

## **Creative reading in Europe**

### ***- Finland and European models of literature and reading promotion***

#### **ABSTRACT**

In my feasibility study I will clarify what is and what can be the role of non-profit organizations in reading skills of children and young people. My research question is: How should non-profit organizations promote literature and reading? What kind of practices and programmes can be found in comparable countries (Sweden, Norway, Scotland)? What practices should be adapted to my organization, Lukukeskus, The Finnish Reading Centre?

To start with, I explain the background of Finnish PISA results and what is measured in PISA. In this context, I introduce my concept of “creative reading”, particularly in relation to “cultural and social literacy”. I present the relevant cases and best practices in Sweden, Norway and Scotland.

I have four basic conclusions. First, there is a distinction between creative reading and a “utilitarian” view of reading as a learning tool. Creative reading aims to both cultural and social literacy – understanding of idioms, metaphors, allusions and empathy. It is an effective way to avoid social exclusion, make people more tolerant and understand different signs and values.

Second, feedback from writers’ visits has constantly been very positive in the three Nordic countries. But I think all organizations should assess the outcomes of their activities and promote research in their area. All facts that support the importance of “creative reading” programmes would be useful in securing funding. However, proper research requires adequate resources.

My third conclusion is that the field of literature and reading promotion in Europe is fragmented. In Finland, too, there are several small actors doing their own thing without much cooperation.

Fourth, three European general schemes emerge: a Nordic, a Central European and a British model of

promoting reading. They relate strongly to their respective societies and cultural traditions. Reading promotion can be either long-term or short-term: enhancing a literary lifestyle as a community norm, or, campaigning a temporary duty with limited consequences.

Finally, I offer recommendations for a Finnish model. I emphasise the power of collaboration and exchanging experiences in the international level, especially in the new, changing operational environment. We have several challenges: our target groups are much more difficult to reach than before. Secondly, scarcity of governmental funding demands good justification for our activities. On the other hand, in times of financial pressures, NGO’s can prove themselves as the most economical, flexible and effective actors in the field.

Nevertheless, too many small organizations result to unfocused priorities in reading promotion. They multiply the overhead but at the same time are unable to carry out any large programmes. In contrast to Finland, in most other European countries organizations that promote reading are much bigger. It would be recommendable to consider mergers of smaller organizations in Finland at some future stage, in order to use resources much more efficiently.

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## 1. Introduction

Reading is key both for learning in school and involvement in society. Ability to read and understand texts has remarkable consequences for future lives of young people.<sup>1</sup> There are quite remarkable disparities both in education systems and reading skills of young people, and there are different models in different countries. But the main challenge is the same – people across cultures see that reading literacy is worth of effort and one of the most important things to maintain in society. During last eight months I have talked with 30 people from European organizations that promote reading. Everyone shared the same worry about the future of reading as a lifestyle. In fact, there is little if any concrete collaboration between different countries because the first challenge is to promote reading in the national level. But there are contacts and networks in which people are able to share problems, exchange views and get new ideas and viewpoints.

When I visited Norwegian literature organizations, I was asked about the secret of high literacy rates of Finnish children and young people – what have we done so much better? There has been a lot of discussion in Norway on how to achieve the level of Finland. However, at the same time in Finland people are worried about the level of literacy after the latest PISA survey results. Similarly, when I took part in an open session of the EU Read network, I was asked whether there is need for any kind of reading campaigns in Finland, because everything is so well.

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<sup>1</sup> Teaching Reading in Europe, 47.

Norway has great resources for promoting reading literature out of school curriculum, and organizing authors' visits all over Norway. Several other European countries have also put great effort into promoting reading, but in Finland not much has been done in that field. On the other hand, the Finnish library network of is excellent, resulting in large numbers of borrowed books. Finnish people are also active users of libraries, spending a lot of their leisure time there. But other support to literature skills and creative reading is very fragmented and small.

There are several organizations in European countries which are working in the fields of reading, writing and literature promotion out of school. That activity is summarized partly under the chapter "Reading promotion out of school" in the Eurydice study, *Teaching reading in Europe: Context, Policies and Practices*. The title is a little contradictory, however, because many of the organizations presented also cooperate with schools. The fact is that school is the only place where you can reach children and young people equally and democratically. To avoid misunderstanding, I will talk about "reading promotion out of curriculum" when I mean reading and literature promotion carried out by non-profit organizations.

The skill of reading literature is not only the responsibility of schools and NGO's. Home environment and leisure time reading have a great impact on reading skills. According to the study *Teaching Reading in Europe*, early literacy activities at home establish a basis for children to learn to read in school. Later leisure-time reading, reading for pleasure and good reading abilities increase the amount of reading children do. Those who read more become better readers. This research presents the "Matthew effect" which means that increasing competence to read is motivating, and a high level of motivation leads to more reading, which again improves achievements.<sup>2</sup>

On the other hand, "[m]any reading promotion initiatives take the form of literacy activities which may largely attract those already interested in reading. Targeted programmes for groups with low literacy skills, or for boys, appear to be rare. Moreover, there is little focus on multimedia literacies among the main programme for promoting reading in European countries, despite their

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<sup>2</sup> Teaching Reading in Europe, 113-115.

increasing significance in pupils' lives."<sup>3</sup> However, the material in the Eurydice research was quite restricted. It gives only glances to the field but doesn't cover whole area systematically.

But what is the role of non-profit organizations in reading skills of children and young people? My research question is: How should non-profit organizations promote literature and reading? What kind of practices and programmes can be found in comparable countries (Sweden, Norway, Scotland)? What practices should be adapted to my organization, Lukukeskus, The Finnish Reading Centre?

Lukukeskus is a well-established literary organization which operates both in Finnish and Swedish languages. It exists to promote reading, create author-reader relationships and build up a new generation of readers. We produce services mainly for schools, but also for libraries and the general public all over the Finland. The most important service is the organizing of author visits. Lukukeskus also publishes three literary magazines – one for children and the other for young people. The third and largest magazine "Kiiltomato.net" is published on the Internet and it reviews Finnish and foreign fiction and non-fiction. We also have an annual reading campaign, "Reading Week".

Lukukeskus consists of ten member organizations which are the leading literary societies in Finland, and it works in close contact with Finnish authors, publishers and organizations.

## **2. Structure and methodology of study**

In Chapter three, I will explain the background of Finnish PISA results, which are mostly based on an equal, high-quality education system. However, I think that non-profit organizations can influence in the importance of reading as a lifestyle, appreciation of literature and reading, as well as the ability to interpret fiction, and allegories and metaphors in general. This is discussed in the next chapter.

In Chapter four I will introduce my concept of "creative reading", particularly in relation to "cultural and social literacy". These skills are not easily measured in PISA surveys, but are equally important in students' lives.

