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Slovenian Reading Badge Society

a) **WHY?**

The movement for *The Reading Badge* was born 58 years ago when two teachers of Slovenian language Stanko Kotnik and Leopold Suhodolčan were inspired by the idea of rewarding readers with badges. The founders of *The Reading Badge* organized the activities so as to offer a child as many options as possible for a creative communication with literature, which could give him/her literary-esthetical pleasure and make them linked to the book for good. Kotnik and Suhodolčan prepared the regulations where they wrote down the goals, the rules and the procedure of this new activity. Ever since then, the motivational system that invites the child and young people to read in their spare time, develops: through teachers - mentors who work with children and parents from pre-school period until the completion of their secondary education. A young reader, who decides to take part, is given a full guidance over a number of years. The teacher - mentor gives at their disposal a long list of the best and most suitable books. The reading is followed by conversations or some other kind of presentation guided by the mentor.

b) **WHAT?**

1. Organization

In ten years from the start, *The Reading Badge* spread as a movement to improve reading habits and reading culture not only all over Slovenia, but also abroad, in Slovenian minority schools in neighbouring Italy, Austria, Hungary and among emigrants in the world. Creativity was not reduced to an empty formalism, but over the years it has been improved with the help of a large number of native language teachers, librarians, headmasters, and all those enthusiastic readers, who within this voluntary activity have gathered children of similar souls showing them how to love books. Owing to its expansion it was necessary to link and coordinate various activities. This task was taken by the Board of "*The Slovenian Association of Reading Badges*", which worked within *Slovenian Association of Friends of Youth*, a non-government organization. The Board is/was connected with schools through a net of community branches. In some schools *The Reading Badge* activity is included in the teachers' or librarians' timetable workload. However, there are many schools where this kind of work is done as a spare time activity. Anyway, the share of voluntary work is very high. In the course of time *The Association* grew up into *The Slovenian Reading Badge Society (from 2002)*. *The Programme Committee of The Reading Badge* was formed to monitor the movement and to take care of the basic directives of its development. It has helped mentors with their work by organizing lectures, workshops with inventive teachers, librarians, supervisors, and specialists in the field of youth literature. In this way, the democratic aims of the movement have been supported till this day.



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2. Financial threshold

Because *The Reading Badge Association of Slovenia* has never been directly financed from the state, it has to (to implement programs and projects on the national level) obtain financing in different ways - applying to the call of Slovenian Book Agency, Government Office for Slovenes Abroad, working with the Institute for the Education. It is also supported by donors, sponsors. During the long history of the movement, each of the projects has been supported by a number of Slovenian companies, including many Slovenian publishers. Programs for children and young people (and their parents) are free, they can attend them regardless of ethnicity or social status.

3. Social, cultural and practical thresholds

Through the years, *The Slovenian Reading Badge Society* has opened an increasingly democratic dialogue between readers and mentors, as well as adding more and more accompanying activities, such as cultural events, gatherings with artists, an international book quiz etc. At the same time, it has encouraged and accelerated the development of school libraries and book production for young people. *The Slovenian Reading Badge Society* successfully spreads the reading culture mostly among the young, and it is integrated with all the endeavours for better functional literacy of the individual and the society. The ambitious goal of this movement is to raise a reader who will love and enjoy reading all their life.

The Slovenian Reading Badge Society is both the name and the “trade mark” of an important cultural and educational movement, of an activity for the development of reading habits and reading culture among the youth. It is one of the most intimate free activities, but at the same time very popular. Teachers and librarians have found *The Reading Badge* to be an excellent form and opportunity to make good books popular. At the same time, pupils are directed to technical literature and getting used to dictionaries, encyclopaedias and various handbooks.

