

# Emese Rózsa Széman

## Choose a Book to Take | liveLibrary

### 1. Best practice selection criteria

Choose a Book to Take (KT) | liveLibrary came into being as a personal initiative in 2015, within the framework of a series of festive events related to the then 20-year-old students' paper of Cluj Napoca, *Perspektíva*. From the next year, the Hungarian Cultural Society of Transylvania (EMKE) and later on the Youth Organization of the latter, EMKISZ started nurturing it; for 2018, the fourth edition of the event was planned. This is a bottom-up initiative by young people, which is innovative in its youthful and trendy attitude to books and reading. Its viability is proven by the fact that it has been organized with success for four years, with a growing stock of books and varied live books.

### 2. Organization(s) / person(s) the best practice can be related to

The initiative came into being based on the idea of Arany Mák and Zenge Kolumbán. "They wanted to make reading and the use of tangible books popular with young people once again and believed this event would be the way to achieve it. It has indeed succeeded in achieving the goal as several thousand books find new owners via this event", voluntary Melinda Molnár explains.

From 2016, the programme was nurtured by EMKE; since 2017 it has been running under the auspices of EMKISZ, the youth organization of the former.

### 3. Stakeholders and beneficiaries of the best practice

A team of approximately 20 voluntaries work for the implementation of the programme, from collecting books to promoting the event, selecting books and actually implementing the programme, which latter involves activities in several fields: arranging the site, receiving those invited and guests, tasks at the information desk, protocol duties, children's corner, etc.

The primary target group of the event is the young generation in their teens or twenties and the idea is to guide them back to the world of "offline" books and make them develop a liking not only for reading but also for paper-

based books to take in their hands and glance through. At the same time it was primarily older generations who joined the book collecting and donating activities, so the project is actually able to address all generations. The event was launched in Cluj Napoca but already in 2017 it was organized in 6 other towns with the locals involved and there are new sites planned for 2018. The scope of those interested will thus gradually grow to cover whole Transylvania. Book collecting goes on all the year through; books left over at one site travel on to the next site and at the end of the year EMKISZ, assisted by EMKE, donates the books left over to the library of one of the schools of the Hungarian diaspora. Thousands of books change owners every year.

An integral part of the programme is the live library, which thus involves other beneficiaries, too: on the one hand the people who are the live books and on the other hand those who talk to them. In the two days round table discussions as well as a mother tongue contest take place, so the invited guests, the participants as well as the audience are among the beneficiaries of the programme.

#### **4. Objectives and activities of the best practice**

The following event description can be found on the community site of the event: “Choose a Book to Take | liveLibrary targets both bookworms and people who are curious and ready to challenge their own perspectives. The “Choose a Book to Take”- part of the event offers numberless books on various topics which can be exchanged for books you no longer need or can be just taken without an exchange. The main objective of liveLibrary is to do away with stereotypes and foster and strengthen our understanding towards one another. Thus every year we invite live books who are able to open up exciting new perspectives through their experience, occupation and accomplishment. Live books can be borrowed just like real books, the only difference is that these are live persons with whom you can start a direct and sincere conversation.”

As reflected by its double name, Choose a Book to Take | liveLibrary has two major branches of activity, while the programme series offers events for those interested on a constant basis.

The second-hand book exchange itself is a whole-day event. Visitors have the chance to look through the books presented in various categories (poetry, Hungarian literature, scientific books, Romanian or foreign language books) all day, while the voluntaries keep on adding new books

on the tables all day. The aim is to update and add new elements to 'offline libraries'.

The other major programme of the event, the live library, is similarly a whole-day programme and operates like an ordinary library: readers 'borrow' a book for a short time. There is only a single difference: in the live library the 'books' are real persons and there develops a personal conversation between the 'book' and 'its' reader. The 2018 event was based on the topic *From nothing to everything*, so the organizers invited people who, despite their life situation, age or any other disadvantage in their lives, attained outstanding results and were active. The live books include, among others, Judit Borzási competition dancer, Réka Miklós writer, community builder and Attila Ferencz young alpinist. Participants also have the chance to talk to Zsolt Keresztes, who underwent leg amputation about a year ago and in spite of this he is very optimistic, trains a lot, does sports and motivates other people. Other invited guests of the event include Attila Balázs pastor; Vlad Crişan-Po, who works as a clown; Tamás Bozsó winemaker. The focus in previous years was mainly on personal and workplace stereotypes and the live books included pensioners, Jews, Romani, politicians, blonde women, disabled persons, writers, ambulancemen, DJ's, prompters, actors, Krishna monks, etc. The live book aims to give visitors the chance to talk for half an hour to people about whom they have an image prior to meeting them often guided by prejudices, and as an effect of these conversations revise their previous opinions; and last but not least meet a lot of very eager and exemplary people. The Sign Language Choir of Kozmutza Flóra Special School for Hearing and Language Impaired Children of Cluj Napoca has been an invited guest and performer of the event several times.

