Read with Us! A Program series and Campaign in Hungary

Context and goals

The status of reading has become strange, even contradictory nowadays. While bigger and bigger book stores are opening their doors, and book selling has not fallen considerably despite the economic crisis, the possibility of reading is about to disappear in disadvantaged and poor settlements and regions. The consumption of culture is not only bound by the difficult financial situation, but also by the fact that the local bookshops, libraries and community spaces available for reading are disappearing and closing.

Read with Us!, inspired by similar successful campaigns in Central and Eastern Europe, aims to instill and encourage the practice of reading in impoverished families, for children and parents alike. With the help of reading, as a tool and as an opportunity, we intend to stimulate social dialogue as well as to stand up against divisiveness and for reconciliation within Hungarian society. The program attracts such a high level of publicity—with the active participation of celebrities and opinion shapers—that it can effectively change the reading habits of the participating communities, and at the same time serve as a tool to raise awareness of the need for social and personal responsibility. ***Read with Us!*** is – therefore – a long program-series and a well-designed campaign for changing local practices and also fostering changing attitudes within the society in the long-run.

Scenario of a Read with Us! Event

The central element of the program that started in April 2010 is a joint reading whereby well-known personalities read together with 8-9 year old children and their parents in a school either in a remote village or in a cultural center in Budapest, and whenever it is possible, a contemporary author also joins these events. The program also offers possibility for chatting, drawing and playing. The reading is followed either by a puppet show, a theatre performance or the revue of a Roma clown group, which draws the attention of the children on the importance of tolerance and peaceful coexistence by means of tales.

At the end of each program the invited guests and the organizers give books to each child to bring home, and boxes of book donations for the schools and/ or the municipalities that can be the starting point for a new collection of books or a local library, as well.

The classes involved in the reading also receive a big paper castle having the ***Read with Us!*** stickers on it complemented by the drawings and comments of the children. The castles served originally as book collection points in different locations. In order to be able to store the newly received books, the children are also offered a recycled paper shelf.

Future Perspectives

The program realized in the cooperation of many actors is not meant to be a one-time event, but it is important to continue the book collection, to go back to the already visited children and their parents and to involve them in different programs related to reading. Furthermore, we would encourage local communities, schools, NGOs or private persons to organize ***Read with Us!*** events in their respective communities.

For this purpose we will publish and disseminate a short guide on how to organize such an event, as well as a book presenting the campaign, in which we will include photos taken during the ***Read with Us!*** events,

drawings and messages from children participating at the events, as well as the articles which report about each visit and are posted on the website of the campaign after each occasion.

Besides being able to raise awareness the ***Read with Us!*** program is also about mobility whereby the persons traveling to the different locations and the local communities can meet with each other under the pretext of reading and help. Therefore we envisage the development of the program into a movement in which more and more self-organizing communities and partners get active in order to promote reading. We hope that in this way ***Read with Us!*** has the potential to become a program that can improve the chances of reading and that of social dialogue which would lead to a better atmosphere in Hungary.

Organization

The program has been initiated and managed by the Roma Initiatives of the Open Society Institute Budapest Foundation, while several partners contributed to the campaign. **Booksellers and publishers**: Antikvárium.hu, Csimota kiadó, Presskontakt.hu, Libri, Liget, Litera, Magvető, Manó könyvek, Pagony, Póny club, Tudomány kiadó, Vince kiadó. **Other partners:** A38 hajó, Kino, Gödör Klub, Karton Art Design, Magyarországi Református egyház, Millenáris, OMV, RádióQ.

The institutional background of the campaign has been provided by OSI. The campaign was designed and coordinated by an operational team of 6 persons made of 2 representatives of the Roma Initiatives Program of OSI, the campaign coordinator, the representative of Litera, the face of the program (Antónia Mészáros) and the colleague responsible for the press. A visual team made of a photographer, a cameraman and an essay-reporter has recorded all the ***Read with Us!*** events during the campaign. All the photos, short videos and essay-reports are available on the blog of the campaign: www.olvassunkegyutt.hu.

The performances following the readings were provided by Apró Theatre (Trebla, the Sheep), Clowns without Frontiers (Roma clown performance), Caravan Arts Foundation (All Mice Like Cheese), and Barboncas Association (Black Lady – puppet show based on a Roma tale).

Results

Number of children directly involved in Read with Us events	1,000
Books offered to children	4,000
Books donated to schools and the municipalities	4,000
Number of books collected so far	10,000
Number of articles generated by different events	over 100
Radio coverage	18
Number of participants of the workshop about the continuation of the program	50
Number of self-organized Read with Us! events	6
Short films (10-minute long)	14
Celebrities involved in the project	40
Number of partners involved in the campaign	20

Budget

It is important to mention that ***Read with Us!*** is a genuine low-budget campaign that builds mostly on CSR and individual contributions to the program. Therefore the well-known personalities who come to read for the children participate on a voluntary basis. We are proud that we have not received any refusal from the persons who we approached to come and read for children, and when the visit of a famous person could not be realised, it was due to health issues or previously arranged long-term commitments.

It is also important to note that all the books donated to children and schools were offered by individuals or book stores and publishing companies.

The financial background of the project has been ensured by the OSI. The main budget lines are the following:

Item	**Budget (HUF)**
Coordination	
Coordination (18 months)	4,837,500
Logistics	340,000
Rental fee of a store (December 1, 2010 – December 31, 2011)	960,000
Advocacy	
Production of the photo and video materials after each event; making photo galeries; preparation of reports from the field, management of the internet surface of the campaign; involvement of contemporary writers in the project	4,600,000
1 radio spot, a TV spot and a documentary film	3,000,000
Management of contacts with the press (18 months)	1,000,000
Hungarian News Agency (surface)	100,000
Events	
Theatre performance, puppet show, revue of the Roma clowns	1,002,300
Catering (14 locations)	250,000
Recycled paper castles and shelves	750,000
Photo exhibition in Arena Plaza	313,950
Event in Budapest City Park (tents, catering for children, sound engineering, publicity, operation of book collection point for 3 weeks)	2,041,250
Planned programs	
Theatre performance for all the children and celebrities involved in ***Read with Us!***	
Travel	1,400,000
Performance	1,000,000
Publication of a book about the campaign	2,500.000
Manual	200,000
Total	24,295,000

Furthermore, OSI would like to find the possibility to extend the campaign to other countries of the region in the future.