



**Interview with Virginie Clayssen, Editis**

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KENNEALLY: With nearly 75 museums, Paris has a home for everyone's special interest, from Adzak to Zadkine. The latest project under development is the first permanent exhibition space in Europe dedicated to the history of digital reading devices.

Welcome to Copyright Clearance Center's podcast series. I'm Christopher Kenneally for Beyond the Book. Computers, e-readers, tablets, and smartphones now form a new heritage, which should be made available to professionals and to anyone interested in books and technology, asserts Elizabeth Sutton, who hopes to establish a digital reading museum in Paris, called in French *Le petit musée de la lecture numérique*. Whether Paris is the proper home of digital reading is a reasonable question nevertheless.

Virginie Clayssen, chief innovation officer at Editis, France's second-largest publishing house, became president of the European Digital Reading Laboratory in July. She understands the state of digital publishing in the French and European marketplace better than anyone. Virginie Clayssen joins me now in her office in *Place d'Italie* in the *treizieme arrondissement*, the 13<sup>th</sup> Arrondissement of Paris. *Bienvenue a Beyond the Book – welcome again to Beyond the Book – Virginie.*

CLAYSSEN: Hello.

KENNEALLY: It's a pleasure to be able to speak with you here in Paris and to learn a little bit about the state of digital publishing in France and around Europe. Can you give us a brief picture – how do you see it from your office here at Editis?

CLAYSSEN: What I see is that digital publishing is there now. New titles are both published in print and digital. Most of the backlist has been digitized. You can buy digital editions of almost every book you want. And you can loan ebooks in more and more libraries.

Market share of digital is still, in Europe, under 10%, but I like to say that this doesn't matter as much as a lot of people believe. The rhythm of digital reading adoption, when there is no possibility to artificially accelerate it, is very



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progressive. Europe is not an exception. The exceptions are the places where big players cut prices in order to acquire readers and then trap them in a closed system.

**KENNEALLY:** I suppose there you're referring to Amazon, or at least in part to Amazon. It's important for listeners to know a bit about the background, because across Europe, many countries, including France as well as Germany, have national laws that mandate fixed prices for books, including ebooks. What is the impact that these laws have on ebook adoption among consumers?

**CLAYSSSEN:** The same impact as this law had on printed books when it had been voted in 1981. Booksellers still have a strong place in Germany and in France compared to UK and USA thanks to the fixed price law, based on the concept of the cultural exception that says that a book is not a product as other goods are. Books are so precious goods made of ideas and poetry, imagination and knowledge, that we have to invest time to build them the more sustainable ecosystem they deserve.

What is true for print books is true for ebooks. It doesn't mean that prices are the same for print and digital. And with ebooks, there is room for dynamic pricing and experiments. The only rule is all the resellers are selling at the same price, and those who decide these price changes are on the publishing side. The result of fixed price law is very simple – Amazon, Apple, and Google are here, but there is still place for other players, like Fnac and Cultura in France, or Tolino in Germany. Nobody wants a market controlled by only one or two players. Readers are free to buy an ebook reader where they want and to prefer open ecosystem to closed gardens.

**KENNEALLY:** As you say, then, it really is a reader's choice in that environment. So what are some of the choices that French readers and European readers are making as far as digital reading is concerned? Are there any preferred devices, any preferred formats, that you can tell us about?

**CLAYSSSEN:** Reading habits are, of course, moving toward digital in France as elsewhere for years now – reading news, reading social media, reading messages, reading books, too, of course. The habit of reading on smartphone is growing. But we know that heavy readers prefer e-readers – more comfortable for eyes when you read for a long time.

Talking books, but also talking formats, as the president of EDR Lab, I am happy to say that we are sustaining the development of the EPUB format, open source and interoperable. What we are doing with EDR Lab is trying to help publishers and the whole book chain to build a sustainable ebook ecosystem, giving readers the



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best reading experience, protecting their freedom to buy their ebooks and e-readers where they want, with the guarantee of the interoperability.

It takes effort from publishers to maintain EDR Lab, to invest time and money, to delegate people in working groups, to acquire more tech skills, but it's a condition to play an active role in the game. We welcome all publishers and bookish startups at EDR Lab. The more we are, the greater things we can do.

KENNEALLY: As you say, then, Virginie Clayssen, the EDR Lab – the European Digital Reading Laboratory – is a supporter, a promoter, of EPUB. One of the things about EPUB is that it can incorporate beyond text. It can incorporate audio and video and so forth. I wonder, as chief innovation officer at Editis, are there projects happening here and elsewhere in French publishing that go beyond text – that include videos and audio and so forth? Are book trailers popular at all?

CLAYSSSEN: Speaking of book trailers, we made a very interesting experiment in Editis last year. We made the first book trailer using 360-degree video – VR. We made this for a book translated from English named *Domina*, and you can see with the mask.

KENNEALLY: Right, a virtual reality goggle or something like that, I guess.

CLAYSSSEN: Exactly. With a simple cardboard, you can access to this trailer. It was filmed in Venice, because the action of the book is in Venice. And the idea is to have something to put the reader inside the universe and to give him the desire to go further and to buy the book to know what happens next.

KENNEALLY: So it's a bit of a taste of the book itself. So you have done, as you just gave that example, some experiments there. But there are nearly 40 imprints at Editis. Have any seen particular success in digital format? You publish education books, you publish reference books, as well as literature. Are any of those areas having a greater pickup for digital than others?

CLAYSSSEN: Big success in print are generally big success in digital, too. In Editis, we have the publisher of Guillaume Musso, the biggest book vendor in France. Ebook sales of his works are very high, but sorry, I can't share the exact figures. I can say also that we can observe the same trends in our market than in other countries. Some parts of the creation are more digitally successful, as romance, science fiction, thrillers. We are not very different from others in these kind of things.



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KENNEALLY: OK. Finally, after nearly 30 years, France is again the guest of honor at Frankfurt Book Fair, the largest book fair in the world. What kind of innovative publishing projects might we expect to see there, showing off France's dynamism in this sector?

CLAYSSSEN: Because digital transformation is not all about ebooks, the Institut Français in charge of the programming of the event will not only dedicate a space to allow publishers to demonstrate innovative projects, but we'll do that, but they also organized a contest and selected some startups of the French tech that will be invited to pitch to publishers in Frankfurt.

I'm all in favor of developing strong links with the tech scene. That's what we are doing at EDR Lab. That's what we do at Editis. Innovation is coming from everywhere, especially from smart, little, and young companies, and we have to welcome it.

KENNEALLY: Well, thank you for welcoming me to your office. We've been speaking today on Beyond the Book with Virginie Clayssen, who is chief innovation officer at Editis, France's second-largest publishing house, as well as president of the European Digital Reading Laboratory. Virginie, thank you so much. *Merci beaucoup.*

CLAYSSSEN: Thank you, Christopher. It was a pleasure.

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Beyond the Book co-producer and recording engineer is Jeremy Brieske of Burst Marketing. I'm Christopher Kenneally. Join us again soon on Beyond the Book.

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