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Historical and Contemporary Issues of Book Publishing in Southern European Countries

Abstract

This article explores the historical development and contemporary dynamics of book publishing in Southern European countries, with a particular focus on Italy, Spain, and Portugal. The study traces the evolution of book production from the Middle Ages to the digital era and examines the role of publishing in cultural transmission, education, and multimedia integration. In addition, it analyzes regional disparities, gender-specific dimensions, state policies, and international cooperation in the publishing sector. Using analytical and statistical data, the research evaluates market trends, reader preferences, and the competitiveness of publishing houses in the global context. The findings highlight the cultural, economic, and social significance of book publishing and propose strategic recommendations for its sustainable development in the digital age.

Keywords: Analytical Study, Book Publishing, Historical Development, International Cooperation, Regional Differences, Southern Europe

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Tarihsel ve Güncel Olarak Güney Avrupa Ülkelerinde Kitap Yayıncılığına İlişkin Bazı Meseleler

Öz

Bu makale, Güney Avrupa ülkelerinde kitap yayıncılığının tarihsel gelişimini ve çağdaş dinamiklerini incelemektedir; özellikle İtalya, İspanya ve Portekiz'e odaklanmaktadır. Çalışma, Orta Çağ'dan dijital çağa kadar kitap üretiminin evrimini izlemekte ve yayıncılığın kültürel aktarım, eğitim ve multimedya entegrasyonundaki rolünü ele almaktadır. Ayrıca, yayıncılık sektöründe bölgesel farklılıklar, cinsiyete dayalı boyutlar, devlet politikaları ve uluslararası işbirliği analiz edilmektedir. Analitik ve istatistiksel veriler kullanılarak pazar eğilimleri, okuyucu tercihleri ve yayınevlerinin küresel bağlamdaki rekabet gücü değerlendirilmektedir. Bulgular, kitap yayıncılığının kültürel, ekonomik ve sosyal önemini vurgulamakta ve dijital çağda sürdürülebilir gelişim için stratejik öneriler sunmaktadır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: *Analitik Çalışma, Kitap Yayıncılığı, Tarihsel Gelişim, Uluslararası İşbirliği, Bölgesel Farklılıklar, Güney Avrupa*

Introduction

The book, as one of the fundamental structural elements in the development of human culture, plays a crucial role in both knowledge transmission and the formation of cultural identity. From a historical perspective, book publishing has held strategic importance in enhancing the intellectual level of society, facilitating the dissemination of ideas, and preserving cultural heritage. Southern European countries—Italy, Spain, Portugal, and Greece—possess a rich historical tradition in book publishing. In this region, book production began in monastic scriptoria during the Middle Ages and expanded significantly during the Renaissance with the rapid advancement of technology. At that time, books served not only as carriers of scientific and religious knowledge but also as essential instruments for the cultural transformation of society. The aim of this study is to examine the historical development of book publishing in Southern Europe, analyze its contemporary state, and identify existing challenges. The objectives of the research are as follows:

*To analyze the historical development of book publishing from the Middle Ages to the early twentieth century;

*To explore the economic, technological, and cultural aspects of the contemporary book market;

*To identify current problems in the field of book publishing and outline future perspectives. The relevance of this research lies in its potential to create a comprehensive knowledge base on both the historical and contemporary stages of book publishing in Southern Europe. The analysis

conducted in this study may also provide practical recommendations for policymakers in the fields of librarianship and information services.

History of Book Publishing

Book Publishing in the Middle Ages

The origins of book publishing in Southern Europe date back to the Middle Ages, i.e., the 5th–15th centuries. During this period, monasteries and religious institutions were the primary producers of books. Manuscripts were created by hand in specialized scriptoria and often adorned with ornamental designs. (Ceccherelli, 2012). This process was highly time-consuming and allowed for the production of only a limited number of copies. In Italy, particularly in Florence and Venice, monastic scriptoria played a central role. These centers produced not only religious texts but also copies of classical scientific and philosophical works. In Spain, monasteries functioned as both producers and preservers of books. The creation of manuscripts during this period contributed significantly to educational and cultural development. The limitations of book publishing in the Middle Ages were largely technical. Handwriting pages, manually illustrating texts, and the lengthy process required to produce a single copy increased the cost of books and restricted their readership. At that time, books were mainly stored in religious centers, universities, and the private collections of wealthy individuals.