In Chapter five, I will present my organization, Lukukeskus (The Finnish Reading Centre), in a nutshell. In other words I will introduce my starting point of analyzing the data I have sampled.

In Chapter six, I will present the best cases and practices in Sweden, Norway and Scotland, and analyse the situation of Central Europe based on my knowledge of member countries of EU Read network. Every country has its own background, with cultural, historical, educational and financial differences. I suppose there are a lot of differences but there are also many similar challenges concerning promotion of reading. I will examine cases from Sweden, Norway and Scotland, and consider best practises to import to other countries, particularly to Finland.

I prepared a standard questionnaire for interviews in organizations that are involved in similar activities in comparable countries, in order to get comparable information about the practises and their impacts. However, I will not present the results strictly according to this schema, since I did vary questions according to situation, organization and people who I met, and because different questions proved relevant in each of the organizations.

Finally, I will present general conclusions based on my research and best European practices, and make recommendations for my own organization.

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<sup>3</sup> Teaching Reading in Europe, 133.

### 3. PISA survey results as indicators of literary reading skills

#### 3.1. Results of PISA surveys in Finland and other European countries

At present, reading literacy is assessed by two international surveys, PIRLS and PISA. PIRLS (The IEA Progress in International Reading Literacy Study) measures the reading achievements of pupils in the fourth grade, approximately 10 year-olds. PIRLS data are collected every fifth year. PISA (The OECD's Programme for International Student Assessment) measures the knowledge and skills of 15 years old students in reading, mathematics and science. Reading skills have been measured in 2000 and 2009.

Finland has achieved a good reputation in education thanks to excellent results in the PISA survey in reading literacy comparative to other countries in Europe. In 2009, 19.6% of European students were classified as low achievers in reading in. That means that one of five of the 15 year-olds in the EU has difficulties using reading as a tool for learning. In Finland, the amount of low skill readers was the lowest, 8.1%. The proportion of low achievers was about 15% in Belgium (Flemish), Denmark, Estonia, Poland and Norway. The proportion of students lacking basic skills was especially high in Bulgaria and Romania.<sup>4</sup> The PIRLS survey for children in the fourth grade has indicated that one quarter of pupils in Europe never read a novel or short story.<sup>5</sup>

The organizers of the PISA studies define "reading literacy" as "the ability to understand, use and reflect on written texts in order to achieve one's goals, to develop one's knowledge and potential, and to participate effectively in society."<sup>6</sup>

As a matter of fact, the PISA 2009 approach to reading literacy is much wider than perhaps generally thought. In addition to measuring the effectiveness of utilizing information of a given text, which is obviously central to learning and self-improvement, some of PISA criteria consider literature skills that require more than reading literacy in this utilitarian sense.

Students are expected to demonstrate their proficiency in *retrieving* information (25 %), *understanding* texts at a general level and *interpreting* them (50%), and, finally, *reflecting* on the content and form of texts in relation to their own knowledge of the world, and *evaluating* and *arguing* their own point of view (25%). This last aspect (and to some degree, understanding and interpreting texts) correlates with our concept of "creative reading" (see Chapter four). The most recent survey also takes into account the "commitment to reading" – that reading is valued and a part of everyday life – which is what reading promotion aims to encourage.<sup>7</sup>

In Finland, most of these aspects of reading have weakened from PISA 2000 to 2009, except the most demanding part, i.e. reflecting and evaluating the text and arguing one's conclusions.<sup>8</sup> This demonstrates a strong link between literature skills and reading literacy, as presented in the Finnish report "Preliminary results of PISA 2009". Reading fiction books has the most immediate effect to good PISA scores, followed by magazines, then non-fiction, newspapers and comics.<sup>9</sup> Comic books can be useful for inspiring less motivated students to try other reading material.<sup>10</sup> The general trend is to encourage teachers to use a wide range of fiction and non-fiction as well as non-book material such as magazines and newspapers.

Despite good overall results, there are still thousands of young people with poor reading skills, and the amount of good readers is declining. The most alarming development is that the number of those "who read for their own enjoyment" has come down more than in any other surveyed country, 11 per cent, from a high level 78 % down to 67 %.<sup>11</sup>

#### 3.2. Some reasons for Finnish success in PISA survey

There are some historical and social factors that help explain why Finland has achieved such remarkable results in PISA surveys.

First, the roots of the Finnish success in PISA can be found in history. Education is free of charge from the pre-school year at the age 6 to the university level.

<sup>4</sup> Teaching Reading in Europe, 22.

<sup>5</sup> Teaching Reading in Europe, 130.

<sup>6</sup> <http://www.oecd.org/dataoecd/43/9/33690591.pdf>, 38-39.

<sup>7</sup> <http://www.oecd.org/dataoecd/43/9/33690591.pdf>, 38-39; Sulkunen et al. 2012, 13-15.

<sup>8</sup> Sulkunen et al. 23-24.

<sup>9</sup> Sulkunen et al. 2009, 57.

<sup>10</sup> Teaching Reading in Europe, 120.

<sup>11</sup> Sulkunen et al. 2012, 27, 31.

Private sector is limited. The Basic School Law was accepted in 1968 and implemented between 1972 and 1977. Education of teachers was restructured in 1975.<sup>12</sup>

Second, Finland has not adopted the strong version of national testing. Standards are relatively open to local flexibility and diversity with a emphasis on basic literacy and wide-range education for all. Control of learning is left to schools and individual teachers.<sup>13</sup>

Both classroom and subject teachers have Master's degrees. The academic status of classroom teacher education has contributed to the popularity of teaching profession in Finland.<sup>14</sup> Qualified teachers are essential both for pupils who are learning to read and students who are reading to learn.

Third, the phonetic character of Finnish language makes decoding easy. The Finnish language is "spelled as it is pronounced". Children learn early to be fluent readers due to subtitling of films and TV programmes. Combined with a strong tradition of newspaper and magazine subscription to homes, extensive network of libraries, and zero illiteracy among native adults, children have a good baseline.<sup>15</sup>

In the end, there is high congruence between the level of the general objectives of Finland and PISA, but also the Finnish curricular documents and Finnish textbooks fit with the PISA framework.<sup>16</sup>

It is noteworthy that there is an exceptionally small share of students who are at the lowest proficiency level. The differences between schools across country are also relatively small. And, despite of significant difference in Finnish girls' and boys' scores in reading literacy, the Finnish boys were the best readers among the boys of participating countries.<sup>17</sup>

Fourth, it is quite probable that the use of libraries and the amount of loans correlate with PISA results. It appears that the Finnish, and more generally, Nordic library system is exceptional in Europe. In 2007, there were 888 libraries with a collection of more than 40 million volumes. According to the report of the Ministry of Education in 2009, each Finn borrowed on average 19

books a year from the library. The amount of books borrowed is three times as much as in Sweden, six times as much as in France, and even more compared to other countries. In Norway, for example, there are more libraries than in any other Nordic country, but the amount of loans is the lowest: a Norwegian borrows on average four books per year.<sup>18</sup>

Apparently, Scandinavians use libraries much more extensively than others, regardless of age or socio-economical status. Research by Centre Boek.be, the Confederation of the Flemish book sector, indicates that in Belgium, 43 % of Flemish people borrow at least one book a year. According to colleagues from Switzerland, Austria, and Italy, the figure in those countries is between 20 and 25 per cent.

