

# What does ISBN say about book publishers and what trends could be recognized in genres of scholarly books?

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## Introduction

Books continue to be an important channel of scholarly communication and instrumental in the assessment of research output produced by academics and institutions.

Newer initiatives for evaluating books, book series, or book publishers are often experimental in nature but represent positive changes and support for these works within academia (Giménez-Toledo et al., 2015; Zuccala et al., 2015).

The objective of this research project is to identify prerequisites and good practices for the evaluation of scholarly books, mostly, in Performance-Based Research Funding Systems (PRFS).

The ongoing research plans to address several research questions:

1. What are the main approaches taken to evaluate scholarly books?
2. What kind of scholarly book publications are usually assessed in different countries, and what trends could be recognised?
3. What are the key requirements for the assessment of books using bibliometrics or expert judgement:
  - what does ISBN as an identifier reveal for quantitative and qualitative assessment?
  - is it possible to evaluate scholarly books only based on assessments of their publishers?
  - how does using Norwegian, Finnish, Danish and Spanish publisher lists affect the ranking of publishers of Lithuanian authors and challenges faced?

From the perspective of science policy, a publisher is not as important in France (Williams and Galleron, 2016), and in Poland, many academics could self-publish monographs which meet the correct criteria (Kulczycki, 2018).

According to the Lithuanian legislation, research books published by prestigious publishers could get significantly more PRFS points if the judgement of a book made by a panel of anonymous experts confirms the prestige of publisher (or high quality of the book?).

## Methods and Sources

Firstly, a literature analysis was performed to identify prerequisites and good practices for the evaluation of scholarly books in PRFS in different countries. At the same time, Lithuanian legislation was analysed with the intention to ascertain the evolution of requirements for research outputs, such as monographs and other scholarly books, from 2001 to 2018.

Secondly, following a detailed bibliometric analysis of the dataset, only books submitted to the Lithuanian PBRF over 2005–2017, assessed by a panel of anonymous experts and earning points for institutions were selected for inclusion.

Sources used to specify ISBNs and information about publishers, countries of origin of the books and rankings of publishers: • the National Bibliographic Data Bank, National Library of Lithuania; • WorldCat, OECD; • the Global Register of Publishers (GRP), International ISBN Agency; • The Norwegian Publication Indicator (NPI); • The Flemish Academic Bibliographic Database (VABB-SHW); • Publication Forum, Finland

## Results & Discussion

In many countries, the principal criteria of assessment of scholarly books are ISBN and peer-review. Peer-review, which is the axis of quality for monographs and publishers, should ensure a rigorous process. The academic community expects the most prestigious international book publishers to be selective and meet requirements for peer review procedures. Therefore, they publish the scholarly content of the highest quality that could be ranked in the highest positions.

Several countries gained a significant degree of proficiency in the ranking of their book publishers, e.g., Norway (Sivertsen 2016), Finland, Belgium, Denmark, and Spain. However, ranking publishers is not an easy task. "Classifying publishers is an activity that is fraught with difficulty," stated researchers of the project RobinBa, The Role of Books In Non-Bibliometric Areas, (Williams et al., 2018). Our absolute agreement with this statement is based on an in-depth analysis of 750 publishers of the books authored by Lithuanian researchers and scored by a panel of experts in the period from 2004 to 2016.

At the beginning of this project, it was noticed that a publisher named in the book sometimes differed from the one associated with the same ISBN found during a search for the book in different sources. Therefore, the exact names of registrants were gathered (those who ordered ISBNs) from the Global Register of Publishers (managed by the International ISBN Agency) using ISBNs. Publishers were grouped according to their main activities found in their websites: universities or academic institutions; publishers (academic or non-academic, national or international); public institutions, societies, libraries and museums; non-publishers and self-publishers. Fig. 1 shows the numbers of books published by different category of publishers over the period. As demonstrated, 52% of books were published by academic institutions; only 34% of books were published by publishers, and 14% of books' ISBNs were registered by non-publishers. 14 books were self-published, and two ISBNs were fake (as was confirmed by national ISBN agencies). It would be interesting to find out how publishers' categories are distributed in the areas of science. In the light of empirical findings from the Lithuanian data, we wished to check the existing rankings through the GRP lenses.

