



# Book Promotion Projects in Iran

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## Introduction

Reading is that unique nexus between the individual mind and the human culture. For the past 3000 years, books have shown to be the most truthful medium of culture and no other media has ever provided better services to the society.

In the past five years, reading promotion projects in Iran have enjoyed a fresh start. An astonishing number of group and individual book promoters have started new and innovative rounds of activities. They have started forming networks and communicating each other, thus learning from each other and using new ideas and methods for reading promotion in every corner of the country.

As a result of these emerging networks in different cities and villages, municipalities are planning fresh cultural projects around books and reading, village authorities have recognized village libraries as centers for public to participate in rural development projects. Moreover, individual and organizational reading projects are now recognized and are finding new languages and platforms for communication of ideas and experiences. All these are boosting writers, publishers, book distributors, bookstores and libraries who in turn, find their specific location within the network. Even the social media, once recognized as a threat to the book, is serving the flow of books and promotion of reading within different layers of society.

Today reading promotion initiatives in Iran have found their due central position and every cultural, educational, environmental activist, has discovered the pivotal role reading promotion campaigns can play for development of any benevolent project.

This is a brief report on some of the main initiatives for reading promotion in Iran. Although such a general report cannot cover all the creativities and new energies that are activated in the field, it clearly shows a map of the prodigious position of such projects at every level of the Iranian society.

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## 1. Designation of Iranian Capital of Book

Iranian of Capital of Book is a project for annual designation of a city as National Book Capital. The general idea is borrowed from UNESCO's World Book Capital but in practice, it has been specially adopted according to specific conditions and requirements of Iranian society.



Kashan as the 4th Book Capital of Iran, Stand in Tehran International Book Fair

### History

In the first call for proposals in 2014, 64 cities from around the country submitted their reports and plans for the title.

After a series of expert assessments, 10 cities reached the final stage and were introduced to the nomination committee. Based on the objectives and evaluation indicators, the nomination committee, introduced five cities of Ahvaz, Yazd, Bushehr, Gonbad-e-Kavus and Neyshabur as final candidates.

In the final stage, the nomination committee announced Ahwaz as book capital of Iran for 2015. This is due to "innovative, participatory, effective and coherent programs, and the use of the capacities of the private sector, public organizations, industries and sports and cultural centers for book promotion."

In the second call, 99 cities participated and submitted their plans and programs for book promotion in 2016, leading to presentation of Bushehr, Neyshabur, Shiraz, Yazd, Shahrekord and Ray as final candidates and the final winning of Neyshabur as the second book capital of Iran for 2016.

The third call was answered by 102 cities from around the country, which led to the nomination of Evaz, Kashan, Bushehr, Zarand and Shahrekord as final candidates. Eventually, the city of Bushehr was designated as book capital for 2017.



Poster of the fourth call for nomination of cities

In the fourth year, the cities of Mahabad, Sadra, Kashan, Dezful, and Yazd were introduced as final candidates and it was the historic city of Kashan that won the final title.

## Objectives

1. Development of infrastructures and activities for book promotion in large and small cities;
2. Development of cooperation between civil, non-governmental institutions with public and state organizations;
3. Using the public and private capital and facilities for the promotion of reading;
4. Promotion of cultural planning for promotion of books;
5. Acknowledging and supporting innovative ideas for book promotion;
6. Decentralization and promotion of planning at local level for book promotion and other cultural activities;
7. Development of attractive and popular programs in the field of reading.

## Affiliated institutions and organizations

- UNESCO National Commission
- Iranian Organization of Municipalities and Villages
- The institution for public libraries
- Iranian Society for Library and Information
- Association of Child and Adult Writers
- Union of Publishers and Booksellers
- Ministry of Culture and Islamic Guidance
- National Library of Iran
- Network of bibliophile cities of Iran

## Executive Procedures

After the call, every city forms a special council for the programming and coordination of activities. The members of council may include different state organizations and municipalities as well as representatives of private and civil organizations including active NGOs in cultural and reading affairs, representative of public and private libraries, and some relevant private sectors including bookshops.

The council will prepare special report on the situation of book in the city and will work on plans for development of reading infrastructures and facilities in the city. This gathering of different sectors results on fresh arrangements, agreements, plans and cooperations.

Accordingly, the city designs and documents a comprehensive plan and propose it as their plan for national book capital. All relevant stakeholders

including representative of public and state institutions, municipalities and NGOs are required to sign this plan.

The program is scheduled to run in the next year. To ensure the implementation of the program, the City Council must approve it. Some other forms of guarantees are in the form of agreements, contracts, administrative circulars and official reports.

The secretariat for national book capital evaluates the profiles of each city in two levels. Then five cities are nominated and from among them a city will be selected as the capital of the book. A few days before Nowruz and the start of the Persian New Year, this designation is announced by the President, Vice-President or any other high-ranking state official.

