RESEARCH FOR CULT COMMITTEE - THE NEW ROLE OF PUBLIC LIBRARIES IN LOCAL COMMUNITIES

STUDY
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THE NEW ROLE OF PUBLIC LIBRARIES IN
LOCAL COMMUNITIES

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Abstract

Especially in the last years, public libraries (and local authorities) have to meet new challenges caused by ongoing social, technical and economic changes. This briefing paper provides a short analysis of the impact that public libraries can have on the intellectual and cultural development of citizens with a particular focus on their vital role in providing an open public space for learning, culture and social communication. Following from the analysis, respective recommendations for policy action at EU level are outlined.
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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

**ALA** American Library Association

**ALIA** Australian Library and Information Association

**BID** Bibliothek und Information Deutschland

**CILIP** Chartered Institute of Library and Information Professionals

**CLIR** Council on Library and Information Resources

**CORDIS** Community Research and Development Information Service

**CyMAL** Museums, Archives and Libraries Wales

**dbv** Deutscher Bibliotheksverband

**EBLIDA** European Bureau of Library, Information and Documentation Associations

**ELINET** European Literacy Policy Network

**IFLA** International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions

**IMLS** Institute of Museum and Library Services

**IREX** International Research & Exchanges Board

**LIC** Library and Information Commission

**NAPLE** National Authorities on Public Libraries in Europe

**OCLC** Online Computer Library Center

**PLA** Public Library Association

**PPS** Project for Public Spaces

**PubliCA** Public Libraries Concerted Action

**SLIC** Scottish Library and Information Council

**ULC** Urban Libraries Council

**UNESCO** United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Subject Matter / Definition of the problem
This briefing note provides an analysis and evaluation of the current and prospective roles of public libraries in their local communities, their services to the public and to their contracting authorities. It is commissioned by the European Parliament's Committee on Culture and Education (CULT) in preparation for a workshop on "The new role of public libraries" to be held in Brussels on 20 June 2016.

The report aims to examine the role and function of the public library for local communities in the 21st century. It provides a description of the general challenges, risks and opportunities for public libraries to serve their respective communities and to meet the actual and future challenges. The paper also contains a presentation and analysis of international best practice examples from public libraries who have established their new and innovative roles in their local communities and thus ensuring their viability for the citizens. Based on the findings the paper gives conclusions to actual developments and brings forward recommendations for policy actions at EU level.

Methods of analysis
The methods applied in this paper are mainly desk research and personal professional experience of the author as public librarian and functionary in library associations at national and international level. The desk research included academic and research publications as well as policy documents of different origins and advocacy related papers from library organizations. Relevant additional information was also obtained from international colleagues of the field and from library associations. The briefing paper covers evidence from EU Member States as well as from other regions of the world where a development of public libraries is taking place which is worth mentioning.

Key findings summarized
Public libraries are important gateways to knowledge and inclusion
The briefing paper draws attention to the fact that the 65,000 public libraries in the EU have about 100 million customers which is about a fifth of the whole population in the European Union. In many countries libraries – and mainly public libraries – are the most frequented cultural institutions. Public libraries provide a wide range of services which cannot easily be afforded and organized by each citizen on his or her own. The public libraries’ role and function as gateways to knowledge and inclusion in local communities is quite unique and demanding as well. Therefore public libraries need the support of politics and administration in order to stay up-to-date and attractive for the citizens.

Libraries as central cultural and public spaces
Further, libraries play an increasingly important role as cultural spaces offering the citizens an open, non-authoritarian and non-commercial public cultural space in the community or in the neighbourhood. This service is becoming more and more valuable in increasingly privatised urban environments and also in rural areas. They are developing from a place for lending out material as primary objective into a place for staying in and use the offers and services on the spot: For many people they are becoming a “second living room” and a location for self-directed learning as well. With their programmes public libraries offer insights in cultural developments and events which are more than
just the traditional public reading by an author. Their network is well developed and they partner with other institutions in order to increase their effectiveness and efficiency.

**Economic Value of public library services**

As public libraries are questioned for their efficiency there are some interesting approaches to document also the economic impact of public libraries. The briefing paper presents an example from Canada in this context.