Fig. 2 presents the number of books published in Lithuania and abroad, categorised by sciences and genre of books. Evidently, edited volumes became an important publication in all areas of the sciences.

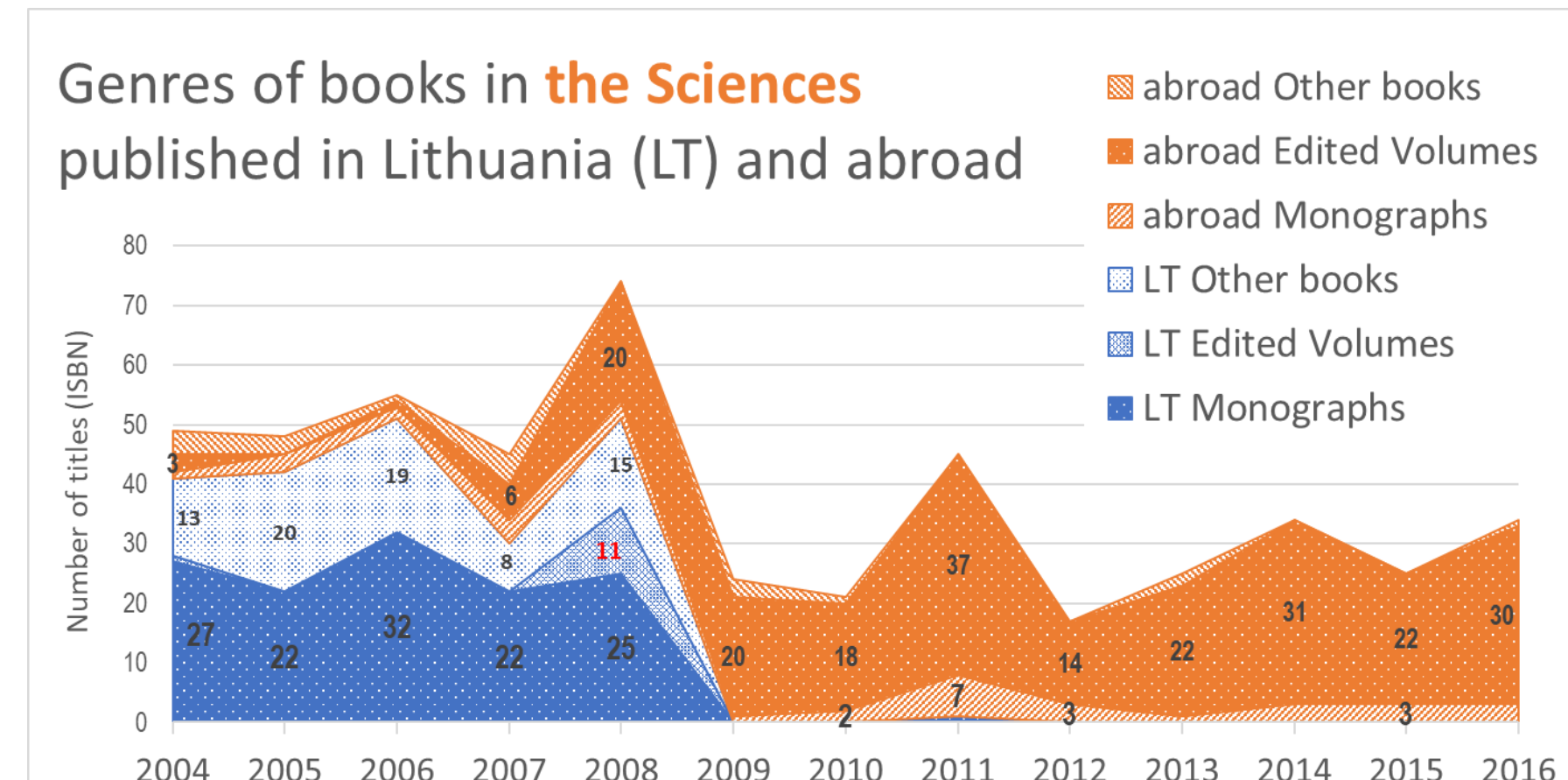
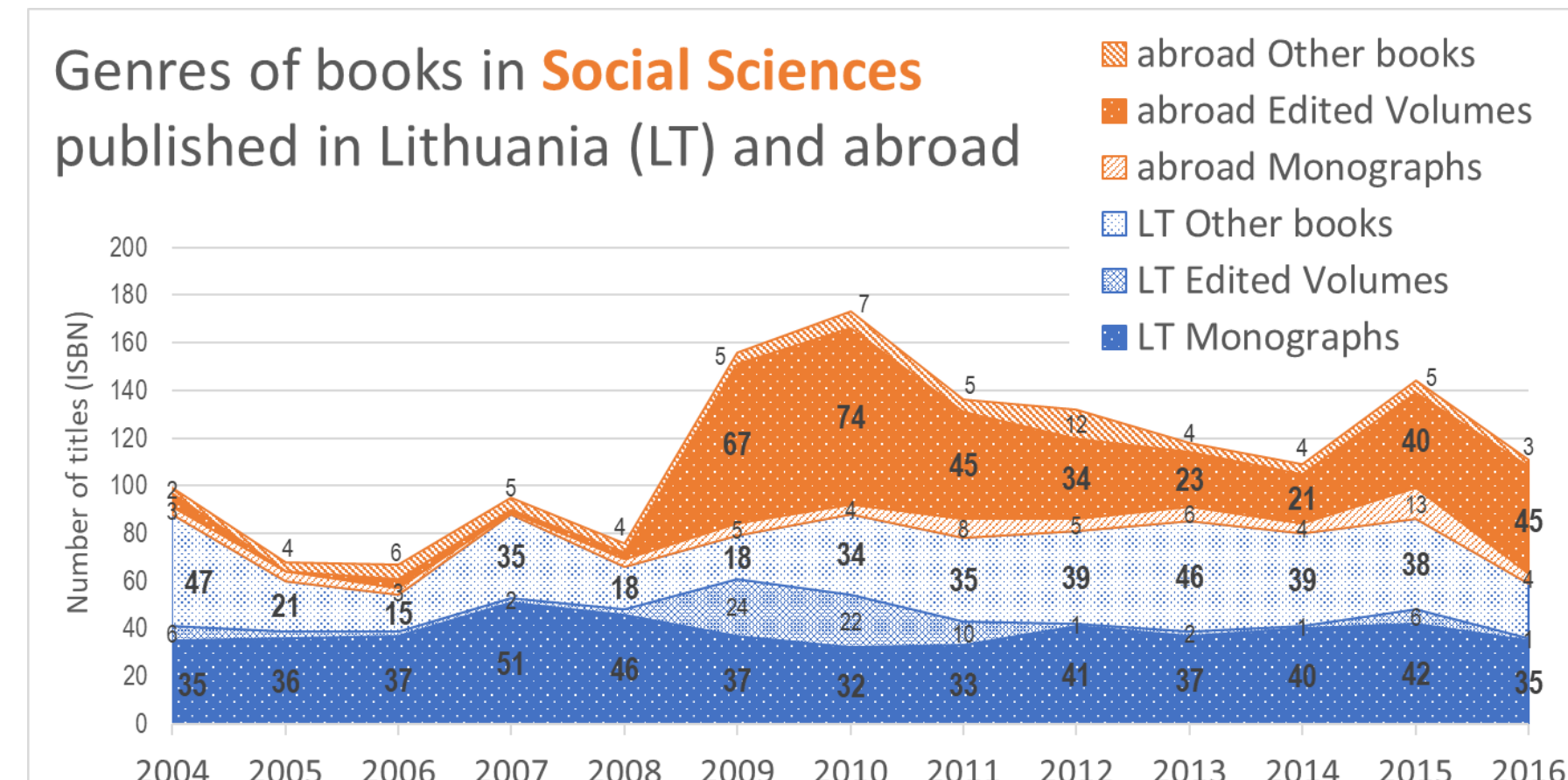
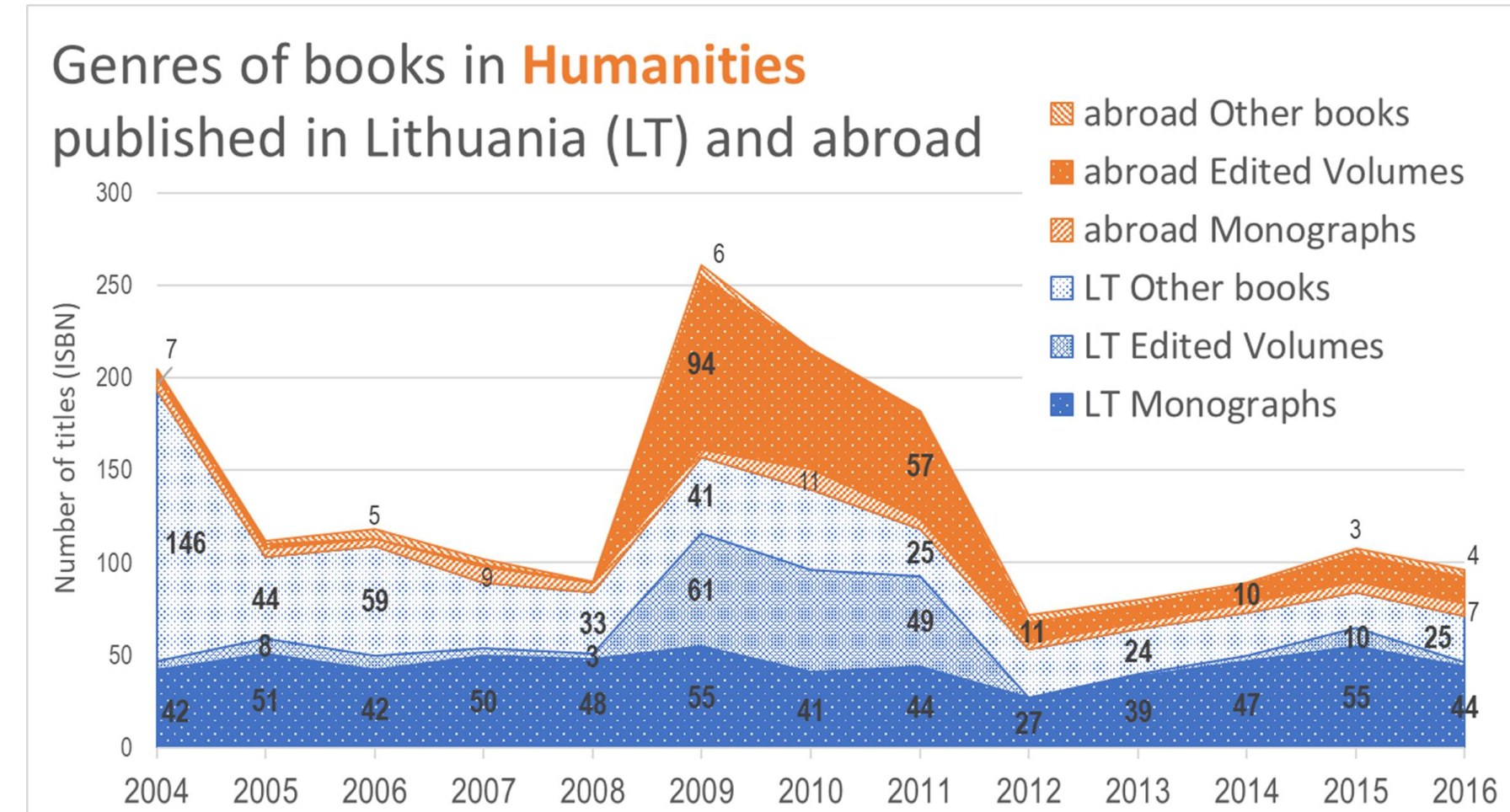


