



A New Concept: The Blue Sofa and the Frankfurt Book Fair 2020. German and International Authors Take Their Seats Live and Digitally

Berlin, September 23, 2020: Culture needs strong partners, especially in times of the coronavirus. The Blue Sofa, the authors' forum hosted by Bertelsmann, ZDF, Deutschlandfunk Kultur, and 3sat, will be there with new, tailor-made concepts when the Frankfurt Book Fair celebrates the world of books in October 2020. This time, the Blue Sofa, a fixture at Germany's major book fairs for 20 years now, will be happening digitally in Berlin and live in Frankfurt/Main.

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The Blue Sofa digitally from Berlin

- 67 international authors will take a seat on the Blue Sofa, which this time will be set up at Bertelsmann's premises at Unter den Linden 1 in Berlin. Timed to coincide with the Book Fair, they will present their latest books in conversation with presenters from ZDF, Deutschlandfunk Kultur, and 3sat. All the talks can be watched live from October 14 to 16; the link can be found at das-blaue-sofa.de.
- Following their conversations on the sofa, more than 40 authors will answer questions submitted online by fans. The answers will be broadcast as a live video on Bertelsmann's Facebook channel.
- In recent weeks, Bertelsmann has also surveyed around 200 well-known authors from Germany, other European countries, and Canada about their experiences during the coronavirus pandemic and their expectations for the Frankfurt Book Fair. Their answers will be published on social media before and during the fair. In this way, the social media campaign under the hashtag #DasBlaueSofaDigital gives a digital forum to many authors who couldn't take a seat on the Blue Sofa this time.

Live conversations in front of an audience in Frankfurt

- The Open Books reading festival starts with a literature gala at the German National Library (October 13) and two "crime-thriller speed dating" evenings at the *Ratskeller im Römer* (October 14 and 15). To guard against infection, only a limited number of spectators will be admitted to each of these events.

After the Leipzig Book Fair was canceled in spring, the Blue Sofa partners agreed that the book industry needs solidarity and active support to keep bringing books to the largest possible reading public, even in times of physical distancing. They designed a hybrid concept that provides an innovative and scalable stage for many authors and their new books. And because the Blue Sofa can't have a live audience at the fair, this time the digital formats make it possible for all book lovers to follow what's new on the book market, wherever they are. In the process, the diversity of authors and topics and the specific "Sofa sound" that has evolved over twenty years will be preserved.



How do authors live and work during the coronavirus pandemic?

In the run-up to the Frankfurt Book Fair, Bertelsmann asked around 200 renowned authors and newcomers to this year's Book Fair about living and working during the coronavirus pandemic and what they personally are hoping for from their readers. Of course, there was also a request to say a few words about their new books.

Almost all the authors said that they already miss the usual hustle and bustle of the Book Fair. ("A fixed ritual in my life, which I have delighted in celebrating for twenty years, has been set to asceticism this year." Ijoma Mangold). Many, however, welcomed the new digital opportunities ("For me, this Book Fair meant that I had to find a new form of expression to present my book. Instead of the analog 'Hello, air kiss here, air kiss here,' I discovered digital and among other things made a video about my new book." Freya Klier). And while Amartya Sen, winner of the Nobel Prize in Economics and this year's Peace Prize, emphasized the value of community at the fair, Hamburg's Senator for Culture, Carsten Brosda, noted: "This year in particular, the Frankfurt Book Fair is a beacon for the tenaciousness of culture. Its defiant 'now more than ever' attitude is necessary at a time when we need artistic and cultural interventions to conduct the debates that lie ahead." When asked about lessons learned from the coronavirus pandemic, many respondents said they had learned to appreciate the enforced slowdown and refocusing on essentials.

An immensely readable compilation of the surveyed authors' answers can be found on the Instagram channel [das_blaue_sofa_digital](#), and on the authors' pages of [das-blaue-sofa.de](#).

Big Topics, Names, and new Books on the Digital Blue Sofa

At the heart of this year's concept are the conversations on the Blue Sofa, which will revolve around new books. These conversations will be live streamed by ZDF; the link can be found at [das-blaue-sofa.de](#). Excerpts from the sofa talks will be made freely available the following day on the author pages of [das-blaue-sofa.de](#).

On three days during the fair (Wednesday, October 14, to Friday, October 16), 67 authors from all over Europe are expected at Bertelsmann Unter den Linden 1, Berlin, including Jean-Philippe Toussaint (Belgium), François Lelord (France), Geert Mak (Netherlands), Alex Beer and Sandra Gugić (Austria), Szczepan Twardoch (Poland), Jens Steiner and Zora del Buono (Switzerland), JJ Bola (U.K.) and from Germany Olga Grjasnowa, Zsuzsa Bánk, Ulrike Draesner, Michael Kleeberg, Bernhard Schlink, Andreas Schäfer, Kristof Magnusson, Nell Zink, and Volker Weidemann.

