. There is also an economic aspect, which in the case of an e-reader includes the cost of acquiring an additional device, while most already own a phone. The fact that economic reasons play a role is also evidenced by the higher use of e-readers among readers from households with the highest income per capita (up to 34% use an e-reader for reading). Overall, mobile phones, thanks to their versatility, availability, and established habits, clearly win the battle with e-readers as the most widespread device for reading e-books.

**Generational Perspective**

The most regular readers of printed books are in the 65+ generation (32%), while the least regular readers of printed books are in the youngest generation of 15-24 years (20%). Conversely, the highest representation of less involved readers (40%) is found in the youngest generation. However, the youngest generation (15-24 years) has the highest representation of e-book readers (54% read e-books at least occasionally), while in the case of the oldest generation 65+, it is only one-fifth (22%). The highest representation of audiobook listeners is in the 25-34-year generation, with about half (51%) listening at least occasionally, 9% regularly. In the oldest generation 65+, only a quarter listens to audiobooks at least sometimes. Although both older and younger age categories prefer printed books, the younger generation, born into the digital era, uses various digital devices more frequently compared to the older generation, and therefore more often chooses e-books or listens to audiobooks. On the other hand, the older age categories, who grew up at a time when printed books were the only available reading method and who are not as digitally “savvy”, more prefer this form of reading, with which they have experience, and which suits them.
Gender Perspective

Women are more regular readers of printed books (34% of women read printed books regularly, compared to only 20% of men). Conversely, men more often than women read books in electronic form (34% of men read e-books at least occasionally, compared to only 29% of women) and men also have greater experience listening to audiobooks (42% of men reported listening at least occasionally, compared to only 32% of women). However, the proportion of regular listeners to audiobooks is the same for both men and women (7%).

Reading Books in Foreign Languages

The quote “As many languages you know, as many times you are a human being”, attributed by some to the first Czechoslovak president T.G. Masaryk, and refers to the value of linguistic and cultural diversity. This quote emphasizes the importance of the ability to communicate and understand more than one language. By learning the language of another nation, we open up the possibility to glimpse into its world and understand its thoughts and values. Therefore, reading books in a foreign language undoubtedly develops intellectual, linguistic, and cultural skills. A positive trend is that the interest in reading books in foreign languages has been growing over the last ten years. Almost a third (29%) of Czech readers read at least one foreign-language book in the past year, which translates to about a fifth of the entire population. Czech readers most frequently read books in English (17% read at least one in the past year) and Slovak (12%), which is due to the linguistic and cultural proximity of the two nations and also the fact that many Czechs have Slovak roots. The numbers of readers of books in other world languages like German or French are in the lower single-digit percentages.

The fact that reading books in a foreign language is related to education is evidenced by the above-average share of readers among people with higher education, especially in the case of English and German (30% read a book in English, 4% in German). However, readers of English books are primarily found in younger generations. Among readers aged 15–19, who are still largely students, about
half of them (52%) read a book in English in the past 12 months, possibly partly due to academic requirements. In the age category of 20–29 years, 42% read a book in English, and in the generation of 30–39 years, almost a quarter. The representation of readers of books in English gradually decreases with age, with only 2% in the 70+ category having read a book in English.

The explanation for why particularly young people today read books in English significantly more than the average population can be found mainly in the significantly higher language proficiency of this generation compared to older ones. English is an important part of the curriculum in all Czech schools, starting from elementary levels. Good knowledge of the English language is today a basic prerequisite for further study and career opportunities. Therefore, reading books in English is a suitable way to improve and expand one’s language skills and often can even be part of the curriculum, exams, and tests within the educational process. Globalization and digitalization have also made it easier for today’s young people to access materials in English (and other languages), and digital technologies make it easy to acquire and read books. And it is the young generation that most often prefers watching video content (movies, series, etc.) in the original (often English) version with subtitles.

