

The promotion of reading culture: access to reading materials (including in libraries and online)

(in brief)

Access to literature is crucial for three reasons:

- Modern societies are based on knowledge and education.
- Democracy is based on equal access to pluralistic knowledge.
- Fantasy, stories, curiosity, knowledge – questions and answers – are a basic human element, without these humankind cannot survive.

Literature is a multi-faceted phenomenon. It consists of various functions and genres: educational textbooks, analytical scientific publications, critical debate books, entertaining novels, aesthetic poetry, and many others. These texts live together, one genre refers to another and they all create neologisms and new ways of thinking. One genre could not live and develop without others.

Literature is the vehicle of culture and language. Our generation will face the death of hundreds of languages. While big, international and global languages will survive, smaller languages will lose their status as tools and sources of civilization. Literature - in all its functions and genres - is necessary to guarantee the full life of languages and speakers of languages.

To increase the access to literature and society is an important task. We need literary policy and knowledge policy; everything cannot be left on markets. The linguistic minorities need literature although commercial markets cannot provide the democratic access to everybody. There are several needs for different texts, translations, texts on plain language, audiobooks for blinds, books in sign languages etc.

Recent discussions on literature have turned into technology: there has been a huge emphasis on digital platforms and technology. The new platforms important and they will give new opportunities to authors to create works and to readers to find texts.

However, this shift has obscured the essence of literature and what authors do. New technology and new printing tools, delivery channels and online publishing are obviously important, but still secondary. Without authors and their works, there is no literature and no need for the new channels. The fair working conditions for authors must be guaranteed.

These arguments should make the importance of easy access to literature crystal clear. How this should be done is a bigger question.

There is no doubt, authors are ready to utilize all modern solutions but this should not be done on the cost of authors. The change of technology does not mean the change of literature or the change of an authors work. Authors have the right to their income, and all the mechanisms are needed to guarantee the fair income of authors.

The romantic picture of authors' work has underlined the creative side of the work. The other side is important as well, the professional work, the professional education and professional right to negotiate the income and the utilization of the works.

The world would not live without stories and knowledge. That's why it is the most important to have access to the literature to everyone. It is the readers that make the literature immortal by reading, repeating, citing, criticizing the texts. But without the authors there is nothing to read!

Pirjo Hiidenmaa

European Writers' Council