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The potential of national reading campaigns Experiences from Austria and the Netherlands in international perspective

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Summary

National reading campaigns can be a strong tool to put libraries and reading on the agenda. Organising reading programmes and campaigns on a national scale has been tradition for a long time in the Netherlands. In the last decade attention for the reading literacy has increasingly been combined with a strategic focus on more national visibility for libraries. This has resulted in participation in national book promotion and in the campaign: Nederland leest (the Netherlands read). This starts a month of reading the same book, which is widely distributed for free among library members. Events in libraries, on TV and with famous persons as Reading Ambassadors are helping to have a national book reading and discussion.

A campaign with a similar title has been introduced in Austria: Österreich liest, Treffpunkt Bibliothek. (Austria Reads, Meeting Point Library). This campaign likewise makes use of celebrities, media, TV, and library events.

In both cases the library associations have taken the initiative for the campaign and the arrangements. The presenters are encouraged that after a presentation we both gave in Germany, the German library association has taken up the initiative and has started a similar reading campaign in 2008: Deutschland liest (Germany reads).

We think that there would be possibilities to learn from these experiences, introducing a useful model. We also see the potential of linking similar national initiatives in other countries. This could be a way forward to work on an international scale, making libraries more visible and put them on the agenda advocating for reading, literacy, citizenship and human development.

1 Introduction

There are several reasons why library associations should consider and organise national campaigns. The visibility of libraries in society should be improved. This is also the clear IFLA aim with 'Libraries on the agenda', which needs to be realised at local, regional, national and international level. The lack or decline of reading and literacy is another strong reason to highlight the role of libraries in this respect. Furthermore, the decline of loans, of library membership is yet another good argument to campaign for maintaining or enlarging the public library audience. In some countries, library funding is related to the number of library users and users % of the population.

It seems that different types of campaigns can be distinguished, which in the end all are meant to contribute to strong library development and profile in society. Library associations can at least be involved in three types of campaigns:

1. Image of the library;
2. Keeping and recruitment of library membership;
3. Promotion of reading.

This article focuses mainly on the last type of campaign, although elements of improving the general image of libraries, and increasingly the audience of library users are also related to it. National reading campaigns can be a strong tool to put libraries and reading on the agenda, as is demonstrated in the examples of the campaigns in the Netherlands and Austria, described here. Drawing on these experiences, a model is introduced which can be used by other countries to implement this powerful tool.

2 Reading campaigns in The Netherlands

Organising reading programmes and campaigns on a national scale has been tradition since several decades in the Netherlands. In the last decade attention for the reading literacy has increasingly been combined with a strategic focus on more national visibility for libraries. At the same time, professionalizing public library services has underlined the need for improvement of management and marketing. A nationwide marketing plan has been developed, including training, management tools and campaigns. Based on this marketing programme, not one, but in fact two library campaigns are launched by the Netherlands Public Library Association, including recruitment of new members of libraries, keeping the current membership, and promoting reading as a demonstration of the socially responsible role libraries play in modern society. The two campaigns are scheduled in spring and autumn: A spring campaign related to the generally known Book Week; and a new concept in the Netherlands: The Netherlands Read: a month long reading campaign from mid October to mid November. The campaigns are described consecutively.

National Book Week

The Book Week is a reading promotion activity with a long tradition (1923), organised by the CPNB, the Foundation for Collective Promotion of the Book. The Netherlands Public Library Association is a partner in this Foundation, contributes substantially, thereby assuring that libraries are included in all publicity and actions. Every year a well known author receives the honourable task to write the Book Week Present, a short novel etc. All those who buy a book during the Book Week receive a free copy of the Book Week Present (25 million copies since 1932). Annually, about 950.000 people come and get their present in the bookshop. The library campaign (since 2006) aims to support reading but also to recruit new library members and is attached to this Book Week, making efforts to demonstrate that the public library has fantastic offers, the whole year round, so a library membership is a valuable asset, worth the money!

Concept

The author who writes the Present for the Book Week draw much media attention. He/she carries the Book Week publicity, and will therefore also be the face for the library campaign. The campaign focuses on the fact that also libraries are giving the Book Week Present for free:

You receive the Book Week Present this year when you register as member. Including a book voucher of 5 euro. Go today to your library.