**Reading and Media Activities**

The survey has long monitored the time people spend on various media activities during an average day. For monitoring this area, we also use data from a smaller survey conducted in 1996 (Public Libraries, 1996). This year is interesting for the Czech environment because it marks a period when internet use by the general public was just beginning. The average time the Czech adult population over 15 years old spends reading books has been around half an hour for a long time and has a slightly downward trend. In 1996, the average adult Czech read books for 36 minutes a day, in 2007 it even went up to 41 minutes, but since then, there has been a mild decline in book reading to 33 minutes a day in 2023. Regular readers (those who read 7–12 books in the past year) spent about 37 minutes a day reading books in 2023, which is slightly less than in 2018, when this group of
readers declared about 45 minutes of daily book reading. Frequent readers (those who read 13 or more books a year) read books for about an hour a day (66 minutes), which is comparable to the 2018 figure.

There has been a significant decline over the past thirty years in reading newspapers and magazines, from 32 minutes in 1996 to 17 minutes in 2023. Today’s hectic online era is not particularly conducive to magazine reading. As research results over the last five years indicate, the number of their readers has significantly decreased, or the number of those who regularly do not read any magazines (neither printed nor electronic) has doubled. However, when interpreting the differences, the possible influence of a different data collection methodology should also be considered. Overall, it can be said that the decline in interest in reading magazines results from changes in consumer behaviour due to technological innovations and changes in the media environment. In the digital era, quick access to information and content is key. Therefore, people often prefer short and current news that they can quickly read online. Printed magazines may seem less current because their content does not change as quickly as on the internet. Moreover, articles are longer and require more time and concentration from readers. Other barriers to traditional magazines include low interaction and sharing (in the case of printed magazines) compared to online content, which allows for quick interaction (commenting, liking, etc.) and sharing content with others.

The number of minutes spent working with the internet from the first year of monitoring in 2007 to 2023 has not changed significantly (86 minutes). The time spent listening to music since 1996 has also not seen significant changes and was at 42 minutes a day in 2023. Trends in watching live television broadcasting are interesting, which had an upward trend from 1996 to 2013 up to 136 minutes a day. In 2018 there was a decline to 130 minutes, and in 2023 it dropped significantly to just 60 minutes a day. On the other hand, there is an increased interest in watching movies, videos, series through YouTube, Netflix, etc., to 49 minutes a day in 2023. Streaming services and TV archives have brought new possibilities for choosing content and watching it according to personal preferences. This flexibility contributes to viewers being able to watch
content that is relevant and interesting to them, regardless of set broadcasting times. Thus, people can create their own entertainment program. This trend is generally evident, especially among younger generations, who are more accustomed to interactive and on-demand forms of entertainment. The growth of mobile devices, fast internet access, and increased availability of online content create an environment that supports the personalization and individualization of entertainment.

It is not surprising that the interest in watching social networks (Facebook, Instagram, Snapchat, X, TikTok, and similar) has grown from 24 minutes a day in 2013 to 48 minutes in 2023, which is exactly double. Conversely, the biggest decline in interest is observed in listening to the radio, from 130 minutes a day in 1996 to 49 minutes in 2023.

**Gender Perspective**

When monitoring the average time people spend on various media activities, differences between men and women are observed. In 2023, women spend significantly more time reading books (37 minutes, 11 minutes more than men), more time on social networks (52 minutes, 8 minutes more than men), and also watch regular television broadcasts longer (64 minutes, 7 minutes longer than men). Conversely, men spend more time working with the internet (94 minutes, 22 minutes more than women), more time watching movies and videos (53 minutes, 7 minutes more than women), more time listening to the radio (52 minutes, 6 minutes more than women), and more time listening to music (49 minutes, 13 minutes more than women).

**Generational Perspective**

Significantly larger differences in the average daily time spent watching and using various media are observed in intergenerational comparisons. Comparing the youngest age category of 15 to 24 years with the oldest group aged 65 and over, it is immediately apparent that these generations lived in very different media worlds in 2023.
There are also major differences in internet and TV usage between old and young people.