Finally, Finnish success in literary tests may be explained by the central position of literature in Finnish society, since both the language and particularly written forms of it are very young: the first Finnish novel was published less than 150 years ago.

Equally, Finland has been an independent country less than a hundred years. Language and literature are key elements of creating a Finnish identity – and dealing with the big themes of national history in the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century: war, death, poverty, and resulting traumas. My late grandfather was unable to express his feelings in so many words although he suffered all his life (or perhaps because of it). But he was an active reader, borrowed lot of books from the library bus which came once a week near his home, 20 kilometres from the centre of a small municipality. Maybe the books spoke for him, and may this private example serve as an answer to a question I was asked recently by a European colleague: which came first, Finnish readers or Finnish libraries? I think language came first; young, lively, suited for and needed in expressing traumas which could help a silent nation in small villages, in the middle of nowhere in our sparsely inhabited country.

<sup>12</sup> The Finnish Education System and PISA, 11.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid., 13,15.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid., 22.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid., 53-54.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid. 50.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid., 28-29.

<sup>18</sup> <http://www.minedu.fi/export/sites/default/OPM/Julkaisut/2009/liitteet/pol0509.pdf?lang=fi>, 2-3.

#### 4. What is “creative reading”?

A correlation can be expressed that where there is a high score in reading literature, there is a high score in reading literacy as measured in the PISA surveys. In this sense, the PISA scores reflect to some degree the efforts to promote literature as an art form and reading fiction for pleasure. That can also be described as “creative reading”, which correlates with another important and often close field of promoting “creative writing” among young people. Indeed, some organizations that promote reading and literature, like the Scottish Book Trust, don’t want to separate their work between reading and writing – they are the flip sides of the same coin.

A teacher of Finnish language and literature in an eminent upper secondary school told me that during the last ten years, she has seen a gradual weakening of pupils’ ability in interpreting poetry and fiction in general. “Cultural literacy”, such as explaining common metaphors, is in decline.

Reading of literature is also something else than just a guarantee for good reading skills. By reading literature you can obtain understanding of different people, societies and cultures and increase your empathy. “Creative reading”, which means reading literature, is more than a purposive effort in learning and success in life. It produces “cultural literacy”, which helps understand nuances, metaphors, irony, parody and empathy within the text and in communication in general. That can help avoid social exclusion. In short, literature is an art form which has value by itself – not only as a tool for something.

Language is always a result of creative work. People create their identity via language. Especially young people have uncertainty and ambivalence in their feelings and world view. They might have problems to put them to the words or they are totally unable to share their feelings. Literature, especially fiction can help on that – it is a tool which can express feelings on silent way. Fiction, especially poetry, brings perception about language – it’s not only a tool, it can be also be a toy.

According to Wikipedia, “Cultural literacy is familiarity with and ability to understand the idioms, allusions, and informal content that create and constitute a dominant culture -- as life is interwoven with art, expression, history, and experience. Cultural literacy requires familiarity with a broad range of general knowledge and

implies the use of that knowledge in the creation of a communal language and collective knowledge. Cultural literacy stresses the knowledge of those pieces of information that content creators will assume the audience already possesses.”

When we talk about cultural literacy, we are talking about “common knowledge” and “tacit knowledge” – the previous championed by E.D. Hirsch (“Cultural Literacy: What Every American Needs to Know”, 1987), the latter by Michael Polanyi (“The Tacit Dimension”, 1966) - without which meaningful communication and participation in society are impossible. Creative reading enhances these abilities greatly.

Cultural literacy is also defined as an understanding of the values and views of those in other social classes and ethnic groups. It is experiential by its nature. In this meaning, I would prefer to use term “social literacy”, meaning the ability to understand the position of other people and to empathize. Differences between people, backgrounds, habits and preferences do not appear as strange and scary, but as natural, interesting and productive.

Creative reading strengthens both cultural and social literacy. Many cultural and social dimensions of skilful and wilful literature reading are difficult to quantify in scores, like PISA results. Therefore, educators need to understand and promote reading beyond utilitarian, short-term goals.

In Finland, there is a lot of discussion and worries of social exclusion of many young people. In the same schools that shine in PISA tests, there may be bullying and harassment among pupils, increasing depression and other mental problems. Communication and empathy skills, a sense of community and shared values, are vitally important. We must also remember the psychological, even therapeutic, effects of reading in a tender age: When you read, you are never alone.

## 5. Challenges and opportunities in Finnish literature promotion

While my colleagues marvel at Finland's success in the PISA surveys, we in Finland worry about slipping from the top, as evidenced in the 2009 survey, and the anecdote from a Finnish teacher presented above. In order to further improve reading literacy, we need to re-evaluate the strengths of the Finnish literary education of the future.

First, the education system faces constant pressure in cutting costs. Public finances are contracting thanks to the European debt crisis and the cost of care for the aging population. Currently, there is restructuring of Finnish local government. That will present both a challenge for the equity and quality of education, and, resources for literary education within the school curriculum may decrease.

Secondly, there is a historically strong tradition of reading in Finland. Newspaper subscriptions have decreased, and disproportionately more so in the lower socio-economical strata. Status of literature as an art form and authors as respected public figures is in decline.

Thirdly, the digitalisation of youth culture presents challenges to libraries and book publishers alike. While the Internet offers many new tools in promoting literature and reading, these opportunities will not be found if organizations stick with traditional methods and frames of thought.

In this new, challenging environment, opportunities arise for non-governmental organizations which work in the field of literature and reading promotion. In Finland, not a lot of resources have been devoted to this work, the public policies have been inconsistent, and the field is still very scattered, with several small organizations doing uncoordinated work in the literature field. With a relatively small investment, these efforts could be much more effective and contribute to ensure that Finnish youth get the best tools for their future.

In the next chapter, I will present how my organization, Lukukeskus (The Finnish Reading Centre) is answering to this challenge and opportunity and obligation.

### 5.1. Mission and objectives of the Finnish Reading Centre

The starting point for this study is my own organization, and my knowledge of other Finnish culture organizations as an executive director or the member of a board.