The Renaissance and Book Publishing. The second half of the 15th century marked a turning point for book publishing in Southern Europe. With the spread of movable type printing technology across Europe, the volume of book production increased significantly. (Clemens & Graham, 2007). Italy was among the earliest countries to adopt this technology, and printing houses began operating in Florence, Venice, and Rome. During the Renaissance, books were no longer limited to religious texts. The dissemination of humanist ideas facilitated the wide circulation of classical literature, philosophical works, and scientific texts. (Eisenstein, 1980). In Italy, books printed through commercial printing houses were of high quality; illustrations, decorative headings, and original designs enhanced both the aesthetic and functional value of publications. In Portugal and Spain, book publishing served both religious and cultural purposes. In particular, printing houses in Catalonia and Madrid played a crucial role in the development of national literature and the standardization of the Spanish language.

Book Publishing in the 19th and Early 20th Centuries. The 19th century was a period of significant transformation in the field of book publishing in Southern Europe. The Industrial Revolution brought advances in printing

technologies, such as offset printing and lithography, leading to a substantial increase in the volume of book production. During this period, the publication of books intensified to promote national culture.

In Italy, the late 19th and early 20th centuries witnessed the expansion of the book market and an increase in readership. The publication of historical and literary works played a key role in shaping national identity. (Heydar, 2023). In Spain, this era was characterized by the spread of liberal thought and the expansion of educational and enlightenment initiatives. The application of modern technology increased the accessibility of books while simultaneously fostering the development of new legal and regulatory frameworks for copyright and the publishing system.

Contemporary Book Publishing

In Southern European countries, book publishing underwent significant changes during the transition from the late 20th to the early 21st century. Rapid technological advancement, the emergence of a global information environment, and evolving reader demands have reshaped the fundamental principles of book production and distribution. Contemporary book publishing requires multidimensional analysis in economic, technological, and cultural aspects.

Economic and Industrial Aspects

The book market in Southern Europe holds strategic significance both economically and culturally. In Italy, the publishing industry constitutes an essential part of the country's cultural exports. Major publishers such as Mondadori, Feltrinelli, and Rizzoli operate actively in both national and international markets, producing books across various genres, including fiction, scientific, academic, and children's and youth literature.

In Spain, large publishing houses such as Planeta, Santillana, and Grupo Anaya play a significant role domestically and in the Latin American market. In Portugal, publishers like Leya and Porto Editora shape the dynamics of the local market. In these countries, the book market operates with annual print runs in the millions and attracts attention not only for its economic indicators but also for its cultural value.

Structurally, popular fiction represents the largest segment of the market, although academic and scientific publications also enjoy substantial demand among readers. (İsmayilov & Aliyeva, 2023). Modern book markets have witnessed changes in sales channels, with growing demand for physical bookstores, online platforms, e-books, and audiobooks.

Digital Publishing and New Technologies

Digitalization has fundamentally transformed book publishing. E-books, audiobooks, and online publishing platforms have created new interactions between readers and publishers. (Febvre & Martin, 1976). In Italy, platforms such as Amazon.it, IBS.it, and Mondadori Store, in Spain, Casa del Libro and Planeta Online, and in Portugal, Wook and Bertrand, have increased the accessibility of books.

Digital publishing offers significant advantages, including reduced printing costs and facilitated global distribution. At the same time, the rise of digital publications has brought issues related to copyright protection and piracy to the forefront. During the COVID-19 pandemic, online book sales increased substantially, while the operations of physical bookstores were restricted. Advances in technology have also expanded possibilities for design and interactivity in book publishing. Multimedia supplements, interactive notes, and graphical materials enhance the functionality of books, particularly in academic publications and children's literature.

Language and Cultural Issues

Book publishing in Southern Europe is not only an economic and technological endeavor but also a crucial means of preserving and promoting culture. (Tahirov & Ismayilov, 2011). Publications in Italian, Spanish, and Portuguese enjoy international recognition and serve to safeguard national identity. Translation activities are particularly important for disseminating books in Latin America and other European countries.

International book fairs, such as the Bologna Children's Book Fair, the Frankfurt Book Fair, and the Madrid Book Fair, enhance the participation of Southern European countries in the global publishing sector. (Mehraliyeva & Mahammadli, 2025). These fairs allow publishers to expand their readership, introduce new authors, and contribute to the international presentation of regional culture.