### Characteristics

The program for annual designation of a city as book capital of Iran has a progressive and developmental approach and can coordinate many local infrastructures, facilities, people, events and resources for the promotion of book. The program encourages and empowers both the people and the state to plan and coordinate their efforts for promotion of reading activities at local level. The independent NGOs and local book promotion groups and individuals are finding the urban facilities at their reach for further activities.

The secretariat annually publishes new and emerging ideas which is a source of inspiration for the activists across the country.

Also, the state local authorities find the real capacities of books and reading communities for execution of further social, cultural and developmental projects.

The program has found many other great results that are hard to observe and list, but the active presence of women and young people at every level of planning, organization and implementation of the programs is hard to overlook or ignore.

### Achievements

During the past years, independent scholars have conducted a number of field researches and assessments. These annual assessments have shown a considerable increase in reading activities and book-related events.

Another assessment conducted by National Cooperative for Book Distribution, shows a significant increase in demand for more books in the cities that have shown interest in nomination. The increase is more evident

in the case of books for children and young adults where it reached to more than 70 percent.

In addition to the evident increase in reading activities, the program also created new opportunities for the presence and activities of women, children and young adults in social activities.

Surveying the reading activities of the four cities that are introduced as book capital shows that most of them have developed sustainable and independent reading promotion programs that evolve through time.

Every year, the secretariat publishes an illustrated and detailed list of selected ideas and activities for promotion of book is published as a new book: *Ideas for Book Promotion in Cities*.

### Social impacts

The program for designation of a city as book capital of Iran has become an attractive program for the media and newspapers. Since the early calls and announcements in late September, the press, different news agencies, as well as radio and TV channels warmly cover the news and events around it. The main reflection, however, happens in local media and local social networks.

Local media including websites, newspapers, as Radio and TV channels regularly and much enthusiasm cover the news and views on the event. Such a warm welcome by the media creates productive waves in the society and increases the level of participation of the people and a variety of governmental and private organizations in the event.

## 2. Festival for Bibliophile Villages

The Iranian Festival for Bibliophile Villages is an annual event for nomination of ten Villages as Bibliophile Villages of Iran. It is a program launched jointly by a variety of different stakeholders including official and civil organization as well as NGOs and private sectors. In order to participate in the festival, the villages are required to present both their past and present capacities and achievements as well as their plans for development of reading initiatives and facilities within the village.

### History

After introduction of Iranian Capital for Books, the empty space of doing some actions for villages and rural areas became more evident. Therefore, a special program was designed where villages could introduce their special capacities and launch new programs to develop it.



Since the early introduction in 2014, in four years, four called were made and a significant number of villages answered and applied for the title.



A group of bibliophile villager with Iranian Minister of Culture

In the first year, about 620 villages participated in the festival and this increased to 1300 villages in the fourth year. The profile of each village, including reports on their past achievements and activities and documents on their future plans, undergoes a series of assessments and evaluations. Finally 20 villages are introduced as the candidates and then only 10 villages are designated as Bibliophile Villages.

## Objectives

1. Development of infrastructures and activities at the rural level for promotion of reading;
2. Provision of a field for collaboration between public and private stakeholders as well as NGOs and independent reading activists;
3. Allocation of public and private capitals and resources for promotion of reading and books;
4. Indirect promotion of future orientation and middle and long-term planning at local level;
5. Supporting new and innovative ideas for reading promotion;
6. Decentralization and turning toward planning at the local level;

7. Design and implementation of attractive and popular programs for reading promotion.

## Partner organizations

- UNESCO National Commission
- The national organization for municipalities and rural management
- The institute for public libraries
- Scientific association for library and informatics
- Association of writers for children and young adults
- The union for publishers and booksellers
- Ministry of Culture
- President's Deputy for development of rural and underprivileged areas
- Network of Bibliophile Villages

## Executive Procedures

The festival is the result of joint efforts by a variety of stakeholders from public and private sectors in rural settings and for the promotion of reading and development of related capacities. In order to participate in the event, the villages are required to provide reports and documents on their past achievements as well as their plans for future activities. These reports should be signed by local authorities and the head of village council and posted to the general secretariat office of the festival in Tehran.

There are two broad categories for the activities and initiatives of every village:

- Infrastructural activities such as building and equipment of libraries, allocation of land for such purposes and other construction affairs;
- Promotional activities such as reading contests, book fairs, festivals, inviting writers, and any other activity for the promotion of books and reading culture.

According to this, every village will submit a profile. Then the secretariat and the consultative body will evaluate the past activities and future plans in two distinct phases and eventually decide on the name of candidates and the final list of bibliophile villages.



People of Fahliyan Village, in Tehran Book Exhibition, introducing books and cultural capacities

## Impacts

The festival has not only affected reading rate in villages and rural societies, but also it has shown significant social outcomes. Reading has actually served as an axis for social coherence and harmony. There is a meaningful change in the general image of the village. State authorities and business people who hardly step into the village are seen several times during campaigns and ceremonies. Village council members find new and more fundamental infrastructures to build for the people, an infrastructure that empowers the people to think and to talk and to build even more.