The Finnish Reading Centre will celebrate its 40<sup>th</sup> birthday this year. Until 1990 the name of organization was "Writers' Centre", which actually correlates to Swedish and Norwegian sister organizations with the same main activity, to organize authors' visits to schools, libraries and cultural events. Lukukeskus has always been strongly involved with Finnish writers: two of the four founding organizations in 1972 were writers' unions. Throughout the years, six other member organizations came along, and during the last decade the operation has focussed to children and young people.

Our task is to promote reading and to provide services mainly to schools but also to libraries and the general public, especially for children and young people all over the Finland. Our operation is funded mostly by government (Ministry of Education and Culture) and several Finnish foundations. The total budget is under 300 000 euros per year. For this year, funding of Ministry of Education and Culture has been 136 000 euros. We have two permanent full-day staff, two temporary staff, six freelancers for magazines, 2-3 interns per year and hundreds of contributors in the magazines.

Our basic activity is to organize authors' visits. Usually, we receive around 300 requests a year from schools, libraries and other organizations. That amounts to about 700 events each year, an increase of 60% in five years. In addition, we have had several campaigns of writers' visits during the last decade for children and young people, funded by the Finnish Cultural Foundation and the Swedish Cultural Foundation. We also oversee the authors' fees, which are used widely as a standard. At this moment, we are creating an Extranet author database to speed up the process and give more information about our service.

Furthermore, we publish three literature magazines: one for children, "Vinski", and one for young people "Lukufiilis". The special feature of these magazines is that children and young people write most articles and book reviews themselves. The third, and the biggest magazine is published in the Web: "Kiiltomato" (in Swedish: "Lysmasken", in English "glowworm"), [www.kiiltomato.net](http://www.kiiltomato.net). The site reviews Finnish and foreign fiction and non-fiction deserving more exposure than they get in the mainstream media. Kiiltomato is very well-known in Finland and it is followed by both professionals and general readers. In the next few years we plan to publish some of the reviews also in English,

which should coincide with Finland being the Guest of Honour at the Frankfurt Book Fair in 2014.

We have looked at models for permanent partial government funding in a writers' visiting programme, similar to the "Live Literature Funding" of the Scottish Book Trust, "Skapande skola" (Creative School) in Sweden or "Den kulturelle skolesekken" (The Cultural Rucksack) in Norway (see below). In Finnish music education, there is a programme called "A concert to every school" which could serve as a model. But, due to pressure in public finances during the next years it will be very hard to find resources for that.

During the last six months we have created several new partnerships and strengthened old ones. We have created a stronger network with Finnish authors' unions and other literature organizations, with which we are running a joint campaign this year: "The Myth of a Reading Nation?"

At the moment, the Ministry of Education and Culture has announced competitive bidding for a nation-wide reading program, "Lukuinto" (Reading fervour). We have prepared a bid with three other organizations. Our resources are not sufficient for administering the programme, but we would provide most of the content and, accordingly, our share of personnel and facilities. A successful bid would mean more synergy in our work, and increase our visibility and credibility.

As a "souvenir" from Scotland, we will launch our own book project "The Book That Changed My Life", which promotes reading for adults, in April. The model has been adopted from Scottish Book Trust. We will invite contributions by well-known authors and general public alike of 100 to 500 words of their most influential reading experiences. The book is being prepared in cooperation with WSOY, one of the biggest Finnish publishing houses. The Finnish Broadcasting Company, Yle, will broadcast a radio series with the same title.

The Finnish Reading Centre is running a tight budget. Last year, due to very strict financial management, we managed a surplus. Our problem has been that we do not have a permanent employee whose only responsibility would be authors' visits. We rely on two to three interns per year, whose training and guiding has taken up time which would be better invested in developing our expertise. We have invested in lobbying of Members of Parliament and officials of the Ministry of Education and Culture. This year we managed to increase our state

funding 16 per cent. One of the main arguments in lobbying has been to compare the number of writers' visits and respective funding in Norway, Sweden and Scotland.

One of our future objectives is to be so successful in lobbying that our funding will increase significantly during the next few years. Another future goal is to create more partnerships and develop sponsorships. Cooperation between literature organizations and private sponsors is quite a new thing in Finland. At this stage, we also want to develop our international network, in order to exchange experiences with and import best practices from similar organizations in Europe.

### *5.2 Other literature work in Finland*

One problem in Finland has been that the field of literature is very fragmented. There are several actors who are working towards almost same goals, all in slightly different ways. There are small non-profit organizations which organize poetry and literature events and publish small literature and culture magazines, for example. Several publishing houses might have their own book clubs and reading campaigns. In Finland in general, it is typical to have a large number of NGO's and small associations in any field.

For example, The Finnish Institute for Children Literature, in the town of Tampere, assists scholars and runs a specialised library of children's literature. It is the nationwide centre for information and research on children's literature.

Some of the actors organize tens of literature events and readings a year, as well as creative writing courses. Schools of creative writing for children and young people and libraries also work towards the same purposes.

However, if each of the Finnish NGO's would not have their particular histories and characteristics, it would be more effective to run one big organization which would concentrate in promoting reading, writing and literature. It's a waste of time and money to have several small associations with several administrations and offices.

The Finnish Reading Centre is in a transitory situation. Historically, we have struggled with adequate resources, but during the last year we have succeeded in creating a base for future opportunities. For inspiration I have studied reading and literature promotion in other



countries. In the next chapter I will present how non-profit organizations operate in Europe.

## 6. Case studies and their best practices

First, it must be noted that all featured cases are totally different. Every organization has its own history and background, and the context of the country is also very determinative.

Second, I expected to get comparable and evaluated information about the operations and best practices of literature reading promotion. But I found that organizations tend to lean more on their own tradition than objective evaluation. While all organizations have taken customer feedback into account, none has carried a thorough or systematic impact assessment of their work.

The most obvious sister organizations for Finnish Reading Centre are Swedish and Norwegian Writers' centres. All are about the same age, founded in late 60's or early 70's. The main task is to organize authors' visits all around the country.

Writers' centres in Norway and Sweden have always been member organizations for writers. Their task is to offer writers occasions for readings and meeting their audience. Authors' visits are also one of the main activities of the Scottish Book Trust via Live Literature Funding Programme. Therefore, cases presented below are rather lists of practices than in any way analyzed data of operation.

The reason why I choose these three countries is based on the size of countries and some other similarities, especially the social systems in Nordic countries. In retrospect, it would have been interesting to include Stichting Lezen which serves 6.5 million Flemish-speakers in Belgium, to gain comparative Central European perspective in this study. Its annual budget is around 1.6 million euros, of which 1.3 million was covered by a grant by the Flemish government.

As Nordic welfare states, Norway and Sweden are quite comparable with Finland. We have a lot of similarities in our education system and library network. Sweden is the biggest of the three with a population of 9.1 million, Finland and Norway have 5.3 and 4.8 million inhabitants respectively. Norway is by far the richest country of the three, due to oil and natural gas resources and resulting property investment.

