

# LJUBLJANA: MESTO/CITY OF/LITERA- TURE...



**4 commitments** Ljubljana aims to fulfil by designation as a UNESCO City of Literature:

- The City of Ljubljana will continuously aim to ensure the development of literature and create spiritual and material conditions for Ljubljana to become a safe haven for writers from all around the world.

- The City of Ljubljana will continue to support thousands of literary and cultural events which will remain accessible to everyone.

- The City of Ljubljana will continue to devote attention to promoting reading and accessibility of books for all age groups as well as to support the infrastructure and promote reading among the youth.

- The City of Ljubljana will encourage creating new employment opportunities for young citizens in the field of book industry and infrastructure, and engage immigrants, foreigners and everyone else who chose Ljubljana as their new home in the activities around the city.

## MANIFESTO FOR LJUBLJANA – CITY OF LITERATURE DESIGNATED UNESCO CREATIVE CITY IN 2015

### 1. History:

In 2014-15 Ljubljana celebrated the 2000th anniversary of its antique predecessor Aemona, which was integrated into the literary movements of the time and was already linked to the legend of Argonauts in the antique sources – in the Old Christian era Saint Jerome was already sending letters to Ljubljana. Almost a millennium has passed since 14 April 1112 when medieval Ljubljana was first mentioned in writing and since then it has become the centre of administrative and cultural life of this area. The first boom in literature took place in the middle of the 16th century when Primož Trubar worked in Ljubljana. He was the father of the Slovenian literary language and an internationally important religious reformer who together with some other Slovenian Protestant writers gave Slovenians their first printed books. During the Baroque period, Ljubljana established its first public library under the auspices of the Academia operosorum. At the same time, polymath Johann Weikhard von Valvasor worked here and dedicated a special part of his main literary work, an extensive monograph *The Glory of the Duchy of Carniola*, to Ljubljana, the capital of Carniola. A rebirth of Slovenian literature happened during the Enlightenment era with Sigmund Zois and his circle of like-minded intellectuals.



Sculpture honouring Slovene protestant writers and printers / photo: Miha Fras

After World War II, Ljubljana became the capital of the Republic of Slovenia with its own parliament and government but within the federally organised Republic of Yugoslavia. Since 1991, Ljubljana has been the capital of the independent Republic of Slovenia. In 1952 at a literary congress held in the socialist Yugoslavia, a declarative break from the socialist realism was set down which opened the doors to the modernism and contemporary literary ventures. Publishing houses were also very active at the time, earning



Monument of France Prešeren, the biggest Slovene poet / photo: Gregor Murn

special international recognition for publishing exceptional literature and illustrations for children and the youth. The oldest still operating publishing house in Ljubljana is the Slovenska Matica which celebrated its 150th anniversary this year and is still an important cultural and scientific association. Books still bear a special symbolic meaning in Ljubljana and that is why in 2010 the city was deservedly named the UNESCO's World Book Capital. Ljubljana is the centre of literary movement having numerous publishing houses and boasting a vibrant literary activity, especially in the field of poetry. Some of the prominent names in world literature live and work in Ljubljana, among which philosopher Slavoj Žižek, poet Tomaž Salamun, novelist Drago Jančar...

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In the beginning of the 19th century Ljubljana was the capital of Napoleon's Illyrian Provinces. The era had a great impact on writer Charles Nodier who lived here at the time. In the 30s and 40s of the 19th century Romantic poet France Prešeren lived here and composed some of his most accomplished work which rose Slovenian literature (written in Slovenian language) to the European level. Since then, Ljubljana has been the ultimate Slovenian literary centre which boasts a vibrant and extremely productive literary life. Slovenian literature reaches an important peak with Slovenian modernist poets: Ivan Cankar, Oton Župančič, Dragotin Kette and Josip Murn. In the 20s of the previous century, Srečko Kosovel created his eruptive opus in Ljubljana which linked Slovenian literature to the most contemporary avant-garde movements in the world. During World War II, Ljubljana was the centre of the resistance movement which caused an immense illegal literary movement but also published literary work in times of great distress.



National and University Library / photo: B. Jakše & S. Jeršič

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### 2. Festivals:

Apart from the music, theatre and film festivals, Ljubljana also hosts the largest number of literary festivals in Slovenia: Fabula, Vilenica, Sanje Festival, closing of the annual international meeting of writers PEN and Mlade Rime (Young Rhymes) Festival which brings together young and unclaimed writers.

### 3. Cultural centre:

Ljubljana prides an honourable opera and theatre tradition since the 17th century. At the same time, the Jesuits Collegium marked the beginning of higher education in this area, while the Slovenian Philharmonic dates back to 1701. The biggest cultural establishment in Ljubljana at the moment is the Cankarjev Dom Culture and Congress Centre where a varied programme of cultural events takes place each year.

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The Ljubljana Castle on top of the Castle Hill also hosts many cultural events throughout the year and especially during the summer. Apart from the rich cultural infrastructure, new cultural quarters are becoming more and more prominent: Križevniška Ulica, Novi Trg, Park Tabor, Šiška Cultural Quarter. In the very centre of Ljubljana, next to the Plečnik's Triple Bridge stands the famous monument dedicated to the poet France Prešeren, which is symbolically one of the most important spots in the city as well as one of the most popular meeting points.