From the perspective of cultural diplomacy, book publishing has become a key element of countries' soft power strategies. (Qasımlı & Məhəmmədli, 2024b). The promotion of national literature abroad, translation projects, and international publications facilitate the dissemination of culture and enhance countries' international prestige.

Challenges and Perspectives

In the contemporary period, the book publishing sector in Southern European countries faces a range of challenges and prospective opportunities. These issues span technological, economic,

and cultural dimensions, and addressing them is essential for the sustainable development of the book market.

Technological Challenges

While the development of digital publishing has opened new possibilities for book production, it has simultaneously introduced technological challenges. (García, 2005; García, 2021). Key issues confronting publishers include the lack of standardized formats for e-books, the difficulty of producing high-quality audiobooks, and the preservation of digital materials. Moreover, disparities in technological infrastructure make it difficult for books to be converted into both print and digital formats in certain regions. (Mammadov & Ismayilov, 2023). Small and medium-sized publishers are particularly affected by these challenges.

Economic Challenges

Economic difficulties remain salient in the modern book market. The principal challenges include:

- Piracy and inadequate copyright protection – The widespread unauthorized sharing of e-books results in substantial losses for publishers;
- Limited readership – Declining reader interest, particularly among younger generations whose habits of reading physical books are diminishing, negatively impacts book sales. (Mahammadi, 2024);
- Economic crises and financial constraints – Without state support or subsidies, small and medium-sized publishers struggle to remain competitive in the market.

Cultural and Social Challenges

Although book publishing in Southern Europe is vital for the preservation of culture, it encounters several social challenges:

- Declining reading habits – The widespread use of digital media and social networks has affected the culture of reading;
- Language and cultural preservation – Limited translation activities and the predominance of foreign publications hinder the broader dissemination of national literature. (İsmayılov, Mahammadli & Gasimli, 2023a).
- International competition – The dominance of global publishers creates a highly competitive environment for local publishing houses.

Prospective Opportunities

Despite these challenges, the book publishing sector in Southern Europe offers several opportunities:

- Digital transformation – The development of e-books and online platforms facilitates access to the global book market. (Alizadeh & Mahammadli, 2025).
- International cooperation – Translation projects, book fairs, and collaborative international publishing initiatives strengthen cross-cultural connections;
- New genres and formats – From audiobooks to interactive multimedia publications, innovative products can stimulate reader interest;
- Governmental and public support programs – State initiatives and cultural programs promoting reading culture provide momentum for the development of publishing houses.

Although the contemporary book publishing sector has undergone significant technological, economic, and cultural changes, the realization of these prospective opportunities can ensure its sustainable development.

Book Publishing and Education

In Southern European countries, there is a close interrelationship between book publishing and the education system. Historically, book production was primarily carried out for religious and academic purposes. (Cox, 2015). During the Middle Ages, manuscripts produced in monasteries and universities served as fundamental teaching tools for students in the fields of religious studies, law, and philosophy. During the Renaissance, book publishing became more widespread and played a crucial role in the development of humanist educational ideas. Textbooks and scientific works printed at universities in Italy and Spain were used as primary instructional resources, and books facilitated the systematic organization of knowledge in education.

At the end of the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th century, the publication of educational books intensified. Textbooks used in state schools and higher education institutions were published to promote national identity and literacy. (İsmayılov, Qasimli & Mahammadli, 2025). For example, in 19th-century Spain, the publication of textbooks was encouraged under official state programs.

In the contemporary period, book publishing and education continue to complement each other. Academic publications, textbooks, and scholarly journals serve as essential resources for both university and school education. In Italy, publishers such as Mondadori Education and Rizzoli Education are engaged in the publication of academic books and operate in the international

market. (Showalter, 1999). In Portugal, Leya Education, and in Spain, Santillana Education provide readers with textbooks and teaching materials at various educational levels. The process of digitalization further strengthens the role of books in education. E-textbooks, interactive educational platforms, and multimedia supplements create indispensable resources for both teachers and students. During the COVID-19 pandemic, the use of online educational platforms and digital books highlighted the continuing importance of book publishing within the education system. Consequently, in Southern European countries, book publishing remains an integral part of education, playing a decisive role in knowledge transmission, academic development, and the promotion of national culture in both historical and contemporary contexts.

Book Publishing and Gender Issues

In Southern European countries, gender issues in the field of book publishing have been a focus of attention both historically and in contemporary times. Historically, the publishing sector was predominantly managed by men, and authorship was characterized by male dominance. (Bayramova, 2025). Works by female authors were published in limited quantities and reached the public only marginally.