Scotland is similar to Finland in respect to population, about five million, and demography, as both have very scarcely populated areas. However, Scottish speak English, which connects Scotland to the largest linguistic community in the world. The different political, economical and cultural environment is reflected also in the financing of culture, which in Scotland is more private sector driven than in Scandinavia.

In the following case analyses I will concentrate on work dealing with fiction which traditionally is the main area of literature and reading promotion. In Norway there is also a programme for promoting non-fiction in schools.

### 6.1. Sweden

**Writers' Centre - Författarcentrum** The aim of Författarcentrum is "to extend the reach of literature in society, to bring writers and readers together, to diversify the range of culture and to safeguard freedom of speech and opinion."

Författarcentrum does not have a role of an executive director in their office. It has four local offices – in East, West, South and North. They have around 1200 authors listed in their database. Authors are members of Författarcentrum. The main activity of Författarcentrum is to be an agency for authors' visits. Författarcentrum East handles and makes contract about the half of the visits. They have about 1050 visits a year, West 550, South 350, North 150.

The system and database employed to handle authors' visits was the best and the clearest what I have seen. There was a description and detailed information of each writer and what he or she will present during a visit. The database also automatically creates statistics on the number of visits in different areas, amount of fees and gathers feedback from audience.

Författarcentrum has had several different projects of authors' school visits, such as "Läsning Pågå" in Stockholm and Linköping and "Författarbesök i sarskolan". After subsidies from the local government, each school pays around SEK 800 (90 euros) per visit.

Other projects of Författarcentrum include "Podium", a book-on-demand service; the "Läsambassadör" (Reading Ambassador of Sweden); "Stockholm läser" (Stockholm reads) in which everyone reads the same classic for a year in Stockholm; and literary events both by

themselves and with partners. Municipalities and the state Arts council are also depending on the expertise of Författarcentrum.

The annual funding of Författarcentrum from Kulturrådet (state Arts council) amounts to 475 000 euros. Around half of the sum (226 000) goes to Författarcentrum East in Stockholm.

**“Läsning Pågar”, case Eskilstuna and other subsidised authors’ visits** The Swedish system of subsidised authors’ visits is the same that Lukukeskus has had during the 2000’s. We have organized several authors’ visit projects sponsored by Finnish foundations. But in comparison with our system I think Swedish system is more motivating and activating for schools and classes. For example, in “Läsning Pågar” for pupils in the 5<sup>th</sup> grade, classes have to send applications to get the writer they have chosen from a list describing what authors promise to do in lecture.

There was also a special case concerning the town of Eskilstuna where the basic level of reading has been very weak. The town has a large immigrant population, including the children of Finnish immigrants of the 1960s. With local funding and partnership with Författarcentrum East, the schools of Eskilstuna organised several writers’ visits and other events, bought books to the school libraries and launched reading campaigns. After a year, very good results of raised reading skills of children were reported. Unfortunately, I have no further information on how the evaluation was done.

Not much study has been devoted to literature and reading promotion in Sweden. I am aware of one study of the significance of school libraries, made in the University of Uppsala.

Författarcentrum provided me with a lot of practical viewpoints. The versatile database in which the writers present themselves ensures that customers get to know what they get in return for their money. It is important to customers but also to writers themselves to get an indication that their work is worth compensation.

The other desirable aspect is that the municipalities are the partners of Författarcentrum. Cities and areas are willing to subsidise visits. Certain writers are engaged with the projects, and they are mentioned on the list.

**Kulturhuset** Kulturhuset (Culture House) is a huge building in the center of Stockholm built in 1974. It is a showcase for all kinds of culture – photo exhibitions, stories for kids, concerts, literary discussions, films, debates etc. I visited in two departments – “Rum för barn” (Room for children) and TioTretton” (TenThirteen), which are special libraries to children age 0-9 years old 10-13 years old, respectively.

“Rum för barn” the is library for children under 10 years old: babies, toddlers and school children alike. In addition to reading and borrowing books, they can play, paint or sing. “Tiotretton” is the library for pre-teenagers. It is equipped with computers, a recording studio, sewing machines, a kitchen and people who have time to talk, chill, cook. Special feature is that parents and teachers are not allowed.

Lena Thunberg, staff member and one of the creators, told me about the philosophy of the space. Children at age 10-13 have to be left in peace, they want to make own choices without parents. They are attracted to the smell of food, and a whole room surrounded by books, places and sofas to lie. Most children also read, a longer or a shorter time, fiction, non-fiction or magazines. Thunberg thought that the age between 10 and 13 is the last chance to inspire a child to read books – if they become interested in literature then, it is possible that they will return back to books later in life. According to Thunberg, urban children are more passive in TrioTretton than children from the suburbs. They are hungry for activities and impressed that such a space has been created just for them.

**Www.barnensbibliotek.se** For me, the sections within Kulturhuset signal how intelligent Swedish are in the area of children’s culture. Another proof is the website library for children: [www.barnensbibliotek.se](http://www.barnensbibliotek.se). It has operated from 1996, and records 1000 visitors a day. The website is developed constantly according to feedback from users. The website has been built from the viewpoint of children and young people, there are tens of plays, book reviews written by children themselves, videos, competitions, advice on what to read, and the “Children books’ catalogue” which is the most popular section of the site. According to Katarina Dorbell, a staff member, to go through all the content of “Barnens bibliotek” would require a lecture of two, three hours.

For my working group involved in the bidding for the reading programme of the Ministry of Education and

Culture, “Barnens bibliotek” has been a very inspiring discovery. The viewpoint of children and young people are crucial. “Barnens bibliotek” will be a model of a learning environment for us, if we will be accepted to carry out the program.

There is also a Swedish Institute for Children Literature in Stockholm which is not involved in direct reading promotion, and thus not included in this study.

## 6.2. Norway

“Litteraturhuset” (Literature House), with its bookshop, café, event spaces and childrens’ room, is situated in the very centre of Oslo, near to the Queen’s castle. It is founded in 2007, and inspired by German literature houses. There are also offices of Forfattersentrum, Leser søker bok and Norwegian PEN.

The synergy is obvious from the start. Co-operation and shared offices make organizations more visible and stronger. My third destination, “forening !les” was located in same house with literature associations and publishers.

**Norsk Forfattersentrum** The aim of Norsk Forfattersentrum (Norwegian Writers’ Centre) is to create contact between Norwegian authors and audiences via readings, presentations, and teaching. It has 1200 members, all writers of fiction. Forfattersentrum organizes book days, writing courses, writers’ readings, the Trondheim literature festival, school tours with and without “Den kulturelle skolesekken” (see below, 6.4.). They provide authors to schools, libraries and other parts of literary life, and private events. Forfattersentrum includes “Litteraturbruket”, which is the competence centre for literature productions.