**Libraries as anchors for the high-street**

As public libraries are highly attractive for the population of all ages and from all social groups they generally become a focal point of the community. This fact has been discovered by urban planners; they have recognized the value of a public library as a highly frequented cultural institution in order to revitalize an urban redevelopment area and to bring life into deserted parts of the city. Their concepts sometimes are based on the fact that the visitors of a public library very often become walk-in customers of shops, restaurants and cafés in the neighbourhood. Sometimes public libraries even initiate the settlement of commercial enterprises in their surroundings. A recent example: Birmingham Public Library for instance with its 31,000 square meter premises since 2013 is one of the biggest public libraries in Europe. The old library had become unattractive and was rather poorly frequented; with the new library the number of visitors increased by 250 percent: instead of 4,000 daily visitors the library now counts 10,000 visitors per day. The business environment profits from these numbers considerably.

Public libraries as well recognized and open public service institutions sometimes can be also deployed to upgrade underprivileged urban districts like inoperative harbour areas or abandoned industrial districts.

**Valuable initiatives: “Public Libraries 2020”**

In regard to the initiative “Public Libraries 2020” a new approach towards public libraries has been noticed as the initiative is a concerted action at European level. The initiative is most helpful for the communication of the public libraries’ significant impact on individuals and communities towards political decision-makers.

**Recommendations**

Based on the key findings and on the demands resulting from these key findings the briefing paper contains the following recommendations towards the European Union as possible support actions for the public libraries in all Member States:

- Recognizing public libraries as key actors in education, digitization and integration into policy strategies at national and EU level
- Creating a fund or programme for the innovation in public libraries and establish a sustainable European network of public libraries
- Creating a European (Public) Library Label, or (Public) Library of Europe
- Supporting data collection on European Public Libraries
1. CHALLENGES, RISKS AND OPPORTUNITIES IN REGARD TO THE PUBLIC LIBRARIES OF THE 21ST CENTURY

Local authorities face enormous challenges regarding current social, technical and economic change in order to make their communities fit for future developments. These challenges mainly rise from the increase of economic and social inequalities, from the transformation of workplaces and jobs, from the emerging digital society, from demographic change, from climate change and much more. At the same time there is a growing need for social security, for a sustainable environment and for social behaviour based on the principles of human rights. Europe’s citizens must be prepared for this and should be provided with the tools and strategies necessary to cope with these changes. One of the basic tasks in this regard is to establish new effective policies for education and training of the population as this is crucial for future success in the knowledge society with its changing demands and conditions. Local politicians and local administration must find new partners and actors who can give answers and offer support for this complex task.

In this context the 65,000 public libraries in the EU which are visited by their 100 million customers every year (Quick et al. 2013: 3) also face enormous challenges as their role and services in the digital society are questioned as never before. The traditional perception of public libraries has been associated with books and culture exclusively. With the advent of the internet and the digital media, public libraries as institutions are quite often described as out-dated and not relevant anymore. Additionally, in the past years most libraries had to undergo budget cuts – especially in rural areas – due to the widespread tight budgetary constraints in the public sector. They experienced a decrease in the number of users and loans and faced the shift to the growing demand of the public for digital services. The development of the digital society has changed public libraries and the profession of librarians considerably. Today their task is much broader than to merely store information, they have become one-stop-shops for informal learning and knowledge. And they have to continuously develop new services exploiting the possibilities of digital interactivity. With their wide range of services to all citizens, public libraries offer chances for innovation and for inclusion and integration as well.

The public and societal value of cultural institutions like theatres, libraries (Huysmans et al. 2013: 168–177) and museums is often regarded as subordinate, although it is becoming more and more clear that especially they can essentially contribute to the stabilization of personal and local identity and to community building.

Public libraries provide the basis for the participation of all citizens in equal and innovative educational opportunities. Initiatives such as „Public Libraries 2020“ of the Reading & Writing Foundation are crucial for the political perception and development of public libraries: they aim to raise awareness about the importance of public libraries as modern learning hubs close to citizens and (potential) learners. The initiative provides broad information about how public libraries have been expanding their role in local communities enormously over the last decades – many of them now help people develop their digital skills, advance or acquire other skills (such as literacy) through various lifelong learning opportunities and offer a neutral and trusted space for people to create, learn, and connect. The initiative is most helpful for the communication of the public libraries’ significant impact on individuals and communities towards political decision-makers through concerted and Europe-wide actions (Public Libraries 2020 n. d.).
In the long-term, the European Union and its Member States must find the most efficient and effective ways of addressing the cultural and educational needs of all their citizens.