The idea is that people will go to the bookshop with this voucher to receive the Book Week present and also spend the 5 euro voucher then or later) in buying in the bookshop, so every partner can be pleased. About 95% of the libraries participates in the action. They order more than 36.000 vouchers for the Book Week Present and 100.000 Book Week Tests, a gadget to test literature knowledge. The national library recruitment campaign starts just before the launch of the Book Week.

Organisation and Mediaplan

The division of tasks in this campaign is as follows: the CPNB develops the Book Week campaign, creates the connection between the library recruitment campaign and the Book Week; it also produces the Book Week Presents, the Book Week test, publicity materials and a commercial. The Netherlands Public Library Association works on specific campaign communication, whereas local libraries work on local communication and distribution of vouchers.

The media are chosen according to their function to transfer an action message: quick and visible.

Timing is important, as in a few days a large group is addressed.

The national campaign has mainly the following media, focussing on the spring period:

- Posters at the railway stations;
- Advertisements in main newspapers, broadcast magazines and free tabloids;
- National library websites: Literatuurplein.nl, Bibliotheek.nl en al@din.

Through partnerships additional media attention is drawn. Additional publicity is connected to the famous *Boekenbal* (Book Party), a literary and VIP festival no media will miss. Furthermore, the national railways NS, as sponsor partner of the CPNB, organises a radio campaign, announcing that people can travel freely on the first Sunday of the month, when in possession of the Book Week

Present. This is done by 200.000 people, and a very popular asset. The CPNB communicates the Book Week Present in radio commercials, including reference to libraries.

Support for local activities

The Netherlands Public Association encourages libraries to contact local and regional media; combined efforts lead to increased results. Local advertisements and/or activities are supported by a toolkit provided by the library association. Libraries can order promotional materials which they use for activities in the street, at bus stops and stations, and in places with a lot of people traffic. Banners are available for website promotion; regular Book Week activities are expanded by attractive local actions for new members.

Advertisements used for the national campaign are used locally or completed with local addresses and logo and placed in local newspapers etc. Free publicity is gained through press releases and interviews in local media. The model press release reads: "The Book Week Present is during Book Week also available in the public library for every member over 18 years of age who registers as new member. The new member receives a voucher with which he can receive the present in the bookshop, including a discount book voucher of 5 euro."

Communication with the local libraries is established through a digital newsletter from the library association.

The Netherlands Read!

In 2008 the reading campaign *Nederland leest!* (The Netherlands read!) is held for the third time. Following the American example of One book one city, the autumn campaign organised by the NL Association is transformed into: One country – one book: encouraging people to read the same book and discuss it. The socially relevant title stimulates both reading and community building.

Building on the successes the 2008 edition focuses on the book, *Two women*, by a famous Dutch author, Harry Mulisch. The book (1975), situated in Amsterdam in the seventies, describing a forbidden love and its social reactions, has been translated in ten languages and made into a film directed by George Sluizer with actors such as Bibi Andersson, Kitty Courbois and Anthony Perkins. The book, in a special new print library edition is freely distributed to library users. (Libraries have to buy the copies for 0,50 € (so an investment is necessary). Besides the widely distributed specially printed library edition, a special luxury edition is for sale in the bookshops.

Foundation Reading sponsors the campaign by distributing free copies to students of grade 10.

The annual campaign is *Nederland Leest!* is an initiative of the Netherlands Public Library Association, executed in close cooperation with the CPNB. The Campaign Ambassador is a famous TV-journalist Philip Freriks.

In 2006 the book *Dubbelspel* (Double Play) by Frank Marinus Arion – in edition of 725.000 copies was distributed. It caused a variety of debates, including the relation between the Netherlands and the Antilles, former colony and location of the book. In 2007, the edition of *De gelukkige klas* (*The happy classroom*) by Theo Thijssen (1926) was increased up to almost a million copies. Education policy and teaching/learning, including school memories were major themes.