Forfattersentrum’s five offices in different parts of Norway organize almost 8000 authors’ visits every year. 3500 schools visits take place in schools (“Den kulturelle skolesekken”), 4500 in libraries, festivals, and private events. Forfattersentrum gets annually 1,6 million euros from the state for national operations. “Den kulturelle skolesekken” has brought an additional 650 000 euros every year during the last five years.

There are more similarities between Swedish and Norwegian Writers’ centres, maybe because of regional offices. But as Swedish Författarcentrum didn’t have an Executive Director at all, in Norway they have one,

common Executive Director for all five offices. The idea of the operation is that it is one large organization divided into five places. According to the director, Ingvild Christine Herzog, the one director model is very functional for the local offices and has activated strongly local operations around Norway. In Sweden local offices were much more independent but they had shared database.

I think that in Nordic countries which are sparsely inhabited, local offices are justifiable, although they originate from times before fast IT connections and probably regional political reasons. In Finland, we are able to serve customers of remote Northern and Eastern parts of the country from one office only – besides, writers live increasingly in Helsinki metropolitan area or in the next biggest towns of Tampere and Turku.

Like Författarcentrum in Sweden, Forfattersentrum in Norway works lot with municipalities, mainly because of “Den kulturelle skolesekken” program. Forfattersentrum is also principally a writers’ organization, working with and for them. Resources permitting, they coach writers for their performances with professional actors. Likewise, the Scottish Book Trust use mentors to train writers for public events. That is something new for us in Finland and Finnish Reading Centre.

**Leser søker bok\_** Leser søker bok\_ is an organisation promoting high quality books to readers impaired in some way. “Easy reading” is the key word in everything, either with big text books for visually impaired or plain language texts for people with reading difficulties. Working closely with publishers and authors, “Leser søker bok” directs its activities straight to the target groups and has managed to style its appearance very attractively. In this approach there may be a lot to learn for Selkokeskus, the Finnish organisation promoting plain language texts and assisted reading.

**“Forening !les”** “Foreningen !les” (The association !read) is a nationwide campaign to encourage people in Norway to read more books. “Foreningen !les” was established in 2001. It works with schools and libraries and runs various projects and campaigns. Of its annual 800 000 euros budget, one third comes from the Ministry of Culture, another third from the Ministry of Education and the rest from foundations for specific projects. “!les” collaborates with teachers, librarians, booksellers, writers and publishing houses to encourage as many as possible to read.

Each year “!es” publishes two anthologies in paperback. “tXt-aksjonen” and “Reintekst” present examples of current literature from Norway and abroad, for adults and young people alike. tXt-aksjonen has been delivered to 160 000 and Reintekst to 60 000 young pupils. In addition, “!es” organizes the annual competition in which young readers can vote the best book of the year.

Every year, nine classes around Norway participate in “Ungdommens kritikerpris” (Youth critic prize). All pupils read the same eight books, of which they vote their favourite. According to Executive Director Wanda Voldner, this is a demanding project for both the young people and the teachers. As a result, participating classes report better-quality literary education as learning levels have improved and teachers come to be more demanding.

That is a very interesting example of importance of teachers’ commitment. I also proves that we don’t need to try find funny or easy ways to get children and young people to read. From my own youth I remember best the teachers who were demanding enough. That was a sign of their commitment to the subject.

### 6.3. Scotland

I visited Edinburgh and the Scottish Book Trust in August 2011. Scottish Book Trust is the leading agency for the promotion of literature, writing and reading in Scotland. There are projects in various levels relative to the remarkable differences in the status of reading Britain according to social and professional status and family background. In Finland, the approach is more homogenous, since the school system and library network are much more egalitarian.

During my visit to Edinburgh, I also visited the Storytelling Centre, the Poetry Library and the Edinburgh Book Festival, and met people from Unesco’s City of Literature. I was accompanying a group of Finnish children’s authors who were guests of the Edinburgh Book Festival. I also did my comparative studies there.

**The Scottish Book Trust** I interviewed six people of the Scottish Book Trust: Jasmine Fassi (Head of Children’s Programme), Philippa Cochran (Head of Programme), Francesca Brennan (Early Years Programme Manager), Colm Linnane (Learning Manager), Marion Bourbouze (Head of Audience Development) and Caitrin Armstrong (Writing Development Manager). I was really impressed

on their operation and I got a lot of inspiration, viewpoints and ideas.

The annual budget of Scottish Book Trust is 3.85 million euros. About one third – 1.45 million euros - of the budget consists of the Early Years programme (Bookbug), which has expanded very much recently. The programme has a lot of partnerships and strong personal relations. Bookbug consists of free packs of books, which are given to all children in Scotland at various ages: six weeks, 18 months, three years and in Primary One. Packs include also a parents’ guide. In addition there are Bookbug sessions in libraries and other communal venues. The investment for reading to babies, toddlers and small children is clearly a trend in UK and Central Europe. Reading to and with children has a very strong tradition in Finland, too. Finnish babies get their first poetry book even before they are born, in a state-sponsored package of clothes and other necessary equipment.

The Scottish Book Trust has programmes for children, young people and general readers, and a development programme for young writers. It produces learning materials for teachers. I also got information about audience relations, sponsorships, as well as about the Live Literature Funding (LLF) sponsored by Creative Scotland, which means supported writers’ visits to schools.

For the Scottish Book Trust it has taken long time building a network and lot of consultation has been needed. They reach their different target groups through local authorities, searching for people sharing the passion for children’s reading.

From my viewpoint it was central to get to know practices and experiences of authors’ visits to schools. Scottish Book Trust does not supply visits like Lukukeskus does. Scottish schools are used to contract authors direct without an agent. But Book Trust oversees fees and assigns grants to schools from their LLF- budget.

The whole budget of Live Literature Funding is about 300 000 euros a year. Schools, libraries and other organizations apply money for authors’ visits. When an application is accepted, LLF pays half of the fee and travel expenses. Every year, 1200 events are financed through Live Literature Funding.

The Scottish Book Trust is a central cultural organisation in Scotland. They reach their target groups systematically

by contacting authorities, librarians, cultural administrators, adult learning coordinators and theatre professionals. They are consulted by young people, parents, librarians and voluntary people from different areas in Scotland.

During the last five years the organization has grown rapidly. In 2006 the Book Trust employed five to ten people, today the figure is 25. I suppose that credit is due to their CEO Marc Lambert who has been very skilful in creating partnerships and sponsorships and applying funding from government for the operation. Of the organisations I surveyed, the Scottish Book Trust is also the only one with private business partnerships.

Compared with other parts of Britain, the Scottish Government support for literature is remarkable. Funding is delivered via Creative Scotland, which is Scottish Art Council. Creative Scotland funds both basic operation and separate projects of the Scottish Book Trust. For example in England, funding is based more on private sponsorships, partnerships and donations.

