

## Follow-up report

### Discussion evening "Longdrinks" on 12 May 2022

#### Topic: Unconscious needs of reading - how reading motives influence our book purchase

On Thursday 12 May 2022, our discussion evening "Longdrinks" took place at 6pm in the Mayence Quarter on the topic of "Unconscious needs of reading - how reading motives influence our book purchase".

The evening started with a short introduction to the topic of reading motives by the interns Florentine Wörner and Malin Reinhard. The reading motives are a project of the Verzeichnis Lieferbarer Bücher (VLB), which was developed in response to the results of a study published in 2018 entitled "Book Buyers - Quo vadis?" and introduced as a new standard in the book industry in October 2021. The aim of the reading motifs is to create more orientation in the book market and thus bring so-called churners (people who leave the book market) back into the bookshops.

The VLB uses ten specific reading motifs to consciously address customer needs: (1) Engage, (2) Immerse, (3) Discover, (4) Relax, (5) Laugh, (6) Read lightly, (7) Thrill, (8) Optimise, (9) Orient and (10) Understand. The assignment of a book to one of the ten reading motifs is made by an artificial intelligence (AI) on the basis of the metadata stored in the VLB. The AI continuously evaluates the metadata, taking into account that perceptions are partly subjective and literary products can be multi-layered. Therefore, the AI models probabilities with which a book fits a certain reading motif. A main reading motif is assigned and, if necessary, also a secondary reading motif. However, not all titles are assigned to a reading motif; excluded from this are children's books and school books up to and including the age of eleven, as well as gift books, since the person buying and the person reading are not identical in these cases. So far, about two million titles in the VLB have been assigned to a reading motif and have been accessible to VLB members and customers since October 2021.

After the introduction, a few questions were answered, which led into a very stimulating discussion about various ideas and suggestions. The suggestion came up whether it would not make more sense not to include the cover design among the metadata evaluated by the AI. On the one hand, the cover design does not necessarily reflect the content in an appropriate form and on the other hand, it can differ significantly from issue to issue. This can lead to incorrect purchases and, in relation to the AI, possibly also to an allocation to different main reading motifs of the same text in different editions. Furthermore, it was discussed whether the reading motifs can take into account the diversity within a product group if the product group is included in the assignment to a reading motif.

The issue of the age limit was also raised. Some of those present would welcome a lower age limit, while others felt that an age limit of up to and including eleven years was entirely justified. It was also discussed that with regard to reading motifs, the impression can arise that they only refer to popular fiction. If one delves deeper into the reading motifs and above all their definitions, it becomes obvious that they are indeed multi-layered. However, the fact that they are sometimes difficult to separate from one another and that a classification based on feelings is difficult to make objectively remains problematic.

The VLB has so far only made the reading motifs available to booksellers, which means that the important professional mediating role to customers remains. However, the concept of the reading motifs is not directly presented to the customers themselves, which could lead to a lack of assertiveness of the concept. Only if the readers are informed about how to find and

access suitable books, a permanent migration can be avoided. An important approach would therefore be to bring the reading motifs into the social discourse, to address and attract potential target groups with them, so that they can also find the reading material suitable for their emotional needs via the reading motifs independently of a mediating person. The online presence of bookshops could also be aligned accordingly with the reading motifs, for example through an information link and a filter function according to the desired reading motif.

In conclusion, it can be said that the participants of the evening were rather critical of the reading motives of the VLB and their implementation. The reading motifs were seen as an approach to keep the migrants in the book market, but the success was doubted. The goals of providing more orientation in the stationary trade and creating sustainable pleasure in reading were viewed positively. However, the implementation in its current form ultimately lacks customer loyalty if only booksellers have access to them. However, if readers are not aware of the offer, they cannot specifically ask for it. It would make sense, for example, to offer a test that can be used to determine one's own main reading motive. The participants of the discussion evening also thought that a filter function according to reading motives would be helpful, as long as one knows what one's own main reading motive is. Furthermore, it was suggested to put stickers with the respective reading motif or something similar on the books so that the customers can directly see which reading motif the respective title serves.

Despite the criticisms and suggestions for improvement, the reading motif project has the potential to become the standard that the MVB and VLB hope it will be. We look back on a successful and very interesting discussion evening, because not only the conversations about the reading motifs, but also about book studies in Mainz, special reading preferences and much more accompanied the evening in a relaxed round and pleasant atmosphere.

We look forward to your participation at the next event in our long drinks series!