This briefing paper aims to address and to highlight the positive socio-economic impacts and the main political purposes that libraries as key community stakeholders can provide.
2. PUBLIC LIBRARIES AS LOCAL GATEWAYS TO KNOWLEDGE AND INCLUSION IN COMMUNITIES

Reading and writing alone are no longer sufficient competences in our increasingly hyper-connected information society and digital economy. Neither is it sufficient to provide computers, smartphones and other technical devices alone in order to solve the risk of an upcoming digital divide of the population. New competencies and literacies have to be developed, especially information literacy, media literacy, computer literacy and cultural literacy.

One of the basic tasks in this regard is to establish new effective policies for education and training of the population, as this is crucial for future success in the knowledge society with its changing demands and conditions. Non-formal and informal learning are an important part of lifelong learning, helping people of all ages to develop their skills and knowledge in a tailed way. Only libraries can accompany people through their entire educational biography. The concepts of the activities for the promotion of reading and for the communication of media literacy are frequently re-designed to offer successive library services appropriate to the learning age in order to continuously raise the skill level.

Public libraries are a unique “third space” after home and school or work, where children and adults alike can make use of the physical and digital resources to improve literacy and other basic skills, receive informal consultations from a trained librarian or participate in structured (and often certificated) non-formal courses organised either by the library or by a third party (Norwegian Ministry of Culture 2009). They are a lifeline to people for whom there are barriers to formal education (for example through time constraints or the stigma attached to formally updating one’s skills as an adult learner). Only 8.9% of the European population participates in activities for lifelong learning which is significantly lower than the target of 15 percent; but 24 million Europeans make use of the non-formal learning opportunities in public libraries (Quick S. et al. 2013: 34). The 2015 Joint Report on the Implementation of the Strategic Framework for European cooperation in Education and Training (ET2020), adopted by the Education, Youth, Culture and Sport Council in November 2015, highlighted the role of public libraries as open learning environments in digital upskilling, developing innovative pedagogies and promoting social inclusion (European Commission 2015: 4). In order to continue providing this vital service, the EU’s public libraries must be empowered and recognized as non-formal and informal education centers, especially in a time of tight public service budgets in a majority of member states. EU level policies have a role to play here – for example, in this year’s New Skills Agenda.

Public libraries as key community stakeholders represent an effective partner network to successfully provide support in meeting the demands of education and of skills’ development in the digital age. They can essentially contribute to the social and economic development under the Europe 2020 strategy for smart, sustainable and inclusive growth.

In many countries libraries – and mainly public libraries – are the most frequented cultural institutions, sometimes having more visits than the national football leagues.¹

¹ In 2014 there were 118 Mio visits to German public libraries and about 13 Mio. visits to the German Bundesliga in the season 2013/14 (German Library Statistics 2014).
Although digital communication is becoming the predominant avenue of personal interaction, people still need opportunities for direct personal exchange and physical relationships – a need that social media cannot necessarily substitute. Of course, there are many other services of public libraries needed in a knowledge society like offering a wide range of services for learning and studying, for creation and inspiration (Danish Agency for Libraries and Media 2010). Schoolchildren and pupils use public libraries for individual study and for shared project work. They are attracted by a good mix of media, IT-services like Wi-Fi, some innovative technical devices like e.g. 3D-printers, by trained knowledgeable professional staff and by the positive impact of an attractive and welcoming space. Also adults use the public library for self-directed studying and informal learning using its material either on the spot, borrowing it for usage at home or using it remotely accessing the library’s online services.

While public libraries continue to act as hubs for culture and social inclusion, they are also acting as increasingly useful resources for digital skills and literacy. Many citizens use them as their access points to a wide range of digital information and digitally distributed cultural expressions. Many people are still not familiar with using computers and digital devices – European Commission data shows that 32% of the EU workforce has no or low digital skills – and rely on the help of the librarians who themselves have to improve continuously their skills and knowledge of the digital tools and devices. In 2013 4.6 million Europeans accessed the internet for the first time at a public library (Quick et al. 2013: 67).

