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Book World Prague Boasts Record Visitor Numbers

The international book fair and literary festival Book World Prague was held for the very first time outside of its original venue – a record 54 thousand visitors passed through its gates on the second weekend in June. This exceeded the numbers from 2019 with its roughly 50 thousand visitors. The main highlights of the 27th annual event were authors from the guest country of honour Italy, including the excellent storyteller Donatella Di Pietrantonio or the author of powerful narratives Viola Ardone, also the Ukrainian display, which hosted a reading of children’s books by the wife of the Ukrainian ambassador Olga Perebyjnis, and the section entitled Literature as a Voice of Freedom. The festival also offered debates featuring outstanding foreign and Czech writers and topics such as freedom of speech, globalisation, history or the future. Book World Prague 2022 stayed true to its motto borrowed from the renowned Italian thinker Umberto Eco: *“We live for books – a sweet mission in this world dominated by disorder and decay.”*

The four-day literary festival and book fair welcomed guests from 33 countries of the world. Its 27th edition was held in June in temporary outside halls at the Prague Exhibition Grounds – this provided Book World with a breath of fresh air after almost thirty years of existence. The unique atmosphere, reminiscent in many ways of a summer festival, also proved attractive to the visitors, who came in record numbers, totalling 54 000. *“Clearly the adapted concept has proved its worth – people enjoyed their time at Book World, they stayed for longer than they used to and they probably also spent more money – there is talk among the publishers of record revenues as well. All this is actually more important for us than the exact total number of visitors. The satisfied ‘book people’ mentioned in our motto – those who make books and those who read them,”* Radovan Auer, the festival’s director, says.

The literary festival’s guest of honour was Italy, home to some of the most outstanding and globally renowned writers. Italy’s programme focused mainly on contemporary authors, including the excellent storyteller **Donatella Di Pietrantonio** and her analyses of complex maternal relationships, or the author of powerful narratives **Viola Ardone**, who spoke about the lack of female perspective in our perception of history during a debate with **Stefania Auci**. Other authors included the writer of books for children and young people **Guido Sgardoli** or the novelist **Gianfranco Calligarich**. Czech readers were also treated to unique encounters with other renowned authors from abroad, such as the Canadian writer **Shari Lapena**, Israel’s master of short stories **Etgar Keret** or the British author **Naomi Wood**. The book fair’s gates also welcomed a great number of contemporary Czech authors, including

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Kateřina Tučková, Alena Mornštajnová, Zdeněk Svěrák, Arnořt Goldflam or Radka Třeřtíková.

A total of 746 participants were involved in the accompanying programme, discussions and lectures taking place over the four days, including some popular world-renowned authors, experts, philosophers, and literary critics. The Large Hall was filled to capacity to greet the French-Moroccan author **Leïla Slimani** and listened attentively to her fresh look at lies, women and the Moroccan society, interlaced with much humour. Book World also welcomed the human rights activist **Nathan Law**, nominated for the Nobel Peace Prize. Argentinian author and literary critic **Elsa Drucaroff** talked about censorship, and the renowned psychoanalyst **Luigi Zoja** blended together philosophy, psychology and economics in a debate with **Tomáš Sedláček**.

Book World Prague also felt obliged to offer help and support to Ukrainian literature, which received ample space for its presentation: *“Our aim was to show the visitors the wealth of Ukraine’s culture, while at the same time providing Ukrainians with access to their own literature,”* Radovan Auer explains. Citizens of Ukraine had free admission to the book fair and the programme included reading of Ukrainian fairy tales for Czech and Ukrainian children. The Ukrainian display included 19 publishers from Ukraine, of which a half participated in person. Ten authors also paid a personal visit to Prague, including the poet **Kataryna Mikhalitsyna**, novelist **Yevheniya Kononenko** and a representative of the Crimean Tatars **Alim Aliyev**. *“Thanks to you we had a chance to revisit a normal world for a few days for the first time since the start of the war – to feel like people again. We could also see how much you care about us and that is priceless,”* say the Ukrainian writers.

Every year a number of important awards gets traditionally presented at Book World Prague. This included the 11th annual award ceremony of the Jiří Theiner Prize, which, in the past, was presented for significant dissemination and promotion of Czech literature abroad. This year the designation has changed and the Jiří Theiner Prize will newly be awarded to personalities who raise their voice against censorship and in the fight for democracy. **Svetlana Alexievich**, the Belarusian writer and investigative journalist writing in Russian, and also the first Belarusian to be awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature, was to become the first laureate of this prestigious award under this changed status. Since she was unable to attend, she had dedicated it to the writers of Ukraine. *“I would like to state that the Ukrainian delegation of writers, representing this brave country, which has our admiration and in whose victory we all believe, fully deserves the Jiří Theiner Award. Today, Ukraine stands at the forefront of fight against EVIL. And it must know that we stand by its side,”* she wrote in her statement.

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Book World Prague has also experienced a significant development in terms of the book fair's international dimension, having played host to a great number of writers not just from Italy. Elena Pasoli, the Bologna book fair director, said: *"I have just spent two wonderful days here. The book fair is great, with a large number of international exhibitors, extensive professional programme and many visitors."* Besides bringing the world of books closer to the general and professional public, it is also our aim to support the love of literature in the youngest readers – an extensive accompanying programme was prepared for them in the pavilion **Growing with the Book**. Large publishing houses were represented alongside many small publishers, and the display located in the open air attracted great numbers of visitors.

Book World Prague 2022 in numbers:

Book fair:

Number of exhibitors: 416

Number of displays: 156

Exhibition area: 3046 m²

Literary festival:

Number of participants: 746

Number of programmes: 465

Number of exhibitions: 9

Total number of visitors: 54 000

Participating countries: Argentina, Austria, Belgium, Bulgaria, Canada, Czech Republic, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Hongkong, Hungary, Iceland, Israel, Italy, Latvia, Luxembourg, Netherlands, Nigeria, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Serbia, Slovakia, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, Taiwan, Ukraine, United Kingdom, USA.

A total of 33 countries were presented at the book fair and the festival.

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