

Fewer printed books, fewer translations than ever before, and several books with a connection to the pandemic. Today the Swedish Institute for Children's Books presents its annual Book Tasting with an overview of the children's and young adult books published in Sweden in 2020.

By the last day of February 2021, the institute had received 2,037 printed children's and young adult books published in 2020, which is 180 titles (8 percent) less than in 2019. For the third year in a row, there is a decrease in the number of books published. The publishing of children's and young adult books reached record highs during the 2010s, which led to discussions of the implications of this development in the industry.

– This has likely contributed to several publishers now focusing their publication lists around a smaller number of titles, says the institute's Research Manager Åsa Warnqvist.

Although the pandemic is not one of the main factors behind the decrease, it has led to changes in publishing strategies and has also accelerated publishing in digital formats.

When it comes to printed books, the decrease is most noticeable among picturebooks and young adult novels. However, it is mainly the share of translated titles that has decreased. The share of translations has not been this low since the first Book Tasting in 1993 (36 percent).

– It is most likely the lowest share in the history of Swedish children's and young adult book publishing, says Åsa Warnqvist.

In terms of content, the books of 2020 are largely the same as the previous year. With one exception. A new category was established in 2020: books with thematic connections to Covid-19 and the pandemic.

Four guest writers have been asked to contribute to Book Tasting 2021. Dr Ann Steiner, Lund University, examines the publication of audiobooks and concludes that the number of audiobooks published continue to increase. She notes that while older titles dominate, the development of different formats suggests a gradual change in this respect. Dr Katarina Rejman, Stockholm University, takes a closer look at chapter books and finds two strands: didactically oriented books and books that require an aesthetic reading. She argues that a one-sided focus on reading comprehension risks counteracting the aesthetic reading experience. This, in turn, may hinder both the reading development and the desire to read. Because of the strong orientation towards the contemporary in children's and young adult literature, Dr Andreas Hedberg, Uppsala University, examines how historical themes are manifested in the books of 2020. His overview shows that history is present and that historical events function as important resources both in a narrative and political sense. Cultural studies student Emilia Hellberg writes about and identifies play in the picturebooks of 2020 as a universal and timeless theme that is varied in a number of different ways.

The Swedish Institute for Children's Books collects all printed children's and young adult books published in Sweden. The annual Book Tasting has been arranged by the institute since 1993.

The written report (in Swedish) is available at www.barnboksinstitutet.se/bokprovning. An English translation of selected texts from the report will be available later in the spring.

The lectures (in Swedish) given as part of Book Tasting 2021 will be filmed by UR Samtiden.

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