Also, the people find new contents and subjects to fill in their newly discovered social media; they can even talk about their experiences of collective reading to other people all over the country and globe. Geographical barriers have already been shattered, now is the time to find new languages and subjects for expression. Village kids find and follow their favorite authors in social media.



The new village library of Yengijeh, Kurdistan, Iran

Whatever is done in the name of books and reading in these villages certainly goes far beyond the activity of reading promotion, reading in these villages acts as a social institution. It is a space and a device for the wider presence of women in social affairs.

Considering the fact that in the past, much has not been done in a planned and coherent manner for reading promotion in villages, this event has been welcomed by the villagers and has been widely reflected in rural settings.

Official media including national radio and TV channels widely cover reading events and communities, regional and national newspapers and magazines allocate new columns to reading events, making room for further development of the project.

### 3. Reading Clubs for Children and Young Adults

The idea of a series of competitions in the format of football cup around books and reading by children is among the most innovative ideas for book promotion in Iran. Now, after several years of practice and development, the Cup of Reading Clubs for Children and Young Adults is national event that is annually held in all over the country. Every year, a group of writers for children travel to different cities and organize workshops for local teachers, librarians, Kindergarten coaches, parents, book promoters and everybody who is interested. The workshop is about how to read for

children and how to organize a small community of children for group reading. The “facilitators” who are trained in these workshops start gathering and listing around 12 children and young adults within the same age group for their reading clubs. When the clubs are registered in [bookpromotion.ir](http://bookpromotion.ir), the members can buy a number of books at 50% discount in their local bookshop. Every member buys at least one book, reads it, brings it to the club and talks about it. Then the members exchange book and through the 8 to 12 weeks of activity everybody in club has read a number of books. They argue for and select the most favorable book they have read, write a letter to their favorite author and make a one minute film about it.



**A young adult reading club**

In addition to these minimum activities, the club performs any other creative activity it feels good and necessary. Finally they must submit a report on their activities for the secretariat, the profile is required to be well-documented and it should include the name of the selected book, collection of letters to writers, and the collection of short video clips on books they have read. The best arguments and most creative plans, performances and activities are the subject of competition at local, regional and national levels. In the final ceremony, both the winner clubs and the highly graded authors and illustrators are appreciated.

Most of the clubs that are formed in this process continue to gather and read even beyond the final round of competitions.

## History

Running a reading club is not a new idea and there are a variety of well-reported reading clubs all over the world. A reading club for children with plans to competition at national level, however, is a new and fanciful; at least the sheer participation of so many children proves this.

The first version of the idea was introduced to a school in Neyshabur, demanding them to read and exchange books in small groups and form a library in their classrooms.

An expanded version of the idea to run in a city found its way among the programs of Neyshabur for her nomination as national book capital. Later on, a group of writers for children worked on it for implementation at a national level.

The educational system of Iran is an old system with heavy homework and little room for children's freedom and creativity and does not allow any other organization to participate in the process. Therefore reading clubs for students was transformed into an independent reading clubs for children to make it free from the boundaries of schools and to invite a variety of different stakeholders into the process.

To make the idea more familiar, it was designed after popular football club competitions. Cup has certain associations and connotations in both Christian western world and ancient Persian world.

Initially, given the special structure of Iranian society and government, the idea was evaluated as too ambitious and unconventional for implementation, therefore only 15 candidate cities were selected as pilot. These 15 cities were high profile cities during the previous round of national book capital designation with active governmental and non-governmental bodies being present in the city.

Afterward, a group of civil and non-governmental organizations such as the Association of Writers for Children and Young Adults, Council for Children's Book and active book promotion groups were invited for collaboration. They introduced a number of prominent writers, scholars, activists and experts. The resulting group of people decided on a two day workshop to discuss and decide on a concerted and coherent approach to book and its promotion across the country. The workshop also resulted in the main plan for further workshops in every city.

These were the workshop where a group of writers talked about their experiences of book promotion in different rural and urban settings.

In 2014 the writers and book promotion activists who have attended the workshops travelled to different cities to run workshops. The ‘facilitators’ who participated in these workshops were mostly local teachers, librarians, NGO activists and a variety of other people with access to a number of children in different setting, even in residential buildings. After participation in a two day workshop, they were certified to build and run a reading club for children or young adults.

The number of cities and villages to run reading clubs increased to 102 in the second year. In the third year, more than 1700 cities and villages have volunteered for running reading clubs.

## Partners

Reading Clubs for Children and Young Adults is an event supported by a variety of different civil and non-governmental organizations including Association of Writers for Children and Young Adults, Network of Book Promotion Groups, HAMI Association, Children Cultural Development Center, some international partners including UNISEF, public institutes such as municipalities, city councils, village councils, Iranian House of Books, and governmental bodies such as Ministry of Culture, Institute for the Intellectual Development of Children and Young Adults, Ministry of Education, etc.