#### 6.4. Case: "Arts and Culture at School"

Scotland supports writers' schools visits considerably, but Norway and Sweden have even better resources for such activity.

**"Den kulturelle skolesekken"** (The Cultural Rucksack) in Norway is a national programme for art and culture provided by professionals in the schools. It has been run for primary and lower secondary schools since 2001. It has been extended to upper secondary school in 2007. It's a joint initiative of the Ministry of Culture and the Ministry of Education and Research. The programme receives annually 20-23 million euros which is distributed by regional and local authorities.

**Skapande skola** (The Creative School) is a project in Sweden in which the government has decided to invest 16,9 million euros in order to stimulate work on art and culture for and involving students in the years 1–9 of compulsory school. One aim of the grant is to strengthen collaboration between schools and the professional world of culture. Creative School provides grants for three kinds of cultural initiative: a professional cultural

event, students' own creativity, and collaboration between the cultural world and schools.<sup>19</sup>

At least 30% of the research funds at the disposal of the Swedish Arts Council shall be allocated to research into culture for children and young people, and at least 30% of the Arts Council's total grant allocation shall go to operations and projects that directly benefit child and youth culture.<sup>20</sup>

**In Finland** the Finnish Reading Centre has been willing to create a similar comprehensive system of subsidized school visits, under the title, "An author to every school". For the past 10 years, writers' visits to schools have been funded by grants by Finnish foundation. Institutionalising the activity through permanent state support seems difficult in the present financial situation. In any case, there is some sympathy for us in the Ministry of Education and Culture, and 15 000 euros has been directed to that purpose for 2012. We will organize a small pilot project in Eastern Finland, and do a proper evaluation of the impact of authors' visits by asking all participants to fill in a questionnaire in the Survey Monkey program. For the Swedish-speaking part of Finland, we have got 20 000 euros funding from Svenska Kulturfonden.

#### 6.5. EU Read Network and European models of reading promotion

EU Read Network is a European platform for organizations that promote reading in their countries. EU Read's aim is to exchange knowledge, experiences and concepts, and to jointly develop new strategies for the promotion of reading. EU Read meets twice a year.

Currently, EU Read members are Flemish Stichting Lezen from Belgium; Book Trust from United Kingdom, Stifting Lesen from Germany; Lese Forum from South Tyrol in Italy; Stichting Lezen from Netherlands; The Fachhochschule Nordwestschweiz, Pädagogische Hochschule, Zentrum LESEN (University of Applied Sciences Northwestern Switzerland, School for Teacher Education, Literacy Centre) from Switzerland; Buchklub der Jugend from Austria; Svět Knihy from the Czech

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[http://www.kulturradet.se/Documents/Bidrag/skapande%20skola/creative\\_schools\\_info.pdf](http://www.kulturradet.se/Documents/Bidrag/skapande%20skola/creative_schools_info.pdf)

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[http://www.kulturradet.se/Documents/English/strategy\\_culture\\_children\\_young\\_people.pdf](http://www.kulturradet.se/Documents/English/strategy_culture_children_young_people.pdf)

Republic and Plano Nacional de Leitura (National Reading Plan) from Portugal. The work of the individual members is very diverse; but there are clear similarities in each organisation's strategies for reading promotion.

EU Read was founded in 2000. In the beginning they applied EU funding for joint projects, but they didn't succeed. Also countries from the former Soviet Union were included. During the decade there has been one remarkable common activity: Bookstart by London Booktrust has spread out to several other countries, not only in Europe but also to other continents. Bookstart is a programme for children of early years with free books and support, guidance and events. The Scottish Bookbug, discussed above, is one version of the original idea.

I took part in the open session of EU Read in March 2012 in Antwerp and met representatives of other organizations. I got a short glance in their operation, as well as from the website [www.euread.com](http://www.euread.com) and each member's own pages.

On the whole, in spite of individual missions, activities and backgrounds of each organisation, three distinct regional models and focuses can be detected. I call them the Nordic, the Central European, and the UK model.

The Nordic model, represented by Swedish Författarcentrum, Norwegian Forfattersentrum and Finnish Reading Centre Lukukeskus, is based on writers' interests on top of a well-functioning and extensive library network. Their main activity is to facilitate author-audience-encounters.

The Central European mode, represented by Stichting Lesen and Stichting Lezens in Germany, Belgium and Netherlands, has to carry also responsibilities of research. Besides several reading campaigns and programmes, partly targeted to families and small children, they may organize research and specialised libraries in the field.

The UK model is more driven by private sector and it takes care of areas which belong to public sector in many countries. I haven't been able to go deeper into London Book Trust, but its size alone, with 50-60 staff, it clearly is responsible for work that in Finland belongs to libraries, government-funded youth programs and charities.

From the Nordic perspective, it has been striking how much of campaign effort in UK and Central Europe is

dedicated to families with babies or small children. In Nordic countries the tradition of reading for children has been taken for granted, maybe even too granted. Reading to and with babies is an absolute precondition to keep them reading later.

I have also got to know some organizations from Eastern Europe, like ABCIX Foundation in Poland which runs the programme "All Poland Reads To Kids", the Estonian Reading Association "Eesti lugemisühing" and The Estonian Children's Literature Centre. I have also met the Czech Svět Knihy's director Dana Kalinová and got to know that organization is a company and they have some same tasks than Finnish Literature Exchange FILI. Based on these few cases I conclude that because of political history and the Soviet era, a clear model has not been yet found in Eastern Central European countries whose independence either from political pressure of even formally is very young. They may have received influences from the West – the ABCIX Foundation's campaign has been started in the USA. In Estonian reading promotion, there are probably both Finnish and Soviet influences – but on the other hand, independent literary tradition is very strong, since it was a major element in maintaining a distinct identity in the time of Soviet Union.

In addition to EU Read network, there is a worldwide website called Reading Worldwide, of which Stiftung Lesen (Germany) is a partner. The Web site [reading-worldwide.de/zeigen\\_e.html](http://reading-worldwide.de/zeigen_e.html) provides examples of promoting reading and literature all over the world, and intends to inspire transfer of knowledge and provide support for people in the field.

## 7. Conclusions

Researching the field of European organizations that promote literature and reading, particularly comparing the work of other Nordic countries, Scotland and members of EU Read to our own challenges in the activities of Lukukeskus (The Reading centre), I arrived to four general conclusions, and a set of recommendations for a Finnish model.

### 7.1. General conclusions

First, there is no overall concept or theory of literature reading skills that would inform the activities of organizations in this field. Promoting literature and reading is easily confused with the general concept of reading literacy measured and quantified by the PISA surveys. That is why I propose in Chapter 4, the concept of “creative reading” - both as a sister concept for “creative writing” which is often a parallel activity in these organisations, especially dealing with young people. There is a distinction from a “utilitarian” viewpoint of reading as a tool for learning. Creative reading aims to both cultural and social literacy – understanding of idioms, metaphors, allusions and empathy. They make possible common knowledge and tacit knowledge of individuals. That is very effective way to avoid social exclusion and bullying, make people more tolerant and understanding the signs, values and differences. As long as people use libraries they are some way contacted with society.