The biggest difference in media activities relates to the use of social networks. Young people spend an average of 108 minutes per day on social networks, whereas seniors only 24 minutes, i.e., 84 minutes less. In reading newspapers and magazines, seniors spend 23 minutes a day, while young people, on average, only spend 10 minutes reading them, i.e., 13 minutes less. The smallest differences are observed in book reading, to which seniors dedicate 40 minutes a day, while young people read books for an average of 32 minutes a day, i.e., 8 minutes less.

**Podcasts - A New Dimension of Audio Learning and Entertainment**

The reduction in radio listening time and daily television broadcasting can also document the technological changes of the digital media world and the transformations in preferences and ways people access information and entertainment. The latest survey in 2023 included a new phenomenon in its investigation: watching or listening to podcasts. These are programs in the form of audio or video files available for download on the internet, which users can download and listen to or watch at any time. Podcasts represent a new and innovative form of media that offers listeners a range of benefits, and there are many reasons why their popularity has been growing in recent years. The increasing interest in podcasts is undoubtedly also related to the development of smartphones. Podcasts offer their listeners flexibility. Listeners have the opportunity to choose content according to their interests and listen to it anytime and anywhere. This means they can use the time during travel, exercise, housework, and other activities to listen to podcasts. Podcasts also offer diverse content. Podcast topics range from scientific discussions, news, and journalism to personal development, culture, and entertainment. This wide range of content allows listeners to discover new perspectives and choose topics that interest them. An important aspect is also a certain intimacy they offer. Listeners have the chance to listen to hosts and guests directly in their ears, creating a sense of deeper
engagement and personal connection with the content. Other aspects supporting interest in podcasts include their accessibility and low cost. Most podcasts are available for free and can be easily downloaded or streamed.

Who Are the Primary Podcast Listeners?

According to research results, about two-thirds of the Czech population aged 15 and over have experience listening to podcasts. 13% of the population regularly listens to podcasts, and more than a third of the Czech population aged 15 and over listen to a podcast at least occasionally (meaning once a week to once every two weeks). And that is not a small number. A slightly higher representation of podcast listeners is found among men (69% of men vs. 64% of women, who listen at least occasionally). However, the number of podcast listeners significantly increases with decreasing age. Therefore, the most listeners (including regular listeners) are found in the younger age categories of 20–29 years (30% regular listeners) and conversely the least in the oldest age categories 60+ (7% regular listeners). The higher representation of the young generation among podcast listeners is due to a combination of technological literacy, a mobile lifestyle, interest in diverse content, the need for time flexibility, and interest in modern media experiences. These factors together create an environment where podcasts are more attractive and appealing, especially for the younger generation.

Podcast Listening and Book Reading

Research results suggest that there is a certain correlation between reading books and listening to podcasts, with significantly more podcast listeners found among readers than non-readers. Almost three-quarters of readers (73%) listen to podcasts at least occasionally, but only half (50%) of non-readers do. And the highest representation of podcast listeners is found among frequent readers (those who have read more than 13 books a year). Therefore, reading and podcast listening mutually support each other. The correlation between regular book reading and frequent podcast listening can be seen
as a combination of interest in culturally and thematically diverse content, preferences for different ways of consuming content, and the need to use free time for intellectual enrichment.

**Reading on the Internet**

As mentioned, the number of minutes spent working with the internet from the first year of monitoring in 2007 to 2023 has not changed significantly (86 minutes). Therefore, we are interested in what types of texts people most often read on the internet. As in 2018, news dominates internet text reading, i.e., news reports, online editions of newspapers and magazines, etc. Two-thirds of the Czech population aged 15 and over (66%) regularly read news texts on the internet. A significant portion of the Czech population also reads content on online forums and discussion groups, specifically nearly a third (30%), and most often people aged 30–39. News texts and texts on discussion forums are slightly more often read by men than women. About one-fifth (21%) read posts, comments, and various blogs, slightly more often women and the younger generation. The least sought-after on the internet are fiction texts, read by only 6%, more often by women and young people aged 15–29.