They will meet celebrity authors like Christian Berkel, Campino, Katja Ebstein, Lars Eidinger, Wladimir Klitschko, and Jan Weiler as well as prominent personalities like Norbert Lammert, Carsten Brosda, and Gerd Müller. Clemens Fuest, Eva von Redecker, Peter Schäfer, Hedwig

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Richter, Wolfram Eilenberger, Richard David Precht, Wolfgang Benz, and Düzen Tekkal, among others, will discuss their nonfiction books. The winner of the German Book Prize and three Swiss Book Prize finalists will also take a seat on the Blue Sofa. This year, the Aspekte Literature Prize will again be awarded live on the Blue Sofa, and a conversation with the Peace Prize winner Amartya Sen recorded in Frankfurt will be live-streamed.

In the evening, the talk show format “Die Blaue Stunde” (The Blue Hour) returns: Early Wednesday evening in Berlin, Klaus Brinkbäumer, Henning Hoff, and Torben Lütjen will discuss “Trump’s America.” On Thursday evening, Susan Arndt, Ijoma Mangold, and Ilona Hartmann will discuss whether and how debates on sexism, gender, and “cancel culture” influence literature. Afterwards Ahmad Mansour, Andreas Kossert, and Elsa Koester will tackle the topic of “being foreign.” The Blue Sofa events in Berlin conclude on Friday with the popular “crime-thriller speed dating” – this time the participants are Alex Beer, Tilman Spreckelsen, and Andreas Winkelmann.

After their conversations on the Blue Sofa, many authors take the time to answer questions from readers on the Facebook channel [facebook.com/Bertelsmann](https://www.facebook.com/Bertelsmann). Questions can either be asked directly during the Facebook live video session or in advance via the Facebook page.

The Blue Sofa Live at Open Books in Frankfurt

To support Frankfurt’s Open Books reading festival, the Blue Sofa has added three public live-audience events to its activities in the Book Fair city. First up is the traditional literature gala curtain-raiser for Open Books on the evening of October 13, 2020, including the first public appearance of this year’s German Book Prize winner. In addition, Wladimir Klitschko, Tanja Kiel, Eva von Redecker, and Kristof Magnusson are expected on the iconic lounge.

On October 14 and 15, crime novelists Jan Beck, Lucas Fassnacht, Tilman Spreckelsen, and Andreas Winkelmann, as well as Zoë Beck, Ursula Poznanski, Oliver Hilmes and Klaus-Peter Wolf will meet for the “crime-thriller speed dating” session on the Blue Sofa.

(October 13, 2020 | German National Library; October 14 and 15, 2020 | *Ratskeller im Römer* | all from 8 p.m.)

For Bertelsmann, this year’s activities for the Blue Sofa form part of a digital initiative in the cultural sector. Under the heading “Culture@Bertelsmann goes digital,” a wide range of streaming offerings, live broadcasts, and interactive projects relating to music and film have already been carried out. Now literature is following suit with the digital Blue Sofa. In August, Bertelsmann and its film production subsidiary UFA presented their UFA Film Nights silent film festival digitally for the first time.

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The Blue Sofa on the Internet, TV, and Radio

- On das-blaue-sofa.de, literature enthusiasts will find a livestream and other activities offered to coincide with the Book Fair
- On social media under #DasBlaueSofaDigital
- On October 17, from 12:05 a.m. to 7 a.m. a wide selection of conversations from the Blue Sofa can be heard on Deutschlandfunk Kultur
- 3sat will broadcast a 90-minute summary of highlights from the conversations on the Blue Sofa on October 18 at 11 a.m.
- On October 18, ZDF will show “The Long Night of the Blue Sofa” for three hours starting at 1:05 a.m.

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About Bertelsmann

Bertelsmann is a media, services, and education company that operates in about 50 countries worldwide. It includes the broadcaster RTL Group, the trade book publisher Penguin Random House, the magazine publisher Gruner + Jahr, the music company BMG, the service provider Arvato, the Bertelsmann Printing Group, the Bertelsmann Education Group, and Bertelsmann Investments, an international network of funds. The company has 126,000 employees and generated revenues of €18.0 billion in the 2019 financial year. Bertelsmann stands for creativity and entrepreneurship. This combination promotes first-class media content and innovative service solutions that inspire customers around the world. Bertelsmann aspires to achieve climate neutrality by 2030.

About the Blue Sofa

The Blue Sofa is the authors' forum jointly hosted by Bertelsmann, ZDF, Deutschlandfunk Kultur, and 3sat. It has become an institution at the book fairs in Frankfurt and Leipzig. The Blue Sofa Berlin celebrated its premiere in 2005. In 2011, Frankfurt's Open Books reading festival opened with a Blue Sofa authors' gala for the first time. Since the Leipzig Book Fair in 2000, the Blue Sofa has provided the setting for nearly 3,000 conversations with authors including Nobel Prize laureates Svetlana Alexievich, Mikhail Gorbachev, Günter Grass, Herta Müller, Christiane Nüsslein-Volhard, Orhan Pamuk, Joseph Stiglitz, Olga Tokarczuk, Mario Vargas Llosa, and Mo Yan.