ERICS

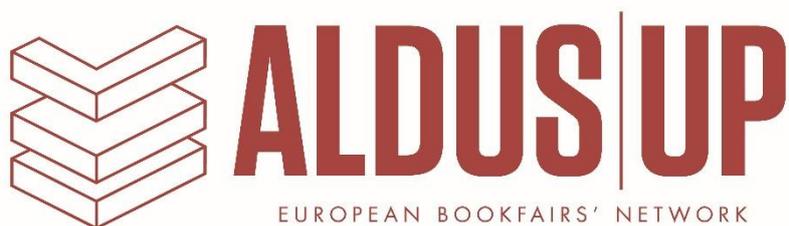# EUROPEAN ITEM CORE SET FOR READING SURVEYS

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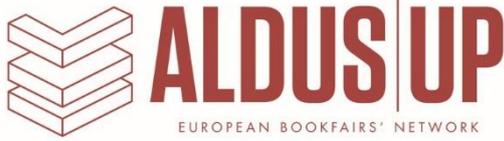Luis Gonzáles Martín (FGSR – Fundación Germán Sánchez Ruipérez)

Contents:

Aldus Up
European Item Core Set for Reading Surveys (ERICS)

Aldus Up is a large-scale cooperation project co-funded in the framework of the Creative Europe programme 2014-2020 featuring both international and domestic book fairs, national and European publishers' associations and organisations with consolidated know-how and experiences in the areas of activities addressed by the project. Aldus Up carries out studies, surveys and initiatives to support the exchange of rights between European countries, the promotion of reading and translations, as well as new models for book fairs to develop their audience and increase their inclusivity and accessibility. One of the objectives of Aldus Up is to establish a common methodology for surveys on reading habits in Europe. The aim is to implement this common methodology in the various national surveys – possibly with the help of a grant scheme – in order to make the results of future surveys more comparable between European countries and thus to obtain a comprehensive overview of the development of reading in Europe. Based on the results of an explorative survey undertaken in 2021 in 20 European countries, general requirements for the methodological approach and different variables were defined and put together as a core set of items for reading surveys (**EuR**opean **I**tem **C**ore **S**et for Reading Surveys [ERICS]). ERICS provides a basic framework for the different national surveys to compare key figures on reading habits, which can be supplemented by further individual variables depending on the focus of the survey.

The variables proposed by us (in many cases on the basis of variables successfully used over many years in existing surveys) will mainly be used for a descriptive evaluation and will not ´feed´ scores related to more complex theoretical constructs. It will therefore suffice to do a pre-test of those variables with a small sample to verify that they "work". We will do this by the end of 2022 the latest and will inform the community about the outcome accordingly.

Recommended methodological approach

Data collection
The method of the data collection is generally not limited to one particular approach such as telephone interviews or online questionnaires, as strict guidelines in this area might hinder a broad implementation of a common European methodology due to concerns about the consistency of results as well as possible financial burdens. Most likely, the solution chosen in each country is based on the weighting of three elements: what is the best way to reach the relevant target group, which method provides the best answers and what are the costs. Nevertheless, depending on the approach used, adjustments in the data collection or the design of the questions respectively are necessary to allow for a reliable procedure, e.g., adding instructions for interviewers or providing more detailed explanation of individual questions in case of online questionnaires. The data itself is collected in the language(s) of the respective country, but at least a brief summary of the methodological approach and the main findings in English would be highly desirable in order to facilitate the access to and comparison of the data.

Sample

The basic requirement for the composition of the sample is representativeness. The frequency ratios of relevant socio-demographic variables must correspond to those in the population under consideration, whereby a possible bias can be counteracted by weighting the results accordingly. Since this is individual for each country, no specific sample size is proposed. The minimum age for participation in the surveys should be set at 16 years, as parental consent is generally no longer required from this age in most European countries. Because of this circumstance and the fact that their questioning requires special adjustments in the research design, children are deliberately not taken into account; rather, a separate data collection on children's reading behaviour is recommended.

Recommended variables

Socio-demographic variables

The four main socio-demographic variables to be included in reading surveys are gender, age, place of residence and level of education. While age and place of residence are asked for in open-ended questions that allow for different categories to be formed in the later analysis, the questions about gender and level of education use a closed-ended format. As far as gender is concerned, people who do not identify with either term are offered the option to indicate a category other than male or female. In the case of the place of residence, the concrete design of the question is left to the respective countries, as there sometimes are major differences in the coverage of the population's place of residence or in the priorities set in this regard. The question in the following questionnaire is therefore to be regarded as a possible option which can be changed. However, it is important that the question allows for different evaluations, e.g., between the urban and rural population. To specify the educational level of the participants, broadly defined categories are given as answer options in order to increase comparability despite the differences in the European education systems. If necessary, an accompanying text can be added explaining the allocation of the categories to the specific education levels of the respective country.

Reading variables

Regarding the definition of reading, a narrow concept is applied concentrating on reading books of various formats, explicitly excluding reading materials other than books such as newspapers, magazines, blogs, etc. In addition, listening to audiobooks is also included. 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. After an initial question to identify the specific books formats used by the participants, the three main reading variables – namely quantity of books read, frequency of reading and time spent reading – are looked at individually for print books, ebooks, and audiobooks. Apart from those, other variables can be integrated into the different surveys but are not mandatory. In this way, it is possible, on the one hand, to record and compare the most important aspects of reading behaviour among a large number of European countries and, on the other hand, to give institutions the opportunity to set individual priorities.

July 1st, 2022

Questionnaire Items

1) Socio-demographic variables

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

- o Male
- o Female
- o 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]

- o No formal education
- o Primary school or equivalent
- o Secondary school or equivalent
- o Vocational school or equivalent
- o 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.

- o Print books
- o Ebooks
- o Audiobooks
- o 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)]

2a1a) Approximately how many print books have you read in your leisure time in the last year? [single code question; answer required]

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

2a1b) How often do you usually spend time reading a print book in your leisure time? [single code question; answer required]

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

2a1c) 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]

- o _____ hours _____ minutes [numbers only]
- o I don't know

2a2) Ebooks [conditional questions; only if "*Ebooks*" was answered in 2a)]

2a2a) Approximately how many ebooks have you read in your leisure time in the last year? [single code question; answer required]

- o _____ ebooks [numbers only]
- o I don't know

2a2b) How often do you usually spend time reading an ebook in your leisure time? [single code question; answer required]

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

2a2c) When you think about last week, approximately how much time have you spent reading ebooks in your leisure time? [single code question; answer required]

- o _____ hours _____ minutes [numbers only]
- o I don't know

2a3) Audiobooks [conditional questions; only if "*Audiobooks*" was answered in 2a)]

2a3a) Approximately how many audiobooks have you listened to in the last year? [single code question; answer required]

- o _____ audiobooks [numbers only]
- o I don't know

2a3b) How often do you usually spend time listening to an audiobook in your leisure time? [single code question; answer required]

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

2a3c) When you think about last week, approximately how much time have you spent listening to audiobooks in your leisure time? [single code question; answer required]

- o _____ hours _____ minutes [numbers only]
- o I don't know