## Stages of Running Reading Clubs for Children and Young-Adults

1. Formation of executive committees in cities and provinces
2. Running workshops for local facilitators
3. Formation of clubs and registering them
4. Members buying books with 50% discount
5. Exchanging and reading all the books by the members
6. Discussing books
7. Selecting the best books by the members
8. Writing a letter to favorite authors
9. Making a short video on the subject of books
10. Doing creative group works
11. Documenting the activities of club
12. Assessment and evaluation of club profiles at local level
13. Running celebrations for clubs at local level
14. Submitting the profile of the city and successful clubs to the national secretariat

15. Final evaluation
16. Celebration of reading clubs and nomination of most successful clubs, short films, letter to authors, and appreciation of the best authors, translator and illustrators as voted by club members

## Characteristics

There are certain characteristics that has made the reading clubs attractive to children and young adults:

1. It has a simple and familiar structure;
2. It provides collective and participatory activities for children.
3. It has a minimal and flexible structure, inviting the members to run their own creative plans.
4. It provides new spaces for collective and active reading.
5. It enables children to read deeply and actively to talk and argue on their special reading of the text.
6. Its simple and familiar structure can be reproduced in a variety of social settings.
7. It provides great potentials for networking and linking reading promotion activists and the transfer of experiences.
8. It demands for a variety of different organizations participation.
9. It can be used as a platform for thinking about, discussing, and providing solutions to certain broader social problems.
10. Cities and villages are voluntary in their participation and they need to provide some conditions for joining the cup.

## Workshops and sharing experiences

In the workshops for facilitators in different cities and villages, the following topics are presented:

- 1) The benefits of reading today's world
- 2) Approaches to reading promotion
- 3) How to set up reading clubs
- 4) Evaluation of books and literature for children and young adults
- 5) How to talk about a book
- 6) Documentation and dissemination of club activities

In addition to running workshops for sharing experiences, a booklet is published with further discussions on the topics. Also, a series of training films are produced with the presentation of two authors and reading facilitators in each volume.



These booklet and videos are also available in bookstores and local libraries for the assistance of facilitators throughout the country in running their workshops and clubs.

### List of selected books

The task of book selection for reading in clubs is given to facilitators and club members and they can find materials in local libraries or bookshops. But for using their share of 50% discount, a special list of book is compiled from the best books available in the market. The list is no less than 1000 titles from best translation and creative works published in recent years and is a combination of several other lists provided by a variety of institutes and organizations.

### Impacts

Reading clubs for children and young adults is one the most socially effective initiative in contemporary settings. Beside tangible effects of increasing readings in volunteer cities, reading clubs has significant social impacts:

1. Club members, according to their families and teachers, have gained many abilities over the course of activities; they have found higher self-esteem; they have developed the ability to talk and argue, and have even been more successful in their classroom and social activities. This is a direct result of participatory, collective, critical and creative nature of work in reading clubs.
2. Many teachers, trainers, volunteers, librarians and independent activists for book promotion find a strong network for further collaboration and sharing of energies and experiences that goes far beyond reading clubs.
3. The program has created new spaces for the cooperation, collaboration and resource sharing of various stakeholders including private and public organization for reading promotion.
4. Reading clubs has strengthened the spirit of collective work and inclusiveness among children and adolescents.
5. The first year more than 2000 members participated, in the second year about 5000 children and young adults registered in clubs and this will certainly find an exponential growth in the third year as more than 1700 cities and villages are volunteering.



Members of a reading club, reading and discussing in open natural spaces

6. Many club members report on their club activities in their independent social media and social networks. This is beside more official reports on club activities in mainstream media.
7. A field research conducted by the Association of Book Distributors shows an increase in book demand in all volunteer cities. Other assessments indicate children reading up to 140 books during club activities.
8. Given the economic crisis facing small bookstores in small cities, the program has proved useful in creating more prosperity. The club members are encouraged to visit bookstore and different supporters including the state ministry of culture offer special discounts for books.
9. Reading clubs lead to the idea of Reading Mondays in kindergartens and preschool centers where they are required to allocate a day in the week for reading.
10. Clubs has proved useful in creation of a link between readers and writers. Children feel they can communicate with their favorite writers.

## 50 Letters from club members and writer's answers

The club members are required to write a letter to their favorite writer, translators or illustrators.

When reading the letters, the club assessment team found the letters highly interesting and important and suggested them to be published along with answer by writers.

Thus the letters became the subject an exhibition and then they were submitted to 50 target writers, translators and illustrators for their answer. The selected letters along with the answer they receive will be published by the start of the third year of reading club activities.