Concept

The title of the campaign is: *Nederland leest* (The Netherlands read). The message that is transmitted translates as: "For reading you have to go to the library", and: "We value your membership." And to the policy makers and opinion leaders: "The library takes its role in stimulating social awareness." In this way, they continued the message of the spring campaign under a different angle.

The main message: Netherlands has a big reading adventure invented and presented by the libraries

Organisation

The set up of the campaign consists of a National Campaign, called: The Netherlands read!, carried by a well known Dutch person, who marks a national period of reading the same book in the Netherlands, which culminates in a big final evening in all libraries. It is hoped that in the future the final event will be broadcasted also on television.

The criteria for the choice of the book are that it should be easily available and attractive for a large audience; relevant for literature, politics, society, and allow connection with a theme or subject.

The well known Dutch person should be charismatic, a verbally strong character with a professional and or personal reference to the theme.

The campaign makes use of the free publicity around the VIP reader, the public debate about nominations and selection, and thereby create opportunities for local actions. CPNB and local libraries arrange an evening, with national, resp. local publicity.

The campaign is organised by the CPNB. The Netherlands Public Library Association organises a campaign to support local and regional activities and publicity via local media through national publicity. Local activities are encouraged, also in cooperation with partners, and allowing to create an exclusive membership event. A Toolkit for local actions and background information are made available via a password protected site.

Mediaplan

The first campaign was presented at the national library meeting, December 2005. The selection of the carrying book and author were revealed just before 23 April 2006, World Book Day, starting publicity. A well-known journalist serves as ambassador for the campaign, which is launched by the responsible Minister. In June, a cultural event in preview of the Reading Month, reminded readers of the upcoming campaign. The real reading event takes place in the time from mid October until mid November: four weeks of reading by all Dutch finalised by evening events organised in local libraries. The final evening all libraries can organise as they see fit, with debate, dinner, discussion.

The Library Association organised four marketing workshops, as part of the marketing policy programme. At these workshops, local activities around the Reading Campaign are discussed, trained and prepared, so a wealth of creative ideas and activities have been the results. The first 60 participants showed enormous interest for the Reading Campaign, so the workshop had to be repeated.

3 Austria Reads. Meeting Point Library

In the PISA study carried out in 29 OECD countries, Austria only scored 19th on reading skills of students. To eliminate the deficits, the Austrian Library Association decided to launch an Austria-wide campaign. The goal of the campaign was; 1) to make publicity for reading and 2) to improve the visibility of libraries. In 2008 the second edition takes place.

All libraries campaign

From the first reading campaign in 2007 can be reported the following. With the title "Austria Reads. Meeting Point Library" the Austrian Public Library Association wanted to draw the public's attention to the subject and to get people to identify it with libraries, indicating competence and authority of the libraries in reading.

It was important to get all libraries on board. While the umbrella organization of the Public Libraries was responsible for the initiative and planning, we deliberately decided not to call our campaign "Austria Reads. Meeting Point Public Library." We wanted the title to refer to all libraries, to make publicity for them. And we succeeded in doing precisely that.

The Austrian National Library was a committed, valuable partner. Our colleagues from the Society of Austrian Librarians motivated their members at academic libraries to become active and the school libraries moved their "Open Day of School Libraries" to the week our campaign took place.

Libraries throughout Austria - from community and church libraries, school libraries, city and provincial libraries, university libraries to the Austrian State Library - took part.

With "Austria Reads. Meeting Point Library", we were able to organize a joint initiative with all the different types of libraries in Austria the first time.

Fresh image

In an attempt to counter the negative cliché of an old fashioned library only frequented by school children and housewives, we used a cool young man who was floating on a book as the central motif in all of our publicity material which was designed by a well-known graphic artist.

We supplied more than 2,500 libraries with free posters, invitation leaflets, and book markers in a uniform design. The same posters that made publicity for a joint initiative of all Austrian libraries were to be found on the walls of libraries, schools, museums, banks, restaurants, etc. The T-shirts with the Austria-Reads design became a real best seller. We had to reorder the T-shirts several times to meet the demand. Library teams from the Austrian State Library to a small village library wore Austria-Reads T-shirts and we were also able to win many prominent persons to wear this T-shirt. Politicians, bishops, athletes, and artists received T-shirts and became the advertisers in our campaign.