Fig. 2. Books in Humanities, Social Sciences and the Sciences by type and publishing country: in Lithuania or abroad

## Discussion & Conclusions

The lack of reliable sources for trusted information on the main approaches taken to evaluate books (ISBN, peer-review and importance of publisher) means that fair assessment of scholarly books requires intensive efforts from the community.

Currently, no better alternative seems available than the rather widely used Norwegian model, devised by representatives of the scholarly community. The model is clear and transparent and developed to be used in all countries of the world. The Flemish ranking attempted to improve the Norwegian model by introducing a clearer peer-review confirmation, which is indicative of the difficulty faced in the accounting of the peer-review process used in the conventional book publishing.

Essentially, any publisher ranking is the repeated peer-review of the already published books, and the use of the content to determine whether the publisher could be regarded as prestigious or not. Possibly, this is why each country has a local ranking as scholars keep choosing different publishers in different countries. It is also especially challenging for a panel to rank national publishers from around the world due to the number of publishers. Quantitative assessment of books is even more complicated than the repeated peer review, because different sources present the bibliometric data of the same book differently. Moreover, many books are only available in the printed format.

A technological breakthrough always occurs in the time of need, and it would be high time for one at the International ISBN Agency which registers a manuscript destined to become a book. Introduced several years back, the Global Register of Publishers (GRP) already provides reliable information regarding exact registrants of ISBN of any book and recognises the publisher officially responsible for the content. It would be of great help if the International ISBN Agency collaborated with the academic community to expand the functionality of the GRP and established uniform standards for all countries, considering the most burning issues for academia.