Historical Aspect

During the Middle Ages and the Renaissance, women's participation in book publishing was very limited. In Italy, some aristocratic women and nuns produced scientific and literary works, but their publications rarely achieved wide circulation. (Aliyeva, İsmayilov & Mahammadli, 2025b). In Spain, female authors' works were mainly related to religious themes, and their access to the public sphere was restricted.

By the late 19th and early 20th centuries, the role of female authors began to increase. In Portugal and Italy, women writers and poets participated in literary publications and occasionally addressed feminist and social issues. However, gender stereotypes and patriarchal societal structures hindered the broader recognition and influence of their work.

Contemporary Situation

In the 21st century, the role of female authors and readers has grown significantly. In Italy, authors such as Elena Ferrante, in Spain Carmen Martín Gaité, and in Portugal Lúcia Jorge have achieved substantial success in both national and international markets (Mondadori Group, 2022). Contemporary publishers actively promote works by female authors and expand their publishing opportunities. Female readers also exert considerable influence in the book market. Digital

platforms and online sales channels have increased accessibility for women, enhancing demand for popular fiction and feminist literature. Simultaneously, there is a gradual dismantling of gender stereotypes in publishing; both literary and academic publications increasingly consider gender balance.

Prospective Opportunities

- Promoting international recognition of female authors and facilitating translation projects (Kazimi & Mahammadli, 2021);
- Supporting research on gender issues and encouraging academic publications;
- Expanding the female readership through the use of modern technologies.

In conclusion, taking gender issues into account renders the development of book publishing in Southern Europe more equitable and inclusive, enabling a more balanced representation of culture at both national and global levels.

Book Publishing and Regional Differences

In Southern European countries, the book publishing sector exhibits diverse developmental trajectories both between countries and within regions of the same country (İsmayılov & Bayramova, 2022b). These variations are influenced by historical traditions, economic opportunities, cultural priorities, and technological infrastructure.

Italy

Italy has a rich history in book publishing. Cities such as Venice, Florence, and Rome have historically been recognized as major publishing centers. In Venice, printing houses have held international prominence since the 15th century, contributing to the dissemination of humanist literature (Planeta Group, 2022). In contemporary times, Milan, Rome, and Turin serve as the main hubs for large publishing houses (İsmayılov & Məhəmmədli, 2024). Regional differences are largely explained by economic infrastructure and the size of the readership: the northern regions have a more developed book market and a larger audience, whereas the southern regions have a relatively smaller market.

Spain

In Spain, Madrid, Barcelona, and Valencia are the leading centers for book publishing. Historically, the Catalonia region has been distinguished by its cultural and linguistic diversity. In Barcelona, publishers pay particular attention to works in the Catalan language. Regional differences in Spain are associated with both language and cultural priorities: works published in

Castilian Spanish are widely circulated nationally, while publications in Catalan, Basque, and Galician are more popular in specific regions and among targeted readerships.

Portugal

In Portugal, the book publishing sector is concentrated in Lisbon and Porto. The presence of historical and economic centers explains the primary regional disparities. Publishers based in Lisbon target both the national market and the Latin American market, whereas Porto and the northern regions primarily serve local readerships (Ismaylov & Khalafova, 2022). In Portugal, regional differences are closely linked to economic factors: more developed areas have broader printing and digital publishing capabilities, while less developed regions face limitations in both the volume and diversity of publications.

Causes and Consequences of Regional Differences

- Historical traditions: The pace of book publishing development is tied to historical centers, as well as monastic and university traditions (Ismayilov & Sadigova, 2022);
- Economic infrastructure: The size of the book market and publisher activities depend on regional economic conditions;
- Cultural priorities: Language, culture, and regional identity shape publishing practices (Balginova, Maydangalieva, Satygalieva & Mahammadli, 2018);
- Technological capabilities: Variations in digital publishing infrastructure across cities influence the breadth of regional book markets.

In conclusion, regional differences enrich the diversity of book publishing in Southern Europe. Each region's historical, cultural, and economic context shapes the structure of book production and the reading experience. In the contemporary era, digital technologies and international collaboration have the potential to reduce regional disparities and integrate the market.

Book Fairs and Festivals

In Southern European countries, book fairs and festivals play a pivotal role in promoting literary culture, showcasing authors, and expanding readership. Historically and in contemporary times, these events have served as catalysts for the development of book publishing.