## Reading club activities

General activities include:

1. Buying books
2. Exchanging books
3. Reading the exchanges books
4. Conducting talks, group presentations and dialogues on the subject of books they are reading
5. Selection of the best book
6. Writing letters to favorite writers, translators, and illustrators
7. Making a short movie for creative presentation of the book read in club

Beside these minimum activities, every club is free to perform a series of innovative activities such as:

1. Communication with favorite and available writers and book producers through social media
2. Inviting writers and book producers to the club
3. Recognition and meeting with regional writers and book producers
4. Running club rallies on the way to bookstore
5. Performing creative presentations of the stories
6. Planting in special vases for every writer they are reading and exhibition of these vases in different occasions
7. Running ceremonies of reading for the sea on Thursdays and cleaning the beach by club members
8. Planting trees for their favorite writers in city parks and other open locations
9. Integration of reading activities with indigenous cultural events
10. Running clubs for children with disability



Members of a reading club in a rally to a local writer's home!

## Fact and Statistics

- Training of more than 7000 facilitators across the country
- Formation of around 2000 reading clubs with 24000 members in the first year
- Formation of more than 5000 reading clubs with more than 70000 members in the second year
- Volunteering of 1304 cities and 433 villages for running reading clubs in the third year
- UNICEF is a new partner in the third round of running reading club activities.



Members of a reading club, celebrating the birth of the club with Farhad Hasanzadeh, distinguished writer for children

All those concerned with children and young adult's literature, either those who have been involved with the Cup of Reading Clubs or those who were observing the activities, have evaluated it as a different and influential event in books and reading affairs. The mass media also covered the event quite well, publishing notes from some writers and translators, as they did so about the experiences of facilitators' trainers.

#### **4. Festival of Iranian Reading Promoters**

This Festival is one of the effective programs in promoting reading in Iran. Four round with participation and support of volunteering individuals and groups who have been active in promoting reading have been held in Iran since 2014.

Participants in this festival are volunteered individuals and groups who focus on promoting reading. In different cities and villages, these people often work voluntarily to promote reading without requesting any help from government agencies. Usually, these people and groups pay for their activities and the expenditure of their activities is provided by popular support.



Selected reading promoters with Minister of Culture

Although, they often operate locally and regionally, their activities are more effective than government agencies. However, the government has tried to play an important role in expanding these activities at the national level by providing more support.

## History

There are two major events associated with the book on the official annual calendar of Iran. The first event is in the middle of the spring and in the framework of “the International Tehran Book Fair” and another one in the middle of the fall at the same time as “the Book Week” would have been held. The focus of activities in “the Book Week” is to promote reading. In addition to providing a comprehensive report on one-year activities of

Governmental and nongovernmental institutions in the field of books, a variety of programs are held throughout the country. In celebration of this week, many NGOs contribute. In recent years, the participation of nongovernmental organizations has dramatically increased.

One of the programs with active participation of NGOs is appreciation of selected individuals and groups in the field of promoting reading and its first round was in 2014.

The festival was held with the aim of identifying, introducing and encouraging the promotion of reading and with the attendance of more than 90 participants (individual and group) in its first round. After the Pathology of the First Festival and according to the experience gained in the first round, the second period held with the participation of more than

450 individuals and groups who presented passionately in a serious competition. And it was decided that the third period would be held with fundamental changes in the run and by a consortium of non-governmental groups who are active in the field of promoting reading.

From the fourth period and with the formation of a network of groups who promotes reading, policy issues and the implementation of this festival have been entrusted to this institution.

## Partner organizations

The main organizer of the festival is the network of groups who promote reading which is an institution composed of more than 20 non-governmental active groups in promoting reading.

Iranian Library and Scientific Information Society, Book House Institute of Iran and the Institution of Public Libraries also work with the network.

## Executive method

After the Festival recalls, individuals and groups active in promoting reading across the country, prepare the case and send it to the secretariat of the festival and then this case will be judged.

In the first period of the festival there were two sections: A section for individuals and another one for institutions and organizations. From the second period, in addition to the division of the individuals and organizations, a special section was added to the festival.



Book distribution in rural area

Special sections include:

- 1- Selected Librarians who Promote Reading
- 2- Selected Bookstores who Promote Reading
- 3- Featured Kindergartens Promoting Reading
- 4- Selected Teachers who Promote Reading

## Festival Features

This festival has special privileges that distinguish it from other common activities. The most important ones are as follows:

*Being nongovernmental:* This festival is exclusively focus on popular and voluntary programs that are run by the people.

*Creativity in line with local and regional needs:* Most of the projects and activities are very local and in line with local capacities, needs and aspirations. Each group has established creative and innovative activities based on their needs, backgrounds and experiences.

*Low costs:* Most of the festival's projects and activities are "healthy and well-prepared" economically. The projects which are led by charities, and also the programs which are conservative and formed by small cultural-economical activities, are very low cost.

