

„Austria reads. Meeting Point Library 2007’: The enlarged and revised 2nd Edition

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During the week of the campaign ‘Austria reads. Meeting Point Library’ Austria’s public libraries were able to stun the public with a dazzling display of creativity, wit and imagination. Over half a million visitors were attracted by an impressive number of events; 4 000 alone in libraries all over the country. Crowded venues were only to be expected as the festival was spiced with an abundance of fresh ideas to inspire and encourage reading. Trains were transformed into mobile libraries (“Our books take the train”, Salzburg), premises of local authorities were “taken over” by librarians and became the backdrop of innovative events. New libraries opened their gates and the rebuilding of the Upper Austrian Federal State Library began. A substantial number of well-established and popular writers performed readings in libraries of different sizes all over Austria. In short – the events associated with ‘Austria reads’ attracted an audience across all communities.

On October 15th, 2007 the Austrian Library Association and the Austrian National Library opened the festival with an elegant evening reception in the stunningly beautiful halls of the National Library. Over 200 guests from the economic, cultural and political sector were drawn in by the motto of the evening “A Temptation to Reading”. Dr. Claudia Schmied, Federal Minister for Education, the Arts and Culture, was highly impressed by the achievements of the Austrian public libraries. Schmied not only revealed herself as a true bibliophile but she also stressed that the lack of an Austrian Federal Library Policy will be an issue to be covered in the same legislative period.

The media and press coverage was extensive: At the time of ‘Austria Reads’ the newspapers with the greatest circulation – Kronen Zeitung, Kurier, Standard, Salzburger Nachrichten – published articles noting that the Austrian library system finds itself in a precarious financial and legal situation. That implies that not all Austrians have equal and unrestricted access to information, education and the cultural life. That is why the working conditions of librarians need to be improved. – Libraries need to be put on the political agenda. The importance of libraries and library services need to be discussed nationally by all stakeholders (government, ministries, local authorities). The media sees the need for change: The number of editorial pieces – ranging from front page reports to announcements – surpassed the one of ‘Austria Reads 2006’ by 53 percent. Media support is an important factor in building a political and economic framework for the advancement of libraries.

It was a great honour that Austria’s federal president Dr. Heinz Fischer agreed to assume patronage for ‘Austria reads. Meeting point library 2007’. The support and funding of various governmental organisations (central government as well as the nine provinces) made it possible that all libraries were equipped with professional posters, folders and other advertising material. The funding by the Austrian Federal Ministry for Education, the Arts and Culture enabled the Austrian Library association to launch an impressive press insert campaign. Both national and international celebrities such as Anna Netrebko, Marlies Schild, Benni Raich, Josef Hickersberger and Toni Innauer agreed to appear in these press inserts free of charge. The Austrian National Radio and Broadcasting Company ORF also agreed to support the

campaign and produced an 'Austria reads'-primetime-trailer airing on national television.

The Austrian Library Association worked with selected partners launching the cross-media-campaign at various levels both nationally and locally: In 2007 the network included companies, artists, athletes, bishops and governors. Clearly successful lobbying work for the library sector needs long term planning and requires great endurance. It was a pleasure to see the efforts pay off – The success of 'Austria Reads' inspired Germany to launch a similar campaign – 'Germany reads'.