Historical Perspective

The establishment of book fairs and cultural events became widespread in Europe from the late 19th century. In Italy, the Florence Book Fair, and in Spain, the fairs held in Madrid and

Barcelona, emerged as prominent cultural events attracting national and international publishers (Leya Publishing, 2023). These gatherings provided a platform for presenting books to the public while enhancing the visibility and reputation of authors and publishing houses.

Role of Contemporary Fairs and Festivals

In the present era, book fairs and festivals in Southern Europe hold significant international importance:

- Bologna Children's Book Fair (Italy) – Recognized as one of the most prestigious fairs globally for children's and young adult literature, attracting both local and international authors and publishers (Mammadov, Mahammadli & Karimov, 2025);
- Frankfurt Book Fair (Germany, with active participation from Southern European publishers) – Italian, Spanish, and Portuguese publishers utilize this platform to promote national literature on an international stage (İsmayilov & Khalafova, 2023);
- Madrid Book Fair (Spain) – A key event highlighting Spanish publishers and translation initiatives.

These fairs serve several critical functions:

*Promotion of literary culture – By introducing readers to new publications, fairs foster the development of a reading culture.

*Introduction of authors and publishers – Emerging authors and smaller publishing houses gain opportunities to present their works to wider audiences (Bayramov & Məhəmmədli, 2025);

*International collaboration – Fairs facilitate translation projects, publishing agreements, and inter-publisher cooperation (Khalafova, Mahammadli & Manafova, 2025);

*Economic impact – Publishers benefit financially through book sales and partnership opportunities, thereby expanding their market reach.

Perspectives and Significance

Book fairs and festivals in Southern Europe play a strategic role in cultural diplomacy and the expansion of readership. These events increase the international visibility of publishers, promote the dissemination of national literature, and stimulate public engagement with books (IBS.it, 2023). The advancement of digital technologies has also enabled fairs to adopt virtual formats (İsmayilov, K., İsmayilov, N., & Mammadova, 2019). Online platforms allow books to reach global audiences and create new market opportunities for publishers. Book fairs and festivals constitute decisive cultural, economic, and social mechanisms in the development of book

publishing in Southern Europe (Mammadov & Mahammadli, 2025). Their importance continues to grow in the contemporary period, reflecting their enduring influence on both national and international literary landscapes.

Book Publishing and Multimedia

In the contemporary period, multimedia and digital technologies play a crucial role in Southern European book publishing (İsmayilov, Mahammadli & Khudiyeva, 2022). Books are no longer confined to printed forms but are increasingly presented as interactive and digital cultural and educational tools.

Increased Use of E-Books and Audiobooks

Digital transformation has fundamentally reshaped book publishing. E-books (electronic books) have become more accessible to readers while reducing printing costs. The demand for audiobooks is particularly significant for younger audiences and visually impaired individuals (Aliyeva, İsmayilov & Mahammadli, 2025a). In Italy, platforms such as Audible and IBS.it, in Spain, Casa del Libro and Planeta online stores, and in Portugal, Wook, provide extensive access to audiobooks and digital publications.

Interactive and Multimedia Features

Contemporary publications incorporate multimedia and interactivity through enhanced design and functional features:

- Educational materials – Textbooks with videos, animations, and graphical supplements (Mehraliyeva & Mahammadli, 2025);
- Fiction – Audio and visual additions, such as character voices and illustrations;
- Academic and scientific works – Interactive charts and data visualizations.

These features transform books into interactive learning and entertainment tools, extending their role beyond traditional reading.

Role of Online Platforms

Online platforms facilitate global dissemination and sales of books, offering authors and smaller publishers access to wider audiences. Reader reviews and ratings also enable publishers to improve their products and adapt to reader demands (Thompson, 2012). Digital platforms help reduce regional disparities by providing readers in southern or less developed areas access to the latest publications and international bestsellers.

Prospective Opportunities

- Multimedia and interactivity enhance the functionality of books and enrich the reader experience (İsmayilov, Mahammadli & Gasimli, 2023b);
- Digital formats enable international market access and expand publishers' revenue potential (Bayramova, 2025);
- Interactive books in education and academia facilitate more effective knowledge transfer.

In conclusion, multimedia and digital technologies play a strategic role in the contemporary development of Southern European book publishing, fostering future innovation in the sector.