In a general view, the preferences for reading texts online have not significantly changed since 2018, but a comparison with 2018 indicates a growing interest of the young generation in news, which may be a consequence of the COVID-19 pandemic and the war in Ukraine. Both of these events have shown an increased interest, especially of the young generation, in news topics. The results also show a higher interest of the young generation in fictional texts. Young people today have easier access to digital media and technologies, influencing how they consume literary content, including fiction texts. While the traditional book format remains an important medium for fiction, new digital options offer young readers a new way to access literary works. The development of e-books, mobile applications, and audiobooks allows readers to explore literature in more interactive and multimedia forms. This can enhance the interest of the young generation, accustomed to various digital experiences.
The development of the digital world and its multimedia nature suggests that we are consuming more visual content in our media activities, but does it mean we are reading less? There is no simple answer to this question. From existing Czech surveys, a trend of declining book reading is evident. This finding does not necessarily mean that we read less in general but refers to the quality of reading. The recently published Ljubljana Reading Manifesto (The Ljubljana Reading Manifesto, 2023) highlights the importance of supporting advanced reading skills. Many studies suggest that the digital environment negatively affects critical reading comprehension and reading long texts, such as books, which require longer and more significant concentration. If we are literate, we continue to read, but more and more in the digital environment. We read text messages, articles, and reactions on social networks, forward messages on messaging apps, etc. It is possible that we are reading more than ever, but we also read quickly, carelessly, superficially, and short texts, which can be dangerous. We are increasingly unable to concentrate on long texts requiring longer and deeper focus. We live in an era of fake news, conspiracy theories, distorted information, and disinformation, simplifications, and outright lies. This weakens the society’s ability to make informed democratic decisions. More than ever, we need the ability to critically examine everything around us. The skill of critical and mindful reading, deep and slow reading, which develops critical thinking, can help with this.

**Book Purchases**

Nearly two-thirds of Czechs (62%) aged 15 and over bought at least one book (in printed or electronic form) in the past 12 months. Women, 68% (vs. 57% of men), and people aged 20–39 years, 74%, purchased books more frequently than counterparts. corresponding with the fact that books were also more frequently purchased by people with minor children in the household, especially those under 15 years, and people with higher education (79%).

There is no doubt that books are mainly bought by readers, with up to 8 out of 10 readers who read 7 or more books in the past year making a purchase. However, the results also showed that books are
bought to a certain, not negligible extent, by non-readers, specifically about a third of them (32%) in the past period. This is understandably because a book is still quite often used as a suitable gift not only for Christmas but also for birthdays, holidays, or other life anniversaries. However, buying a book today is not exactly a cheap affair. Perhaps that’s also why books were more frequently purchased by people from households with the highest incomes per capita than by people from low-income households.

Czech readers and non-readers alike clearly indicate their preference for books in printed form. While up to 60% of the Czech population purchased a book in printed form, only 9% bought an e-book. Among readers, 71% purchased a printed book, and 12% of readers bought an e-book, with non-readers almost exclusively buying printed books (only 1% reported purchasing an e-book). Unlike printed books, e-books are more frequently purchased by men (11% vs. 8% women), people aged 20–29 years (18%), and the educated – university graduates (15%). Frequent readers, who read 13 or more books a year (18%), and readers of books in foreign languages (22%) also purchase e-books significantly more often.

Overall, it can be said that people with higher education, the ability to read books in foreign languages, enthusiasm for literature, and strong (frequent) readers are usually more open to new ways of acquiring books. A certain openness to reading and purchasing e-books thus reflects their adaptability, openness to technological innovations, and an overall culturally advanced approach to literature and education.