*Bold presence of Women and Girls:* These groups have proven that women are ahead of men in voluntary and enthusiastic engagement and engagement.

*The use of virtual social networks as an opportunity to promote reading:* Taking advantage of the capabilities and features of "cyberspace" is the other feature of these activities. So that, in most projects to maintain good communication, websites, blogs, emails and even virtual networks (such as Facebook) and mobile-based virtual networks (such as Viber, Telegram and Instagram) have been used.

This feature finds more importance when we see that many of them have been implemented in remote towns and even rural areas. Moreover, this shows the extends of the capabilities and the range of IT-based activities.

*Organized actions in group:* While many people (and even experts) claim that in the community the culture of group work among the people has been diminished, plans submitted to the festival show that more than 80% of them are managed in a groups and supported by the people. This is an important point which is expected to be considered in governmental and nongovernmental sector planning.



*Focus on children and teenagers:* A look at the groups and individuals who involved in promoting reading books and attending the festival shows that the main focus of activities is on children and young adults.

## Referees and Arbitration Criteria

The scientific committee of the festival consists of five main members who are selected from experts, professors, and book and reading activists. These referees were from the faculty members or critics, writers, literary prize winners, editors of publications, and pioneers in the field of library and information science.

The criteria include:

- Sustainability in impact
- Creativity and innovation
- Attracting popular participation
- Being volunteering
- Creative use of existing facilities
- Attention to deprived areas
- Consistency with native culture
- Modeling capability



A bakery shop has provided spaces for reading

## Some selected groups of festivals:

*Vira Cultural Arts Society*: For promoting the culture of reading along with implementation of storytelling projects in parks, schools and kindergartens in Ilam province, one of the deprived provinces of Iran.

*Children's Literature History Research Institute for program of "Read with Me"*: For promoting extensive and continuous reading among children of deprived areas and those who live next to borders of our country, performing artistic activities in connection with books and reading, training professional coaches to promote reading.

*Book City Institute and Children Literature Research Bimonthly*: For preparing lists of winners of Flying Turtle Award, Evaluation of children and teenagers activities in each chapter and compilation of precious books in the list of "Flying Turtle" award and running meetings of signature celebration for books in the bookstore.

*Wisdom of Sepahan*: Running reading classes for children and young adults, creating groups for promoting reading, conducting the "Children-Book" conferences, holding multiple bookshops in different cities, creating a library or book bag to lend books to elderly people in Isfahan province.

*Mehr Award*: For organizing dormitory inhabitants of a charity organization to read and evaluate books for preparation of list. The girls managed to run reading sessions, meet writers, and perform several other social and cultural event around books and reading.

*Student Book Donation Group*: Collecting new and second-hand books from publishers and citizens and distributing them in villages, charities, and support organizations, holding book readings competitions, buying books for children and teenagers through charity activities.

*House of Librarian*: Assign a residential unit in Tehran as a four-level library for the neighborhood. Creation of two libraries: one for "Child and young adult" and the other for "Family", conducting periodical exhibitions, teaching correct reading and enjoying reading, performing storytelling and familiarizing with traditional Iranian spaces, providing advice and guidance for setting up a library.

*Children's Cultural Development Center*: The establishment of 15 libraries in deprived villages and rural areas. Equip and activate dozens of existing libraries, teaching families and teachers to manage local libraries

*White House Rainbow Group*: this group from Isfahan province has focused on reading among elders, positive motivation to aging and

empowering the elders and strengthening the bond between the young and old generation

*Nakhlak Group (Abadan)*: for doing most of its activities in deprived areas conduct cultural and reading programs for nearly 3,000 students (in groups of five). In each program, one of the famous poets of the country is also accompanied students.

*Citizenship Education Center for Development (Planting)*: This center is one of the most active groups in Ahvaz which has had many activities in the field of promoting book reading. The most important of these activities is the equipping of libraries in deprived areas of Khuzestan, conducting campaigns to promote books, and holding meetings for book critique and promotion of book reading.

*Nick Gaman-e-jamashid Charity Association*: This association has implemented coherent programs to promote reading in the province of Bushehr.

- Their activities includes: the launch of a campaign to equip 30 schools in deprived areas
- Efforts to make libraries in deprived areas and villages in Bushehr
- Establishing a library equipping campaign
- Equipping 30 schools through popular encouragement
- Installing bookshelves in school and attracting the views of charitable people for its resources.

## 5. The Tripartite Network for Reading Promotion in Iran

Organizing programs for reading promotion and establishing related events – such as Reading Mondays at kindergartens and pre-school centers, Cup of Reading Clubs for Children and Young Adults, Festival for Appreciating Reading Promoters and Clubs, Designation of Iranian Book Capital and Festival for Bibliophile Villages of Iran with its sepecial feature helping reading to flourish – are all invaluable activities for book promotion in Iran. But regarding an Iranian social charactersitic, being a ‘short-term society’ as some historical socialogists call it, the continuity of these events necesaites institutionalization and changing such a movment into a public demand by froming public groups for reading promoition and paving the way for their participation and presence in public policy makings.