In addition to the two major programme points those interested can attend several alternative programmes as well: round table-discussions (e.g. What is a PhD research all about?; Behind the scene – about editing a book; What issues are today's writers keen on?; What do students like reading these days? etc.), book shows, children's corners and in 2018 the travelling exhibition of Kultivál (Cultural Youth Festival of the Carpathian Basin) under the title *A distorting mirror about today's youth*, as well as a photo corner, corner of poems, literary café, mother tongue games, events of the student's paper *Perspektíva*.

## **5. Area(s) affected by the best practice**

Teaching, education, literature, literacy, community education, culture

## **6. Territorial scope of the best practice**

KT was launched as a Cluj Napoca project and primarily targeted students in Cluj Napoca, while its wider target audience was the (not only Hungarian speaking) population of the city. Thanks to its popularity, in 2017 it was organized in several settlements already. The planned venues in 2018, in addition to Cluj Napoca (Kolozsvár) are Oradea (Arad), Miercurea Ciuc (Csíkszereda), Gheorgheni (Gyergyószentmiklós), Targu Secuiesc (Kézdivásárhely), Vlaha (Magyarfenes), Targu Mures (Marosvásárhely), Gherla (Szamosújvár), Sfantu Gheorghe (Sepsiszentgyörgy), Sibiu (Szeben), Odorheiu Secuiesc (Székelyudvarhely), Simleu Silvaniei (Szilágysomlyó) and Rascruci (Válaszút). Looking at these settlements on a map you can conclude that this is an event of Transylvanian level.

## **7. The conditions (human, financial, technical) required for the best practice**

One of the voluntary organizers who has been cooperating for the longest explains: “This is a team with a family spirit, used to working together with good team dynamics; they are creative and happy doing their voluntary work because they like both the environment and the objective” – and these are the most important conditions for the programme to be implemented. Speaking in numbers there are about 20 volunteers who help the implementation of the event at various levels, from prior organization work to implementation; as regards finances, specific subsidy (of a few hundred thousand forints) is available from tender resources; and considering the venue sites are required where there is suitable space for presenting the second-hand books, conducting the round table discussions, games and there is also opportunity for visitors to find a quiet corner to talk to their chosen live book. Further advantages include opportunity for sound amplification for making announcements and for the discussions or background music in between the programmes; projection opportunity (projector, screen) for displaying the detailed programme, the photos of the live books, etc.

## **8. Results and short-, mid- and long-term impact of the best practice**

As this is a four-year project, one cannot speak of real long-term effects yet. In the past years more than 10,000 books have been exchanged and over 300 people have talked to several dozens of live books. Results also include supporting the schools of the Hungarian diaspora (like those in Sarmasu (Nagysármás), Radna (Óradna)) that receive the books collected by the end of the year and left over after the events. As an effect of the events in Cluj Napoca in the initial years as well as of the popularization efforts, Choose a Book to Take | liveLibrary has almost grown into a nationwide event. As hoped for long-term effects the event hopes to achieve that reading should gain as great a role as possible in the lives of as many teenagers and young people in their twenties as possible and they should feel the taste of the magic of reading paper-based books.

### **9. Sustainability of the best practice**

As regards human resources it is important that the organizers maintain the interest and enthusiasm of the voluntaries taking part in the project; from the point of view of visitors, on the other hand, “the programme will be able to survive in the long run if it always shows something new – a new programme or new topic – that captures people’s attention”.

Fundraising, monitoring calls to tender, finding the right persons for writing proposals, maintaining good relations and establishing new ones with partners joining the project certainly must not be ignored, either.

### **10. Adaptability of the best practice**

Although the event in Cluj Napoca has quite a large apparatus, it is relatively easy to adapt anywhere where there is a 4-5 member team available who undertake organization, advertising and implementation and there is also an interested and receptive audience.