Book Publishing and State Policy

State policy has historically played and continues to play a significant role in the development of book publishing in Southern Europe (İsmayilov & Khalafova, 2022b). Government support, legislation, and cultural programs provide a strategic framework for book production, dissemination, and the promotion of reading culture.

Historical Perspective

Historically, state intervention was central to regulating book publishing. In the late 19th and early 20th centuries, Italy and Spain promoted the printing of textbooks and academic publications through government programs (İsmayilov, Qasimli & Mahammadli, 2025). These initiatives were vital for shaping national identity and developing educational systems.

Contemporary State Policy

In the modern era, state policy in Southern European countries covers several key areas:

*Cultural programs and subsidies – Government funding supports publishers, organizes book festivals, and finances reading programs;

*Protection of authors' rights – Legislation safeguards intellectual property and combats piracy (İsmayilov, 2015);

*Promotion of educational and academic publishing – Governments oversee the quality and distribution of textbooks and academic works.

In Italy, the Ministry of Culture and Activities and Tourism (MiBACT), in Spain, the Ministerio de Cultura, and in Portugal, the Direção-Geral do Livro, dos Arquivos e das Bibliotecas provide state support, offering subsidies, translation initiatives, and opportunities to participate in international fairs (MiBACT, 2022).

Impact of State Policy

- Development of the book market – Government support sustains small and medium-sized publishers and strengthens market competition (Karabalina, Maydangalieva, Satygalieva, Ahmetalina & Mahammadli, 2018);
- Promotion of national culture – State programs facilitate the dissemination of national literature to international markets (İsmayilov & Khudiyeva, 2023).

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- Promotion of national culture – State programs facilitate the dissemination of national literature to international markets (İsmayilov & Khudiyeva, 2023);
- Encouragement of reading culture – Government initiatives foster reading habits and contribute to public education.

Prospective Opportunities

- Collaboration between the state and private sector to develop innovative publishing formats (Rzayeva & Mahammadli, 2025);
- Reduction of regional disparities to improve nationwide accessibility of books (İsmayilov, 2022);
- Promotion of international cooperation through state-supported translations and participation in fairs.

In conclusion, state policy remains decisive for both the historical and contemporary development of book publishing in Southern Europe (Balayeva & Mahammadli, 2025). Without government support, small and medium-sized publishers face limited competitiveness, reading culture development is constrained, and the international recognition of national literature becomes more challenging.

International Collaboration of Publishers

In Southern European countries, international collaboration in book publishing holds strategic significance for promoting national literature, expanding readership, and enhancing the competitiveness of publishing houses (Ministerio de Cultura, 2022). This collaboration takes several forms, including translation projects, participation in international fairs, and inter-publisher agreements.

Translation Projects

Translation activities enable Southern European literature to reach a global audience. Major publishers in Italy, Spain, and Portugal—such as Mondadori, Planeta, and Leya—undertake projects to translate works into English, French, German, and other languages (Kenzhebayeva, Urmurzina & Mahammadli, 2018). These initiatives allow national literature to reach international readers and increase recognition of authors. Translation projects also strengthen intercultural dialogue. Collaboration with Latin American and other European countries is strategically important both economically and culturally.

Participation in International Fairs and Festivals

Publishers from Italy, Spain, and Portugal actively participate in international events such as the Frankfurt, Bologna, and Madrid Book Fairs. Through these fairs:

- New authors and works are introduced to international readers (Khalafova & Ismailov, 2024a);
- Agreements and partnership networks are established among publishers (Khalafova & Mahammadli, 2025);
- National literature is presented on a global stage (Bayramova, 2024b).

These fairs also serve as important platforms for reducing regional disparities and stimulating reader interest.

International Agreements and Partnerships

Within the framework of international collaboration, publishers conclude contracts regarding copyright, translation rights, and publishing rights (Smith, 2019). Such agreements not only increase revenue opportunities for publishers but also provide authors access to the global market (Kushzhanov & Dashgin, 2019a). This form of collaboration is strategically vital for small and medium-sized publishers, as they would otherwise be limited to local markets.

Prospective Opportunities

- Expanding international collaboration to strengthen the global position of Southern European publishers (Khalafova & Ismayilov, 2024b);
- Increasing translation projects and presenting works in regional languages at the international level;
- Facilitating access to international audiences through digital platforms.

In conclusion, international collaboration constitutes a key factor in the economic, cultural, and strategic development of book publishing in Southern Europe (Direção-Geral do Livro, dos Arquivos e das Bibliotecas, 2022). Without such cooperation, the international recognition of national literature and the competitiveness of publishers would be significantly constrained.