## Office of Cities and Villages Coordination

One of the ways to provide public groups of reading promotion with chances for participation in public policy makings was putting their and public and governmental representatives all together. With this outlook, three networks for reading promotion were formed:

- Reading Promotion Groups Network
- Bibliophile Cities Network
- Bibliophile Villages Network

## Representative of Books Promotion Networks

- Representative of Bibliophile Villages Network
- Representative of Bibliophile Cities Network
- Representative of Municipalities and Village Heads Organization
- Representative of Iranian National Commission for UNESCO
- Representative of Public Libraries Organization
- Deputy Minister in Cultural Affairs
- Two experienced book experts

## Reading Promotion Groups Network

This network is made of volunteer and public reading groups, who while independently working, share their experiences, know about other groups, decide together on their common problems, seek one another's opinion on new ideas, and have the chance of influencing the related public policies.

This network consists of 20 public groups and its coordinating council is formed through an election.

Its representative is also a member of the Council of Cities and Villages Coordination.

This network helps in running reading promotional events including Cup of Reading Clubs for Children and Young Adults, and was allowed in the preceding round to run the Festival for Appreciating Reading Promoters and Clubs ever after.

## Bibliophile Cities Network

It is a communicational and coordinating institute that is active in exchanging common experiences and activities among cities that have ever been nominees for Iranian Book Capital.

This institute is made of those cities' cultural managers and mayors, and its coordinating council is elected by them.

Currently, over 20 city-nominees for Book Capital City are among its members, which is increasing every year.

This network's secretariat is located in the Book Capital city and its coordinating council holds its meetings every month in different cities across the country. For the time being, the mayor of the city of Yazd is the head of its coordinating council. It has held four meetings so far in this year, and one of its future programs will be holding a seminar for mayors from all provincial centers of the country, with 'reading promotion' as its topic.

This network has also attained a good relation with the High Council of the Provinces, one of legislative institutions in cities to which city and village council representatives enter through election.

### **Bibliophile Villages Network**

Villagers' participation in policy makings is not only a new trend in reading promotion process but that it is regarded as a big step from a political and social point of view.

Bibliophile Villages Network is a communicational and coordinating institution that is active in exchanging common experiences and activities among villages which have ever been nominees for the Festival for Bibliophile Villages of Iran.

It was formed in the presence of the village chiefs, head of village councils, and village librarians from 40 villages and in four rounds. The members of its coordinating council were elected by the same attendants.

This network was established in March this year by the election of its coordinating council in Tehran, and got formally recognized through a ceremony at the International Book Fair in Tehran in April.

## **Conclusion: Reviews on Reading Clubs**

### **Reflecting the Missing Relations and Dialogues**

*Neda Movahedipour* (Reading Promoter/Manager of House of Librarians)

No doubt, each of the words "club", "books", "reading" connote some meanings on which every trainer and children can talk for hours. They can say why bother making a club? Cannot one read by themselves? Or they can say they'd better read a book from which they can draw a dramatic play. Or that let them read a book they have got not idea about its end. They may

ask what they should read to enjoy most. Does one ever enjoy reading these days? What is the perfect enjoyment?

Many questions that one would face from the very beginning. Our activities are challenged from the first questions every trainer asks themselves, “What do we make the club for?”, to many other ones after the club or while carrying it on and finding the needs and potentials. Our activities differ according to the range and number of questions engaging us.

This difference ranges from the trainer’s look at the club’s identity and the children’s participation in forming the clubs’ activities to their creativity in reading.

Caring for dialogues on books and exercising searching and inquiring, or caring for social relations and activities, or whatever the reason, children and trainers have chosen it for its taste and feature and will reinforce it along the club’s progress.

The Cup of Reading Clubs gave the zest for trainers and children to read books, to have some dialogues, to correspond, to make themselves some room in the non-formal and non-educational atmosphere, and to plan their type of being together.

There are many traces reflected in the received proposals. Traces of children’s and trainers’ creativity who are very interested to do different things and to be seen. Traces of cooperation with other student groups, writers, parents and citizens. Traces of wanting and following good books; following sweet and wonderful narrations. And on the other hand, traces of filters that block the children’s and trainers’ fancies and limit and control their flights!

All traces showed that clubs have been able to make a movement. With no movement, there would not be any learning or progress either. The movement of asking what book to read? Why that book? Why that writer? Why a collected book? Why a translated one? How to enjoy? ...

The best and elected correspondences, reports, movies introducing books, and all other works show that clubs have become an atmosphere for reproducing many of missing relations and dialogues. The trainers’ informal and friendly dialogues with children; children’s serious and challenging dialogues together; dynamic relations between children and writers; and in short, relations to “civil” ideals and reviving them for a different living, and all these on the pretext of books and reading!