**Acquiring Printed Books**

Up to 72% of readers acquired a printed book through purchase (in bookstores, second-hand bookshops, or online) in the past 12 months, representing a significant increase compared to 2018. Nearly half (48%) received a book as a gift, nearly a third (29%) borrowed at least one book from a library, and about the same number of readers stated that they borrowed a book from a home library or from friends and acquaintances. While the proportion of those who purchased
a book has increased, the proportion of readers who received a book as a gift or borrowed it from home stocks, friends, or acquaintances has significantly decreased.

On average, readers purchased 5.58 books in the past 12 months, which is relatively comparable to 2018 (5.39). The average number of books readers received as gifts decreased from 3.29 in 2018 to 2.64 in 2023, as did the number of books readers obtained from a home library or from friends and acquaintances, from 5.74 (2018) to 4.35 (2023). Conversely, there was a slight increase in the (declared) average number of books readers borrowed from the library, from 17.90 to 18.49 books.

In the past year, most readers purchased 1–4 books (64%), nearly a fifth (19%) bought 5–9 books, and only 7% of readers purchased more than 20 books a year. The vast majority of readers (86%), who received books as gifts during the last period, acquired 1–4 books in this way. Similarly, the majority of readers (74%) who borrowed a book from a home library or from friends and acquaintances also obtained 1–4 books, with only 3% of readers acquiring more than 20 books in this way.

The largest average number of books was obtained by readers who borrowed books from the library. Only 36% acquired 1–4 books this way, whereas about a third (32%) stated that they borrowed more than 20 books from the library. While the youth tended to borrow fewer books (more often 1–4 books), older readers significantly more often borrowed more than 30 books.

**Acquiring Electronic Books**

With the development of digital platforms, people also have easy access to e-books and audiobooks, which can be instantly downloaded after purchase or are available for free download on the internet. The most common way of acquiring e-books, just like five years ago, is still downloading them for free online. However, the share of e-book readers who acquired a book this way has significantly decreased to 45% of readers. Twenty-seven percent of readers purchased an e-book, 17% received an e-book as a gift, and only 9% reported borrowing
an e-book from a library. Compared to 2018, there has been a significant decrease in all methods of acquiring e-books, which may indicate that readers have found one preferred method that suits them best and they use it.\(^1\)

**Home libraries**

Like in 2018, the survey included a question about the number of books in home libraries. A large home library not only indicates an interest in reading but also reflects an interest in intellectual growth and education. It is no coincidence that people with higher education (378 books) have significantly more books at home than the general population and more than twice as many compared to those who have only completed an apprenticeship without a high school diploma (168 books). A high number of books in a library thus also indicates a higher cultural capital of the household. Cultural capital includes values that influence the social status of the household and the individual within society.

Readers naturally have more books at home than non-readers, and the number of books in a home library significantly increases with the love for and frequency of reading. The number of books in home libraries also somewhat reflects the financial situation of the household, with the number of books increasing as income per capita grows. The average number of books in a typical Czech home library remains at the level of 2018, which is 253 books. About one-fifth of the Czech population aged 15+ (19%) has fewer than 24 books at home, while 15% of the Czech population owns more than 500 books (up to 25% of people with higher education and 19% of readers).

**Visiting Public Libraries**

Despite the complex events of the last five years, which include the COVID-19 pandemic and its impact on library operations, as well as the rise in the viewership of paid online platforms, the (declared)

\(^1\) Here, however, it is necessary to warn about the possible impact of changing the methodology of data collection see. Methodology.
number of library visitors has remained at a similar level as in 2018. More than a quarter of the Czech population aged 15+ (28%) declared at least one library visit. Although the pandemic led to the temporary closure of many libraries and restrictions on their operations, it appears that many readers have remained loyal to libraries. This trend may indicate a strong bond between people and libraries and their ability to adapt to new challenges and needs of modern times.