Against this background public libraries can also effectively contribute to urban development in creating access points to public services and being a manifest positive example of spending tax payers’ money to the direct benefit of the citizens (The Reading & Writing Foundation n.d.: 1).2 As e-democracy develops, citizens are increasingly required to go online to perform basic societal functions – such as online banking, registration for government services and local administration. Public libraries also are a significant resource for the unemployed; in 2013, internet access in public libraries allowed 250,000 Europeans to get a job (Quick et al. 2013: 41). Public libraries offer not only the physical resources for citizens to integrate, but also the guidance of a trained librarian to guide them in the process – a critical service when 22% of the European population has never used the internet.

The development of the digital society has changed public libraries and the profession of librarians considerably. Today their task is much broader than to merely store information, they have become one-stop-shops for informal learning and knowledge. And they have to continuously develop new services exploiting the possibilities of digital interactivity. With their wide range of services to all citizens, public libraries offer chances for innovation and for integration as well.

Libraries are a low-threshold public service that everybody can use without any need for legitimation and authorization. In many countries users get a library card without any payment, which is sometimes even granted by a national law. In those local communities where the patrons have to pay a fee for the library card, these fees are either relatively

2 “In the context of our increasingly hyper-connected information society and economy, today’s public libraries provide ICT-enabled, outcome-focused and staff-assisted learning environments which offer a digital lifeline to disadvantaged groups and communities. They offer free access to non-formal and informal lifelong learning opportunities, basic digital skills and online open education resources in non-threatening and welcoming community spaces”

[12]
low or there are reductions in place for socially deprived people. In any case, the visit of
the library itself is free everywhere.

With regard to current challenges arising from the arrival of hundreds of thousands of
refugees in Europe, these specific qualities of public libraries can assist the integration of
the refugees in their new communities, allowing them free access to self-determined
language learning, information and education. The effective and efficient integration of
migrants or refugees is one of the main targets in many public libraries around the world
(IFLA Public Libraries Section 2015).

"Ultimately, public libraries represent a pre-existing, pan-European network of
community-based staff, buildings, information resources and digital infrastructure which
maximize positive outcomes in the fields of lifelong learning, social inclusion, digital
inclusion and successful pathways to employability and employment“ (The Reading &
Writing Foundation n.d.: 1-2).

The advent of the digital shift has also given libraries the opportunity to offer possibilities
to support learning, discovery and research in this knowledge intensive society.

SUCCESS STORY
Public library Dokk1 in Arhus/Denmark
(City of Aarhus 2015)
An illustrating example for the shift of the role and the services of public libraries under
the conditions of the media and knowledge society is Arhus in Denmark. In 2015 the
opening of the biggest public library in Scandinavia, Dokk1, took place. Here everything
revolves around communication, service, a modern event programme and social
integration. The administrative communication in Denmark is completely digitized, so
that the library provides contact persons for respective information and training. Even
the public health department promotes workshops there. Dokk1 is defined as community
centre. There is a complement of modern information and communication offers and
library services. For the purpose of integration of the ethnic minorities the library
provides consulting services for food and health, legal advice, support of job search as
well as specific training courses.

SUCCESS STORY
Cuyahoga County Public Library in Ohio State/US
Another best practice example represents Cuyahoga County Public Library in the US
State of Ohio with the following commitment: "we are committed to our mission of
being at the centre of community life by creating an environment where reading, lifelong
learning and civic engagement thrive. Our vision is to be the most convenient public
library in the nation, recognized for exceptional customer service. Everything we do is in
support of improving the quality of life in Cuyahoga County, and we strive to deliver on
three key objectives:
1. Fostering a community of enthusiastic readers.
2. Strengthening the economic vitality of our region.
3. Being recognized as an essential community asset and innovative library industry
leader." (http://www.cuyahogalibrary.org/About-Us/Our-Organization.aspx)
SUCCESS STORY
Queens Public Library in New York/US
This library has a long tradition in supporting the social integration of newcomers and refugees: “...Queens Library’s New Americans Program (NAP) was established in 1977 to provide special services to the area’s many new immigrants. NAP organizes workshops (in the languages spoken by Queens’ immigrant communities) that assist new immigrants in adapting to life in America and programs that celebrate the culture of the diverse ethnic groups in Queens. The program works closely with the Adult Learner Program, the Job and Business Academy, and community libraries to assess local needs and link residents with existing system-wide library and social services to enhance civic engagement...” (http://www.queenslibrary.org/services/new-americans-program)