## Reading Promotion and Village Women's Participation

*Jafar Touzandejani* (Writer and Secretary of the Iranian Association of Writers for Children and Young Adults)

It is two years that I have travelled to different cities upon the Cup of Reading Clubs. Travels that have provided me with lots of experiences and made me closely familiar with cities and people I had not ever approached. But the recent travel to the villages participating in the Cup of Reading Clubs was a new experience. I travelled to four villages: Shams near Yazd; Reisabad in Abarkuh; Gezir in Bandar Lengeh; Abavisan in Khorasan.

There were two important points in all the four villages. First, the participation of women and young adults; next, the villager's joint cooperation in forming the club. In Reisabad, all the participants in the training workshop for the reading club were women. The manager of the library was a woman too.

In Shamsi, the number of women participating were larger than men. It was so in Abavisan. There also a woman was running its library. She was from that village and voluntarily had been running the library for a long time. Her sisters helped her too, and had already carrying on a similar plan for reading before us and our introducing the plan of reading club.

The library at Abavisan was established by the will and help of the villagers themselves, and no institution or organization had supported them with any money or facilities. Their access to children were easy too, and brought most of the village children on for the meeting at the library on the due day.

Children were quite at hand, and trainers could easily gather them together. That is main cause of reading clubs to be organized in Gezir and many other rural settings.

Gezir was a different village. The workshop was held at their Cultural Center right on the first they we arrived. They were extremely kind to us. We would stay the night at a villager's house where all other villagers would come to meet us, from their Imam of Friday Prayers through the village chief or village council members to the ordinary people who would stay the night there too upon their kinships.

The percentage of people with high educations were fairly high there. This village had many facilities that I can claim I had rarely seen in other villages. The big library of the village was built with the donation by a generous villager there. A big library which embodied not only books but an English language institute.

Shamsi was such a village too. Youths' participation was conspicuous there; youths who were mostly university students and had built a library and seriously read books, held weekly gatherings to talk about the books they read. They were quite active in the training workshop too.

We stayed the night at a villager's place who also invited for dinner all the people who had been accompanying us since morning. How honest and generous he was! Though I know there are villages which are, even today, still deprived of any facilities, the villages I went to had almost good services. More importantly, they were supplied with their residents' determination and efforts. It was interesting for me to see how decidedly women had stepped in to participate in book affairs and to teach children how to read.

### Tireless Efforts

Masoumeh Ansarian (Writer and Critic)

One of the pour features of reading clubs is its being public. The managers concerned with books promotion simply paved the way, and people enjoyed welcoming that. The friendly and easy-going measures of the managers made the circle of success perfect, with the educational atmosphere sensational and intimate as well as rich. There were no obstacles for the presence of the participants' children. One of the trainers actively attended the two-day workshop with her the 6-month-old baby in her arms all the time. No doubt, her love for reading and strong determination had alleviated the pain of two days of child care as such in a training workshop and on a seat.

In my opinion, the success in different stages of books promotion clubs owes to the act of opening a lot of them and tireless efforts in reaching the books to the club members, and thus, the realization and reflection of a coordinated determination across cities got recorded. The fulfillment of sympathy and sodality and coordination between managers and people guaranteed the success of reading books clubs.

### Different Cities, Different Plans

Mina Hadadian (Librarian)

In the first introductory meeting on forming reading clubs, the head of the project informed us that as part of the project, the children will visit local book stores.

After the training course, every volunteer headed toward the cities that had announced their readiness for running reading clubs. We stepped into a way in which the governmental management was supposed to be lessened.



Issues differed from city to city. We were supposed to consider the cultural context and civil capacities of each city. The differences meant something: Any plan from the top and without regards to the cultural characteristics of its environment will probably fail.

Any city that would achieve attracting more public forces as volunteers it had more powerful aims for promoting books and reading.

Reading clubs were the symbol of the presence of non-governmental forces and the public cooperation.

## A Civil Experience Named "Gonbad-e Kavus"

*Abdolrahman Ownagh* (Local Novelist)

Gonbad-e Kavus' children's welcoming the reading club was far-fetched. We visited four schools in this city; and on the whole, girls' schools were more welcoming [In Iran, there are separate schools for girls and boys]. In one of the schools' club, children had read a book higher than their age level and had written criticisms on that. At first, I thought their trainers had helped them in writing, but later on, I found out it was their own analysis. Facing this experience, I concluded they know books and reading every well.

## Kashan Experience

*Farmehr Monjezi* (Translator)

There were established about 133 reading clubs in Kashan and around it, and the children there had already participated in the Week of Book Store Tours and had bought books before celebrating the birthday of their reading clubs.

Reading clubs' agents attended this celebration and treated the program with lots of interest and enthusiasm. We gave books as gifts in the ceremony and it was clear the children knew good books very well. We understood it from their attitude.