Types of publishers, Lithuanian authors, 2004-2016

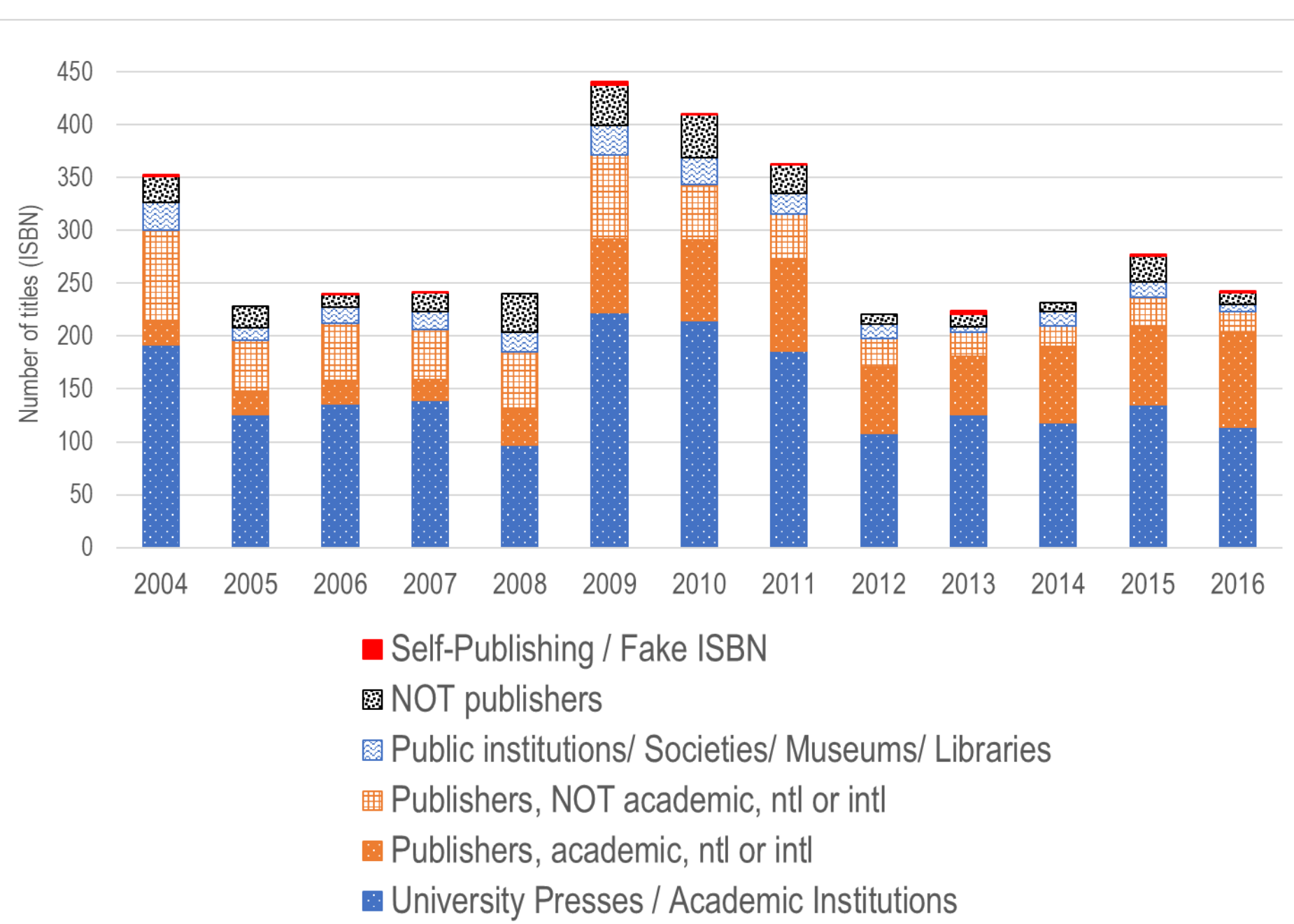
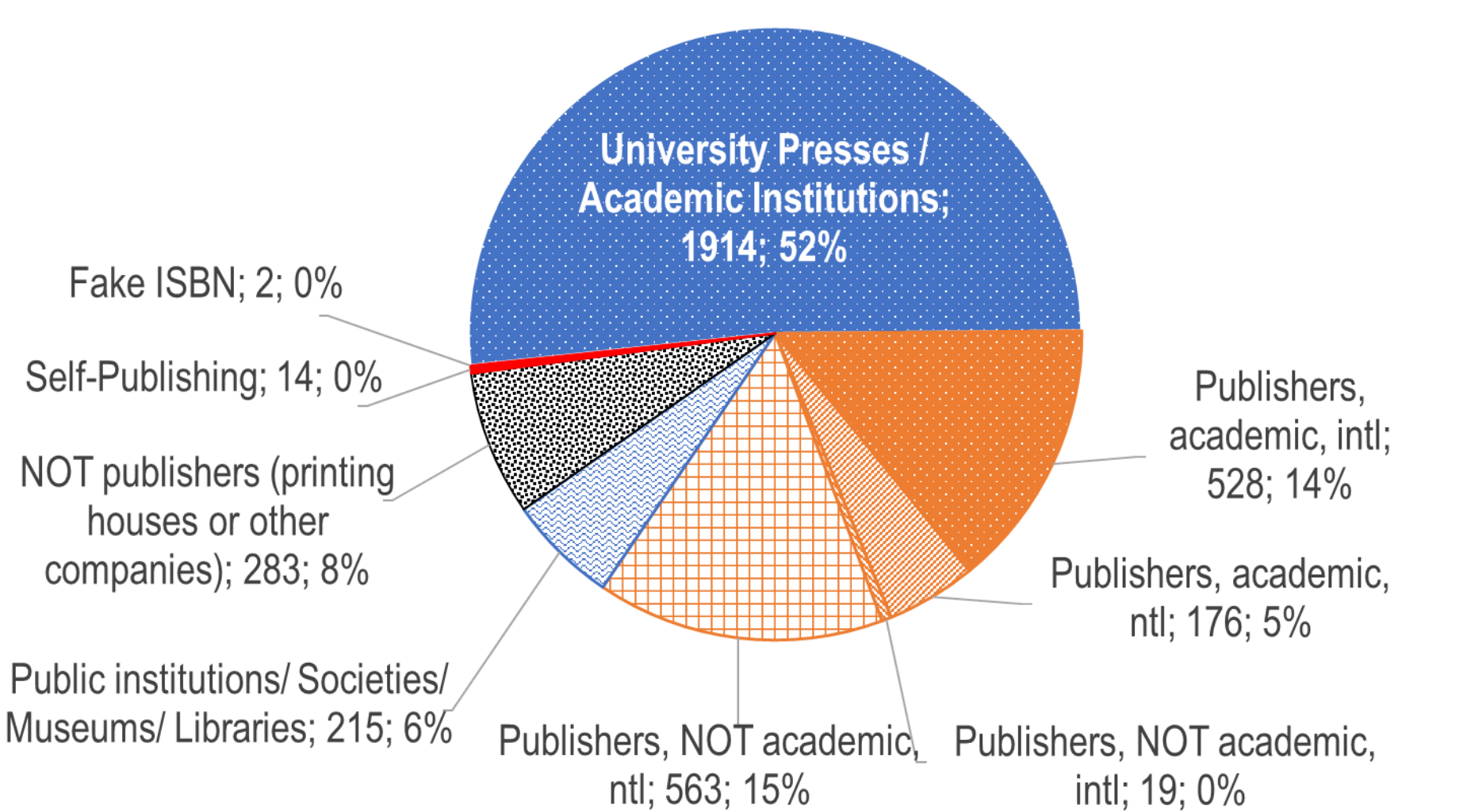


Fig. 1. Book publishers were grouped according to the data collected from GRP and various websites: category; the number of books published in this category, and percentage

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