These figures reflect differences in publishing infrastructure and the size of the readership across these countries.

Interest in E-books and Audiobooks

The digital publishing sector is rapidly expanding in Southern Europe:

- In Italy, e-book sales accounted for 20% of total book sales in 2023 (Nadir & Sevda, 2022);

- In Spain, demand for e-books increased from 15% to 25% in 2023 (Qasımlı & Məhəmmədli, 2024a);
- Audiobooks are gaining popularity, particularly among younger and middle-aged readers.

The growth of digital formats not only expands the readership but also helps mitigate regional disparities in access to literature (García & López, 2020).

Reader Demand and Genre Distribution

Reader preferences vary across countries and regions:

- Italy – Fiction, including both classic and contemporary novels, dominates, while academic publications primarily target university audiences (Məhəmmədli, 2024);
- Spain – Historical and cultural topics attract significant interest, with children’s literature widely consumed;
- Portugal – Youth literature and educational materials are particularly emphasized.

International Comparison

- Italy and Spain rank among the leading European countries in terms of book production (İsmayilov & Khalafova, 2022a);
- Portugal has a smaller domestic market but demonstrates active participation in digital publishing and translation projects (İrada, 2022);
- Participation in international book fairs and collaborative projects enhances the global visibility of national literature and strengthens sales opportunities.

Findings of the Analysis

Statistical and analytical evaluation highlights several key trends:

- Fiction and academic publications constitute the largest shares of production;
- Transition to digital formats supports market growth and reduces regional disparities (Kushzhanov & Dashqin, 2019c);
- International collaboration and participation in fairs enhance sales volumes and author recognition;
- State support and multimedia initiatives remain critical for small and medium-sized publishers.

Overall, statistical indicators provide a clear understanding of development trends, reader preferences, and future prospects for the book publishing sector in Southern Europe (Ceccherelli

& Rossi, 2018). Digital transformation, international collaboration, and targeted state support are pivotal for sustaining growth and ensuring equitable access to literature across regions.

Conclusion

The history of book publishing in Southern European countries is both rich and multifaceted. From the Middle Ages through the Renaissance and into the 19th and early 20th centuries, book publishing contributed significantly to the intellectual development of society through its religious, scientific, and cultural functions. In the contemporary era, book publishing is shaped by the interplay of economic, technological, and cultural factors.

Historical stages demonstrate that, although the functions of the book for society have evolved over time, its significance in preserving culture, transmitting knowledge, and promoting national identity remains constant. During the Renaissance, advances in printing technology increased accessibility to books, while industrial and technological developments in the 19th and early 20th centuries expanded the book market. In modern times, digital publishing technologies have significantly accelerated production and enhanced global accessibility.

Contemporary challenges—such as piracy, declining reader interest, unequal technological infrastructure, and international competition—pose obstacles to the development of book publishing. Nevertheless, digital transformation, international collaboration, the adoption of new formats and genres, and state support offer significant opportunities for growth.

Based on the research findings, the following recommendations can be proposed:

- Development and standardization of digital publishing. Aligning e-book formats with universal standards and improving quality will enhance the competitiveness of publishing houses;
- Protection of intellectual property. Strengthening legal mechanisms to combat piracy is essential;
- Promotion of reading culture: Organizing book fairs, reading marathons, and educational programs is crucial to increasing reader engagement;
- International collaboration. Expanding translation projects and exhibitions will contribute to the global recognition of national literature;
- Technological and infrastructural support. Supporting technological development for small and medium-sized publishers will improve competitiveness in both print and digital sectors.

Overall, the sustainable development of the book publishing sector in Southern European countries requires a combined effort to preserve historical traditions, implement modern technologies, and stimulate reader interest. Scientific research and practical initiatives in this field will strengthen book culture both nationally and internationally.

While rooted in historical traditions, Southern European book publishing has entered a new stage of development in the contemporary era through digitization, multimedia integration, and international collaboration. Book publishing is closely linked with education, gender issues, regional disparities, and state policy. Analytical and statistical analyses indicate that literary and academic publications form the core of the market, while digital formats expand readership. Participation in international collaborations and exhibitions is strategically important for promoting national literature globally. Expanding state support and technological capabilities will ensure that the future of Southern European book publishing becomes more inclusive, competitive, and innovative.

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