### 4. Ljubljana theatres, galleries and museums:

Apart from the national theatre, there are 14 other theatres which are active under the auspices of Ljubljana and annually organise over 100 premieres for all age groups, as well as other theatres which bring home awards from numerous international festivals and contribute to the publishing of Slovenian dramatics, essay writing and theory of theatre. The Ljubljana Puppet Theatre is the biggest standout with its second biggest puppet stage in Europe. The theatre is intended for children and is also home of the first bookshop for children in Ljubljana.



City Museum of Ljubljana / photo: Andrej Peunik / MGML

Apart from the key national institutions with a strong tradition (National Gallery, Moderna Galerija, National Museum etc.) Ljubljana has numerous exhibition centres which annually host outstanding Slovenian and international exhibitions and museums where impressive collections of ancient and modern history of the city with a rich archaeological

heritage dating back as far as the pre-Emona times are on display. In the recent years, a new museum quarter was built and is home to the Museum of Contemporary Art and the new Ethnographic Museum.

### 4. Libraries:

The National and University Library in Ljubljana was designed by architect Jože Plečnik and is one of the most beautiful palaces in the city. The library holds an extensive collection of medieval codices, incunabula and literary heritage of some of the most important Slovenian poets and writers. The Ljubljana City Library with its 24 independent units is the most important cornerstone of literature and has the biggest membership of all the libraries in Slovenia.



Ljubljana City Library (Šiška Library) / photo: Domen Grögl

Apart from the Reading City (Mestobere) project and the Mega Quiz intended for primary school pupils, the library units all around Ljubljana celebrate the Slovenian cultural holiday (8 February, marking the anniversary of the death of France Prešeren), Poetry Day (21 March), World Book Day (23 April), Day of Slovenian General Libraries (20 November) and the Culture Celebration Day (3 December, marking the anniversary of the birth of France Prešeren) when all the cultural institutions are admission free. In 2010 when Ljubljana was the World Book Capital, the city gained a new house of literature named after Primož Trubar and in 2015 Vodnik house where special events dedicated to the book, literature and journalism take place every day of the year.

**5. Numerous events dedicated to the book:** Each Autumn, the Slovenian Book Fair traditionally takes place in Ljubljana. On 23 April each spring, the date marking the World Book Day, publishers, writers and readers meet. Writers and readers are all grateful for the varied literary programme and abundant book supply during the Book Week. On midsummer's eve (23 June) a traditional



Library Under the Tree Tops at Ljubljana Castle / photo: Vita Kontić

bonfire is set up on the Rožnik Hill where Ivan Cankar spent a significant part of his life. Each year, the bonfire is lit up by the Kresnik Award winner (the most prominent award for novelists). The event is organised by the national newspaper house Delo. In total, 12,000 literary events take place in Ljubljana annually and almost all of them are free of charge.

### 6. Publishers and booksellers:

The beginnings of publishing date back to the 16th century, while it flourished the most in the 18th century. The oldest publishing houses still in operation are the Mohorjeva Družba and Slovenska Matica. Publishers and booksellers in Ljubljana publish and sell two thirds of the entire Slovenian book production and organise up to 50 various literary events a week hosting literary guests from Slovenia and abroad.

### 7. Education, openness and concern for the youth:

Ljubljana has the greatest concentration of primary and secondary schools in the country. The University of Ljubljana is the oldest Slovenian University and has the largest number of enrolled students. Ljubljana is also home to the Slovenian Academy of Sciences and Arts. In the framework of the Ljubljana Reads project, the City of Ljubljana gives out books written by Slovenian authors to all three-year-olds, to all six-year-olds, pupils of the first year, and to all ten-year-olds, the pupils of the fourth year of elementary schools, thus aiming to promote reading and book ownership.

### 8. Literary societies and organisations:

284 associations, institutions and organisations promoting books and reading and uniting writers have their seat in Ljubljana: Slovenian Book Agency, Slovene Publishers Society, Chamber of Publishing and Bookselling, Slovenian Reading Association, Slovenian Library Association, Reading Badge Association, Literatura Association, Apokalipsa, Beletrina - Academic Press, Slovene Writers' Association, Slovene PEN Centre, Slovenian Association of Literary Translators.

### 9. Crossroads of international action in the field of book:

Many great and internationally acclaimed writers regularly visited Ljubljana even before it became the World Book Capital in 2010 (Nicodemus Frischlin, Carlo Goldoni, Henry W. Longfellow, Charles Nodier, Hans Ch. Andersen, Paul Eluard, Roland Barthes, Salvatore Quasimodo, Miroslav Krleža, Ivo Andrić, Georg Tabori, Pablo Neruda, Herta

Müller, Tomas Tranströmer, Jonathan Franzen, Irvine Welsh, Michel Houellebecq, Georgi Gospodinov, Janice Galloway etc.). Numerous writers took part in the PEN international congress and Literary festival Fabula.

### 10. Diverse amateur cultural and association life:

248 amateur cultural associations work in the area of the City of Ljubljana, among which numerous theatre groups, choirs, folklore groups, book clubs, educational clubs for seniors etc.

### 11. Public projects for integrating immigrants from different cultural environments:

As the capital of the Republic of Slovenia, Ljubljana accepts everyone who desires to help create a better life in mutual understanding, among them numerous international partner associations such as SILA and French, Italian, German, Austrian and Russian cultural centres. Foreign embassies and consulates are also located in Ljubljana and contribute to the vibrant cultural and literary life in Ljubljana. Our city is also a member of the International Cities of Refuge Network (ICORN) and gives refuge to persecuted writers from around the world who were exiled from their own countries and found a safe new home for writing and creating a new social network here in Ljubljana.



Literary festival Fabula 2016