4. Cooperation

The Reading Badge participates with experts in the field of youth literature, libraries, the Pioneers - Centre for Youth Literature and Librarianship (Ljubljana City Library), the magazine *Child and Book*, with the Slovenian section of IBBY, Reading Association of Slovenia, the Slovenian Writers' Association, the Association of Slovenian publishers, with publishers and libraries, mass media, cultural and educational institutions and also with the Ministry of Culture, Ministry of Education and Sport and Slovenian Book Agency.

c) **WHO?**

Nowadays in all of its programmes *The Reading Badge* includes up to 140.000 young participants each year (mostly primary school and preschool children and a smaller number of secondary school pupils), quite a respectable number for a nation of two million people. It also includes adults: teachers and librarians who participate in the programmes as mentors of reading. This is the target group of *The Reading Badge's* educational programmes for mentors. The third important target group of *The Reading Badge* are the parents/families of

the young readers. The development of family reading is an especially important goal of the programmes for the youngest readers.

The Reading Badge is also presented among the children of Slovene minorities, the Slovene emigrants' children in Europe, in the countries of the former Yugoslav Republics and in other parts of the world.

The movement tries to find special ways of developing reading culture among different disadvantaged groups: children living in poverty, children with disabilities and children from a different ethnically-cultural background.

d) **HOW?**

The Reading badge has developed various basic programs and actions that usually take place during the school year:

The Preschool Reading Badge promotes family reading. It encourages adults, parents, grandparents and teachers to read to children. It is carried out by nursery school teachers and librarians in public libraries.

The Reading Badge in primary school makes schoolchildren between 7 and 15 read in their free time. The process is carried out by teachers - mentors together with the school library. It may have various forms, such as a literary circle, school magazine, young reporters, etc.

In secondary schools, *The Slovenian Reading Badge Society* encourages reading, talking about the books, and literary creativity. These activities take place at debate clubs, at meetings with authors, at literary performances, etc.

The Slovene Reading Badge Society tries to support the work of the teachers, librarians and parents (grandparents), involved in those basic programs in different ways:

- It helps to organize the meetings (cultural events) for young readers with important Slovene writers, illustrators and other cultural workers/artists in financial and other ways (in the past years with special booklets that included presentations of the authors, now with presentations on the homepage www.bralnaznacka.si);
- It prints different motivational and informational materials for children and informational and/or educational materials for teachers, librarians and parents;
- It organizes the special sponsor-funded reprints and donations of high quality books, which are given to different kinds of target groups as a present and motivation;
- It organizes different kinds of educational seminars and workshops for mentors of reading and for parents/whole families involved in the programs;
- It tries to inform mentors about important things, events etc., related to books and reading in their online newspaper *Ostržek*.

e) **ISSUES**

The main problems in the long history of the movement always appeared when and where the adults, organizers and/or mentors forgot the main goal of *The Reading Badge*: to fill young people with enthusiasm for reading good literature and to teach them to live with the books after they have left school. In practice it means that the problems occur when the organizers and/or mentors of reading forget about being creative and active participants in



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encouraging young people to be part of “the reading world” (when they use methods and/or lists of books, which are either no longer attractive for the present generations or just don’t work for the group of children/young people they are working with).

The most important solution for this kind of problems is good and permanent care for the nationwide informational and educational system for mentors and local organizers of the movement.

f) RESULTS

The Slovenian Reading Badge Society has successfully been spreading the reading culture (for almost 58 years!) mostly among the young, and it is integrated with all the endeavours for better functional literacy of the individual and the society.

- *The Reading Badge* movement covers 70 percent of all primary school children in Slovenia and is being conducted on 99% of all Slovenian primary schools;
- The project is carried out by approximately 7000 teachers – mentors in kindergartens, primary schools, public libraries, ...;
- Each year approximately 140.000 preschool and primary school children (Slovenia has a population of 2 million people) read within the framework of *The Reading Badge*;
- More than 500.000 books were donated to young readers, teachers – mentors and libraries in the past 15 years;
- Over 2.000 receivers of monthly released online newspaper *Ostržek* ...

g) EVALUATION

- The high number of included participants each year is a sort of attestation of the program, since the participation is voluntary (the data for the statistics are gathered yearly);
 - The movement programs are regularly evaluated and the results of the past evaluations are integrated in the future plans;
 - *The Reading Badge* is one of the oldest and most respected cultural movements in Slovenia: that is proven by several national awards and by the fact, that the last three presidents of the Republic of Slovenia were the patrons of honor of *The Reading Badge*.
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