Compared to 2018, there was a slight decrease in the proportion of those who have never visited a library (by 5 percentage points) – such people still make up more than a quarter (27%) of the Czech population, more often men and people from older generations. Conversely, there was a slight increase in the proportion of those who do not go to the library but used to visit it. Such people make up about 45% of the Czech population. This may be related to a significantly higher proportion of library visit experience in younger generations, who unlike older generations often visited libraries as part of primary school attendance due to cooperation between schools and libraries.

Libraries are more frequently visited by women (33%), the youngest generation (aged 15–19 – largely students – 58%), people with higher education (39%), and, naturally, readers (34%). It also holds true that visiting a library correlates with the amount of books read, and among stronger readers, a higher representation of library visitors is found. Among frequent readers, more than half (57%) visit the library.

**Utilization of Library Services**

Today’s libraries offer their visitors a wide range of services and activities that go beyond the traditional concept of a library as merely a place for borrowing books. In addition to the classic lending of printed books, libraries also focus on the digital sphere and provide visitors with access to the internet, audiobooks and e-books, electronic magazines, and other media. Online services allow for convenient reservation and extension of book loans and allow the library to maintain communication with readers. Moreover, libraries are active cultural centres, organizing author readings, discussions, literary
workshops, film screenings, and exhibitions. They also offer educational programs, courses, and lectures on various topics. Libraries provide environments for study and work and include children’s corners for the youngest visitors. In this way, libraries create a significant space for community interaction and support for reading, while reflecting the modern needs of society and becoming important pillars of cultural and educational life.

Library visitors still primarily use libraries for borrowing books (82%) and magazines (17%), followed by using libraries as study and reading rooms (16%) and spaces for educational events (13%). A similar proportion of visitors also use services for searching databases and digital libraries of electronic information resources (13%) or access to the internet, as well as photocopying services and attending cultural programs. Among the less utilized services, which are also offered only by selected libraries, are visiting various creative workshops, or borrowing audiobooks and conducting research. These services are used by only a few percent of visitors.

Compared to 2018, there has been a slight decrease in the use of traditional book lending services (by 5 percentage points) and an even more significant decline in magazine borrowing, where the share of visitors using this service has decreased by up to 8 percentage points. Some services are also more frequently used by different generations of visitors, for example, magazine borrowing is most utilized by visitors in the age group of 55–64 years (34%), while study and reading rooms are most used by people aged 20–29 years (i.e., the generation with a high representation of university students), as well as searching in digital catalogues (37%) or borrowing electronic books (18%). Cultural programs, on the other hand, are most attended by the oldest readers aged 65+ (15%).

**Satisfaction with Library Services**

If libraries want to continue maintaining a high level of satisfaction among the young generation of visitors, it is necessary to further develop and provide more digital services that are attractive to the young generation, keep up with trends in the world of literature and culture, and regularly renew their offerings to match the current
interests and preferences of young visitors. Young people often look for places where they can study, work on their projects, or meet with friends. Libraries can respond to this need by offering suitable study spaces with available tables, comfortable seating, and, for example, enough outlets for plugging in laptops. A suitable addition that attracts young visitors is also a café. Overall, offering a quality study environment and a pleasant atmosphere including a café can help libraries not only retain young visitors but also attract new ones. In this way, libraries can act not only as a source of information and literature but also as a lively and inspiring centre for meeting, working, and learning.

**Why Do People No Longer Use Libraries as Much?**

There are several factors that can influence why some library visitors stop using libraries. With the advent of the internet and digital technologies, people have easy access to e-books, online news, videos, and other resources. The role of the library as a source of information and content has diminished. One of the reasons, undoubtedly, is the change in how people access information and content today. This category could include 26% of those who stated they do not visit the library because they have no reason to do so (this may mean the library does not offer what they need). However, the most common reason given when asked directly why they no longer visit the library is a lack of time (37%). This answer includes both those who lead such a busy lifestyle that they do not have time for a library visit (and by extension, reading) and those who prefer to spend their free time on other, more appealing activities. Other frequently mentioned reasons include a preference for buying (new) books (28%) and the administrative tasks associated with borrowing books, keeping track of return dates, etc. (18%).