From the very outset we knew that we were sitting on a real treasure. Austria's libraries are extremely active and creative in the event sector. Every year, countless events take place.

Each organizer is sure of the quality of the event – and usually rightly so. Unfortunately, however, the wealth of activities is not perceived and the potential is not tapped for enhancing the libraries' visibility. It is here that we wanted to proceed – to convince libraries to pool their efforts, to contribute to publicity measures and to market our campaign as the biggest Austrian literature festival.

With thousands of readings, literary tours, story times, kid's cinema, reading nights, reading festivals, workshops, literature-café's, book exhibits we also succeeded in doing this in one week.

Advertising campaign: The Crème de la Crème to Promote Reading and Libraries

By conventional means – press mailings as well as nice designed posters – one only reaches people who already have an interest in reading and libraries.

Press reports on libraries appear, if at all, in the cultural section, and are only noticed by people who already have an interest in culture.

We wanted to achieve more. We wanted to break out of this cycle. We had to take people by surprise. To this end, we designed an insert campaign in which individuals with a high degree of publicity and an image, who were not immediately associated with libraries, made publicity for libraries or reading in a very personal way. The goals we set ourselves were very high.

We would consider only absolute top stars who also have visibility outside of the world of culture who did not have a polarizing effect and could appeal to a large target group.

We were able to win the crème de la crème of several different professions for our campaign: Anna Netrebko, an international star and everybody's darling in Austria, a country of opera fanatics, the singer Christina Stürmer, whom children and young people dream of, the team coach of Austria's national soccer team Josef Hickersberger, the slalom world champion Michel Walchhofer, many-time sailing Olympic champions Hagara and Steinacher and the Olympic champion in Austrian ski jump Toni Innauer.

Whoever knows that normally press inserts featuring Anna Netrebko are linked to six-figure Euro fees, will all the more appreciate the fact that Anna Netrebko and all other stars provided their services completely free of charge for the press campaign.

The thirty inserts in the daily papers with the greatest circulation – and also placed most favorably on Saturdays and Sundays on page three, and in the cultural or sports section in all other days surprised all. No one expected libraries to be able to pull off such an initiative.

Results

With "Austrian Reads. Meeting Point Library" the Austrian libraries launched a campaign that was unprecedented to date. Thousands of events in the libraries –

- 480,000 visitors in one week (Austria has 8.2 inhabitants),
- international stars who volunteered completely free of charge in a press insert campaign promoting the libraries.
- Our goal to promote reading and libraries with the campaign "Austrian Reads. The Library as Rendezvous" was reached.
- From the community and church libraries, school libraries, municipal and provincial libraries, university libraries all the way to the Austrian State Library – libraries throughout all of Austria participated and put together an attractive program.
- Almost all of Austria's well-known authors appeared in libraries during this week.
- The German colleagues decided to organize in 2008 "Germany reads. Meeting Point Library" in connection with us, with the same design and the same concept.

For the First Time: Public Libraries as Part of the Government's Action Plan

It is not possible to precisely assess the success of campaigns. However, it is no coincidence that public libraries figured for the first time in a government action plan.

This plan was presented in January 2007 – that is, three months following our campaign.

For the first time a government program indicates a need to take action and to change things in this area.

We have yet not reached our greatest goal, a library law which defines standards, services and financing of libraries. But with targeted lobbying, accompanied by an Austria-wide campaign that has a high level of visibility we have succeeded in putting libraries on the political agenda. We will go on in this way and are well under way with *Austria Reads. Meeting Point Library 2008*.

4 Building a chain of National Reading campaigns, supported by a model

The described national campaigns in the Netherlands and Austria differ somewhat in scope (involvement of other types of libraries) and partnerships (publishers and booksellers, media, railways) but serve the same aim and focus: reading and library visibility. The need to put libraries on the agenda, and to draw attention to reading in its various forms is a major task of all library associations. In Europe, there is an urgent need to present libraries more visibly at the European level. Therefore, we suggest to build on the Dutch and Austrian example in two ways. The first one is to make an overview of all national and reading campaigns throughout Europe, and work gradually on an relay run of library reading campaigns, a chain connecting all the nations/libraries in Europe. A number of

countries organizes a library week of national Book Month. By connecting them in a loose but structured way, all libraries can gain by this joint effort.

