



Symposium for programmers *a Transbook event*

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ITALY
Bologna Children's Book Fair

Digital Mediation and Children's Literature Programming

“This is a scary thought, a future without books. For me it's the most frightening thing. It's a very dystopian concept.” These words, spoken by Nobrow (UK) co-founder Sam Arthur, are representative of the fears shared by many readers and book industry professionals. But is content digitalization a real threat? Will it be the end of print publishing? How should these new digital formats be used?

Neal Hoskins curator of the Digital Café at the Bologna Children's Book Fair **UNITED KINGDOM**

Marlene Zöhner freelance consultant specialized in children's medias **GERMANY**

Christina Hasenau director of the information center at the Goethe-Institut in Rome **GERMANY**

Sam Arthur co-founder of Nobrow **UNITED KINGDOM**



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Transbook
children's literature on the move



Economically speaking, print publishing is largely dominant given that the children's e-book market is not quite mature. Design costs for applications are too high to allow low retail prices. Other major impediments dissuading publishers from investing in electronic literature are the difficulties in distributing works and distribution monopolies, format incompatibility, the issue of royalties and a lack of readers. The e-book market varies considerably across Europe: in France, it represented a meagre 2.3% of all publishing revenue in 2014¹.

The view is different when it comes to digital devices and children and teens. Use of smartphones and tablets is increasingly widespread: in France, 62% of households with children own a tablet, 68% of teens have their own smartphone and a 29% a tablet². At the European level, children are growing up in homes with two to three screens on average. Children and teens are using digital devices daily to watch videos, play games, use social media sites, listen to music and, importantly, to read.

This trend highlights a pressing need to "ensure that children and young adults can discover first-rate works in children's literature", says **Sylvie Vassallo** (France), Director of the Salon du livre et de la presse jeunesse en Seine-Saint-Denis.

With digital technology, content becomes transmedia: a fusion of the printed page with digital apps, sound, video and interactive features. According to **Neal Hoskins** (UK), Curator of the Digital Café at the Bologna Children's Book Fair, "the borders between print and digital are falling away" and it is pointless to pit paper against digital. They should be combined; the world of publishing has more to gain by embracing the new technology sector so that it can meet the new needs of consumers in terms of content.

Symposium speakers provided a complementary approach to how digital technology can be used along with insight as to what the technology can bring to every level of the publishing process.

1 KPMG

2 Ipsos poll: Junior Connect' 2015

APPS FOR CHILDREN ENRICH NARRATION

Marlene Zöhrer (Germany), a specialist in children's literature and media, identified three types of apps: educational ones, used to learn a language or maths; those designed exclusively for games, and apps for children's books – either adaptations of existing ones or new creations. These three types of apps have certain things in common: the characters, often used as brands; the use of images, and a game component.

Marlene Zöhrer took three examples of apps – *Emma Eats* by Jutta Bauer, *The Trip to Panama* by Janosch and *Elephant's Backlight* by Florian Felix Weyh and Karin Planting – to demonstrate their narrative constraints: to make sure the narrative thread remains clear to young readers, it must not get lost in the mix of various interactive technological features.

The fun factor – the biggest selling point for parents – must appear throughout without tainting the spirit of the story or becoming an end in itself, as the main purpose of an app is to tell and build a story. *The Trip to Panama* app deals with this constraint by allowing access to its games only after the story has been read, making the game both an incentive to read and the reward.

Children do not use tablets alone; these devices are shared and used with others. Children should use screens with their parents, not be left alone. An app can also become a tool to develop reading in children whose exposure to it is limited.

Digital literature is therefore capable of providing new value to publications, to incite children to read and also to promote literary creation, via writers' residencies, for example.

USING THE WEB TO PROMOTE WRITERS' RESIDENCY PROGRAMMES

Promotion at the international level of literary works created at a writers' residency is sometimes very limited without the exposure offered by Internet. For this reason, the Goethe Institut has invested heavily in the Web for two writers' residency programmes for comic strips and illustration, explained Christina Hasenau (Germany), Director of the information centre of the Goethe Institut in Rome.

Created in 2012, the blog Comic Transfer has had 360,000 visitors, a success undoubtedly due to its publication of elaborate works by Italian and German artists who travelled in Italy, France, Spain and Portugal for the purpose of the project.

For the second project, which received support from the French embassy in Rome, three artists created comic trip takes on two foreign cities they visited. To reach a wider audience, the web version of the Italian daily *la Repubblica* hosted the artists' work, which was published on a weekly basis. The project also included interviews with the artists and video content.

After the fact, it becomes evident that combining real and digital work in the projects of these writers' residencies heightens their international exposure and that of the artists. Less obvious, but proof of the diverse benefits of digital formats, is the second wind which digital content can – paradoxically – provide to printed works.

WHEN DIGITAL DRIVES PRINT

The notion that "Print is dead" was already widespread in 2008 when Sam Arthur (UK) co-founded Nobrow, a publishing firm specialised in comic strips, graphic novels and albums. As a consumer of literature and a publishing professional, however, Sam Arthur observed a number of trends which showed that the "digital ogre", rather than devouring paper entirely, has enriched it and brightened its future.

He noted that Amazon became an internet giant by choosing to sell paper books. New, print-based indie magazines are appearing which

are supported by their web versions and social networks.

Printing can also become something to do for fun. At Newspaper Club, clients print customised magazines using the site's web platform. In London, places are popping up where people can handcraft their own printed products. The risograph, an increasingly popular digital photocopier, can be used to print limited series of things such as art books.

Books have not escaped this trend. Last year, the English children's title *The Little Boy Who Lost His Name* – a half-print, half-digital creation – was a bestseller. The concept uses a web site to create a personalised book. The child's name is incorporated into a unique story which is then printed and sent to the reader. Some young adult novels are initially written, distributed and read online using Wattpad, a social network that has become very popular, in the Philippines particularly. Certain Wattpad novels are later published in paper format. The highly popular world of video games can also take the form of paper novels.

These three very different, complementary approaches show that digital technologies enrich the children's and young adult publishing sector: they add interactivity and other media to literature; promote creation and heighten the visibility of artists at the international level, and can even breathe new life into print publishing.



TRANSBOOK IS A EUROPEAN PROJECT FOR THE DIGITAL TRANSITION OF THE CHILDREN PUBLISHING INDUSTRY

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