A move (11%) and the unavailability of a library in the vicinity (7%) can also be reasons for ending library visits. The younger generation more often cites the preference for buying books (especially people aged 25–34) and the inconvenience of the administrative tasks associated with borrowing books as reasons for no longer visiting libraries. More than others, they are also bothered if the
library does not have the latest, new books. Compared to the entire population, the youngest generation more frequently mentioned unsuitable library opening hours as a reason.

There are several reasons why some people have never visited a public library. The most common reason identified in the research is that they never had a specific reason to visit a library (39% of those who have never been). This reason was more frequently mentioned by non-readers (47%), for whom books are not part of their everyday life, and they do not need to borrow them. People of middle and older age (45–64 years) and people with lower education (up to apprenticeship without a high school diploma) also more frequently cited this reason.

The second most common reason is also lack of time (25%), which was also a reason for no longer attending libraries among people who used to visit them. Other reasons relate to people having sufficient access to other sources of books, for example, preferring to buy books themselves (22% of those who have never been) or borrowing books from friends or family. Both reasons, especially purchasing books, were significantly more often mentioned by readers. Concern about the administrative duties associated with borrowing books (16% of those who have never visited a library) and the absence of a library in the vicinity (8%) also play a role.

**Relationship to Libraries and Evaluation of Their Activities**

The Czech public traditionally has a positive relationship with libraries. Extensive research data show that the vast majority of people (88%) agree that libraries are important educational institutions that play a key role in supporting reading and the development of literary taste. Considering that not everyone has a sufficient number of books at home, libraries are seen as an invaluable source of access to books that they otherwise could not afford.

Compared to 2018 (which, however, may be influenced by a change in data collection methods), there is even a certain trend of increasing perception of libraries as attractive places for spending free time and studying. Libraries are gradually becoming places where people can
not only study and work comfortably but also attend various cultural programs and public events. This trend allows libraries to attract new visitors, especially from the younger generation, who appreciate the offer of multifunctional spaces for study and various other activities. The fact that 63% of the Czech population considers libraries to be rather an attractive place for spending free time and only 31% do not find going to the library sufficiently “cool” indicates that libraries are able to adapt to current trends and interests of the public.

Just as in 2018, it holds true that the more educated part of the Czech population and older generations have a more positive relationship with libraries compared to the general population. Conversely, men and people with lower education have a somewhat less positive relationship with libraries. This corresponds both to “readership” and the relationship to books, as well as to the structure of library visitors. The most critical of libraries is the youngest generation aged 15–19, where only 77% agree that the library is an important educational institution (while the average for the population is 88%), and for 27% of them, libraries are unnecessary in the era of the internet (the rate of agreement with this statement within the population is 18%). Younger generations also less frequently perceive libraries as an attractive place to spend free time, yet still, more than half of the young people (54%) agree with this view. Opinions on how attractive and “cool” spending free time in libraries is today significantly differ between women and men. For men, the attractiveness of libraries in today’s era is significantly lower than for women.

In conclusion, it can be said that libraries still maintain their place in people’s lives thanks to their ability to reflect their needs and preferences and provide a wide range of services.

Literature

**Vít Richter** – a graduate of the Department of Librarianship at Charles University. Since 1971, he has been working at the National Library of the Czech Republic in various positions, and since 1998, he has been the director of the Library Institute of the National Library of the Czech Republic. From 2020 to 2021, he was appointed as the General Director of the National Library of the Czech Republic, serves as the chairman of the Central Library Council of the Czech Republic, and the executive secretary of the Association of Librarians and Information Professionals of the Czech Republic. He focuses on the research of adult and children’s readership, the public’s relationship to libraries, library construction, evaluation of library performance, preparation of library legislation, and other topics. He is the organizer of many professional conferences and serves on the editorial boards of the journals Library – Library Review and Reader. For detailed information and publication activity, see: https://aleph.nkp.cz.