Second, feedback is very positive, but not systematically followed upon. In the three Nordic countries, there is a strong feeling that writers’ visits are a very successful activity. Schools and libraries that use our services, usually return for new assignments, and those who are not our customers, say that only lack of funding keeps them from organizing authors’ visits. We hear anecdotes from teachers who tell how enthusiastic the pupils have been and how someone with poor writing skills had been inspired to create a story after a writer’s visit.

When I visited organizations in three countries, I was surprised to learn how little evaluation has been done on the impacts of writers’ visits and outcomes of programmes. I think all organizations should have the possibility to assess the outcomes of their activities and promote research in their area. However, proper research requires adequate resources. Evaluation brings knowledge whether an operation has been worth the effort and how it could be improved in the future. All facts that support the

importance of “creative reading” programmes would be useful in securing funding from public and private sources.

“Den Kulturelle skolesekken” program did produce a report in 2008, but its perspective to literature work was quite narrow.<sup>21</sup> Swedish Art Council published an analysis of “Skapande skola” in March 2012. The Scottish Book Trust is preparing an evaluation of writers’ school visits, but it will not be ready until the beginning of April 2012. So I have been unable to use Swedish and Scottish reports in my paper.

My third conclusion has also to do with the first two, and explains them. The field of literature and reading promotion in Europe is very fragmented. According to the Eurydice study, *Teaching Reading in Europe*, there is not a clear central coordinating body for the promotion of reading literacy in Bulgaria, the Czech Republic, Estonia, Ireland, Malta, Romania, Slovenia, Slovakia, Finland, Iceland, Liechtenstein and Turkey. Similar functions can be carried out by several organizations, reading associations or library networks.<sup>22</sup>

In Finland, too, there are several, small associations doing own things without much cooperation. Their goals and missions differ only slightly. Publishing houses might also have reading campaigns and book clubs. The field is very fragmented and does not cover the whole country, even though there are also regional institutes.

The same problem exists in Sweden. The Swedish Arts Council distributes grants for reading promotion activities to municipalities, libraries, schools and other organizations. It is a central body for research and development. That sounds excellent. But according to Katarina Dorbell, who is in charge of “Barnens bibliotek”, its work has not been seen as a national resource. Each region has its own small projects, which often last only for a year or two.

In Norway, there was a large campaign “Make Space for reading in 2003-07”. The purpose of the campaign was to improve reading skills and motivation to read among children and adolescents, especially boys. It had strong focus on local activities. In relation to our own bid for the Lukuinto programme, I was looking forward to learn more, but there was no data available any more on the web site.<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> <http://denkulturelleskolesekken.no/english/publication-in-english/>

<sup>22</sup> *Teaching Reading in Europe*, 125.

<sup>23</sup> The Dutch Stichting Lezen has had a nationwide reading programme in collaboration with a library association.

The fourth conclusion concerns whole Europe. As stated in Chapter 6.5, a Nordic, a Central European and a United Kingdom model of promoting reading can be detected. They relate strongly to their societies and national cultural traditions, which also determine the strength of organizations. Countries from Eastern Europe only reinforce this hypothesis – they are very young as independent actors without political pressure, and the models and ways to promote reading differs strongly. This diversity would certainly merit further research.

In the Nordic countries, the library institution has a strong part in literature and reading promotion. I think that several European countries have been forced to replace a weak library network by literature and reading promotion. In the short term, it is obviously cheaper to run campaigns than maintain high-quality book-storage-buildings all over the country. But in the long term, I am convinced that public libraries where people are willing to spend their leisure time is the most effective way to ensure the future both creative and utilitarian reading. Preparing this study has made me understood more deeply that libraries are our national treasure.

The distinct European models can also be differentiated by their focus of attention. Where there is a strong life-style tradition of families' constant use of libraries, a lot of effort is directed on keeping each generation as readers in all stages: as it enters school, pre-teens, teen age, become young adults and then parents themselves. In a "weaker library" society campaigning is concentrated more in families with babies and small children, since parents might not by themselves encourage their children's reading. There is a constant risk of losing the children as readers later on, and only when they eventually become parents, their interest in reading to their children – and perhaps for that purpose only – is rekindled by campaigning. In short, reading promotion can be either long-term or short-term: enhancing a literary lifestyle as a community norm, or campaigning a temporary duty with limited consequences.

### *7.2. Recommendation for a Finnish model*

During the course of my Diploma, Lukukeskus has taken big steps. If your organization is small, partnerships and networks are very important. You have to reach a strong status in your own country, both financially and operationally, before you can enter partnerships at the European level.

It's natural that organizations in reading promotion are concentrated in working at the national level, because

that is where their target groups are, often also as linguistic communities. But challenges, problems, and, eventually, human beings, do not differ that much from one country to another. Exchanging opinions and experiences at an international level is most welcome. Otherwise there is a risk that you never evaluate your mission, values, activities and actual successes and failures accurately. You only carry on with your work in a way it has always been done.

In the changing operational environment, we have to be very careful not to get stuck to old habits, constantly assessing our activities and if need be, changing our operations. We face two main challenges. Our target groups are much more difficult to reach than before because we have to compete for time with other entertainments and hobbies. Secondly, cuts in governmental funding demand a lot of justification and good arguments for your activities. On the other hand, in times of financial pressures, NGO's can prove themselves as the most economical, flexible and effective actors in the field.

However, too many small organizations result to unfocused priorities and inefficient work in reading promotion. They multiply the overhead but at the same time are unable to carry out any large programmes. In contrast to Finland, in most other European countries organizations that promote reading are much bigger than in Finland. Depending on the size of the country, there are 12 to 50 employees and budgets up to several millions of euros. Some organizations promote also scientific research and libraries in this specialist field. I think it would be recommendable to consider mergers of smaller organizations in Finland at some future stage, in order to use resources much more efficiently.

In the future, we will concentrate more on public relations and cooperation with municipalities and other regional actors. That is particularly important if we succeed in growing our operation. We will evaluate writers' visits systematically, starting with a new customer questionnaire combined to our new writers' database. We cannot rely any more on further foundation funding, but must find other sources of financing, in forms of private partnerships, sponsoring and donations.

Finally, each year we need a PR spearhead, a campaign that will increase our visibility and credibility as the major actor in the literary field. This year, it will be the book project of "The book that changed my life". •



## Literature

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<http://allofpolandreadstokids.org/all-of-poland-reads-to-kids>

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<http://www.foreningenles.no>

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