The second way is especially for those countries who have until now no national reading or library campaign; they can start by exploring the possibilities of following a model drawing from the Dutch and Austrian experiences. The German colleagues, inspired by the Dutch and Austrian examples, and encouraged by IFLA's president, and DBV Association's president Claudia Lux, have started with 'Germany reads. Meeting Point Library, which will take place from 24 to 31. October. More than 11,000 public and scientific libraries will participate with unusual presentations, exhibitions, reading aloud hours, library nights and various actions, and present projects on information and media literacy and reading promotion.

"Germany reads. Meeting place library" is supported by the Federal Ministry for education and research and numerous prominent personalities. Protector of the campaign is Federal President Horst Köhler. The start of the library week, 24. October, "Library Day", will be combined with the Award presented to the 'Library of the Year, the only national library Award in Germany. This first national campaign, coordinated by DBV, the German library federation should be prelude for further annual library campaigns. The aim is to make the effect and impact visible of the libraries in culture and education and strengthen their role in the society. Starting from June up to the library week in October 2008 updates of the full programme are collected at a dedicated website: www.treffpunkt-bibliothek.de

Model

In general, setting up campaigns takes place as a structured activity. This structure includes:

1. Aim of the Campaign
2. Concept, incl. Target groups
 - a. Facts on Reading and Libraries
 - b. Vision
 - c. Prominent Stars for Reading
 - d. Advertisement campaign
3. Organisation and Partners
 - a. Division of responsibilities and tasks
 - b. Time schedule
4. Media Plan
 - a. Media partners
 - b. Promotion materials: Printed matters, T-Shirts, Balloons
 - c. Mailinglists
 - d. Materials for Library users/Readers' advice
5. Funding, incl. supporters and sponsors
6. Local perspective
 - a. Marketing workshops
 - b. incl. Idea clearing house where best practices can be exchanged

In search of the best of national reading campaigns, it seems attractive to adopt a thorough marketing plan and strategy as developed in the Netherlands, as an overall framework for improving awareness among the public and politicians on reading; create opportunities for local library activities and profiling and enhance competencies and skills of library workers.

Likewise, it seems attractive to adopt the Austrian approach to include all types of libraries, to cooperate on presentation and visibility. VIPs on posters are a major support for national reading campaigns. Additional local reading promotion through local celebrities also pays off. There is always a need for a good story by VIPs, as this will help national media coverage. Without the media, no reading campaign can succeed.

Both campaigns show that only with strong partnerships such campaigns are feasible and fundable.

The Austrian one stays close to the total library community, but involves all government levels, incl. the President, and has a media partner and the Ministry for some aspects. The Dutch campaign partner (CPNB) is in fact a very skilled one, with a long tradition – for publishers and book sellers, but is still young in explicitly addressing library audiences and working with libraries as equal partners.

As in many countries, for a long time booksellers libraries and publishers have mixed feelings on their relationships. Nowadays, the overall and common felt need to encourage reading and create a climate

of books and reading makes widely profitable alliances possible. That is why the premises for the next campaign: many readers of literature are both buyers and borrowers of books, is such a promising one for a new era of cooperation.

References

Austria Reads: www.oesterreichliest.at; in english:

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Germany Reads: www.treffpunkt-bibliothek.de

www.bibliotheksverband.de/projekte/bibliothekskampagne/Bibliothekskampagne_Konzept.pdf

IFLA advocacy campaign: www.ifla.org/III/PresidentsProgram.htm#President

Pisa studies: www.pisa.oecd.org

The Netherlands Read: <http://www.debibliotheken.nl/content.jsp?objectid=6907>;

www.cpnb.nl/nll/site

Opening of the campaign: the Netherlands read: Campaign Ambassador and the Minister of

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