

**Speech at the Opening Ceremony
Frankfurt Book Fair 2011
Juergen Boos**

Tuesday, 11 October 2011, Congress Centre

- The spoken word takes precedence -

Your Excellency, President Grímsson,
Minister Skarphéðinsson,
Minister Westerwelle,
Guðrún Eva Mínervudóttir,
Arnaldur Indriðason,
Deputy Premier Hahn,
Mayor Roth,
Publishers,
Dealers in books - in all the world's languages,
Colleagues,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

The flourishing of German literature in the late 18th century gave rise to a new phenomenon - the reading societies. These societies were first formed for a practical purpose, because books were still very expensive at the time. But it quickly became clear that the people in these societies all shared a common motivation - they were all hungry for knowledge, they wanted to find out as much as they could about everything. Above all, however, they wanted to participate. The reading societies gave them the chance to discuss their newly acquired knowledge with other like-minded people. This is how information made its grand entry into society.

That tradition still persists today, with tremendous vitality. Of all the readings I have attended in the last 12 months, there wasn't a single one that wasn't sold out. At the Book Fair too, for more than 15 years, we've also run a small reading society in the company. And now - as you're all well aware - the internet and the digitisation of content have multiplied the possibilities for organising highly effective reading societies. Today we call this "social reading", yet it is really no different to what was happening 200 years ago.

It's just that everything works more easily today, especially if you want to discuss with friends in Reykjavik whether or not it's worth spending money on Sjöfn's latest book. Comments are attached directly to passages in the e-book, questions are posted spontaneously on virtual pin boards - it's the literary salon on the internet!

A large number of book people have exploited the readers' urge to share their ideas, and have developed digital formats as a motor for such exchanges. This is what turns social reading into social publishing. These concepts are but two manifestations within a whole spectrum of opportunities.

Marshall McLuhan might have been right when he suggested that "a new technology expands one or more of our senses within the social world, and new relationships develop accordingly between all our senses" - meaning that our social organisation will change... At the same time, I believe that all the changes that occur will still reflect an eternal, basic need, deep inside people and therefore deep within our societies - the need for stories, the need for relevant information and the insatiable urge to share our thoughts about that information.

Readings, reading festivals and literary symposiums - the people who take part in personal interactions such as these go later to their online social networks and write about their experiences there. That creates a connection between the customer-friendly bookshop on the corner and the globalised social networks of readers and authors, of media and publishers.

Wherever people get together with authors and whenever discussions of content take place, needs are being satisfied. In my opinion, anyone who inspires enthusiasm, who moves readers to "get involved in the debate", has certainly done a lot of good. The "New" evolves out of proven and familiar things, often melting them together in different ways. As such it carries forward the traditional values of the book into a mutually stimulating future cohesion, with cultural, social and economic aspects.

In recent days, we've talked a lot about "renewal". But, renewal can't come from nowhere. There is an urgent demand for new ideas of formats, new business models and new distribution channels. We need to think about the long-term archiving of digital content; if not, we won't have any exchanges of correspondence to read in the future. We have to answer the need for new forms of copyright, because authors can't live off their passions alone. And we don't even have appropriate words to describe all the new products we'll need to develop.

As an industry, we are daring to undertake the renewal. Undoubtedly this will involve a lot of hard work, and not a few risks. But it is also a great chance to grasp and create new opportunities.

And you don't have to tackle the renewal alone. If the core of our industry consists of the collective reading and collective interpretation of stories and information, then we can succeed in making the transition if we all think of ourselves individually as full participants in the debate. Our industry lives - like no other - through people who produce good ideas and recognise relevant content, and who communicate these things to society at large.

I would like to invite YOU ALL to use this Book Fair as a place to participate in the debate! In this spirit, I wish us all an inspiring few days here at the Frankfurt Book Fair 2011.

Frankfurt, 11 October 2011