SUCCESS STORY
Cleveland Public Library/US
The staff of the Cleveland Public Library defines themselves as “community deficit fighter”, fighters against the failure of the community and the inadequacy in public service provision in order to create a culture of lifelong-learning. Besides books, movies, computer games and access to a large range of digital tools, the libraries of Cleveland provide for example also healthy meals (about 20.000 in 2011). Parts of the city are regarded as "food deserts" where children and adults are not provided with enough fresh food. The library has become the central place for primary counselling as 36% of the children grow up in poverty and in some parts of the city more than 50% of the adults are jobless (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2jGmMbTcEGM).

Economic Value of public library services: Today public services are evaluated by their local authorities in regard to costs, performance, outcome and impact as well. More and more public libraries have to justify their public and economic value. There are some prominent examples of how the return-on-investment (ROI) of public libraries is calculated, mainly in North America and Canada. Toronto Public Library, for instance, which is one of the biggest local public library systems worldwide, was evaluated in 2013 with regard to its economic value. The famous Martin Prosperity Institute of the University of Toronto undertook research into the ROI of Toronto Public Library. The findings proved that 1 Dollar invested in the library generated 5.63 Dollars in corresponding counter value. In average each library patron in Toronto annually received services worth more than 500 Dollars. One opening hour in one of the 98 branch libraries cost 653 Dollars, but generated public value of about 2,500 Dollars. These figures resulted in a total annual value creation by Toronto Public Library of 1 billion dollar. The report states also that there are additional services in the Toronto public library like programs, educational and employment opportunities which are not easily quantifiable but doubtless also contribute to the ROI of the library (Martin Prosperity Institute 2013).³

³ The study methodology quantified the total economic impact and return on investment of Toronto Public Library services based on analysis of direct tangible benefits, direct spending and indirect tangible benefits. The report also includes analysis of some Toronto Public Library programs and services that make a difference to the city, going beyond the numbers. These services are not easily quantifiable, but create significant value for residents, including opportunities to improve literacy skills, engage in lifelong learning and enhance educational and employment opportunities.
This example documents impressively that public libraries can even generate added value to the public funds which are spent for them. So funding public libraries can have also macro-economic significance and can produce economic effects which are by far greater than the subsidies invested into them. In this respect they might be also even called actors in the concept of sharing economy.

3. **LIBRARIES AS CENTRAL CULTURAL AND PUBLIC SPACES**

Public libraries are locations which can support the need for direct communication as they offer free public space without any pressure to consume and without any need to legitimize their utilization. In many, mostly smaller or rural local communities, public libraries often are the only public non-commercial space left for the social needs of the population.

The essential service of public libraries is to provide free access to information, education and culture as well as to cultural education services for all citizens - regardless of income, status, age, gender or ethnic origin. In order to fulfil this task public libraries provide media in all forms - physically and online – and support the development of reading, media and information literacy by offering activities and programmes. Additionally the public library as public, non-commercial, protecting and inspiring meeting space and as knowledge resource has a significant importance for society.

The relevance of public libraries as so called “third place”, a further room function besides home and work, has already been established in many cities and will further increase (Aabø et al. 2012: 138–149). The symbolic term and the respective concept of the library as a “second living-room” internationally disseminated from the excellent library system in Singapore, where the mission statement of the library is derived from the political strategy for the nation:

“Our survival depends on our people, our only precious and critical resource. Thus, it is important for our people to stay relevant, competent and highly skilled. To minimize social disparity and to nurture a talent pool that will contribute to economic viability, our government has placed emphasis on investing in education, training and lifelong learning to create a highly skilled workforce for work in a knowledge intensive industry. It is against this backdrop that the libraries in Singapore were developed to support the national goals to help our people stay abreast and attain a competitive advantage.” (Sabaratnam et al. 2013: 103)

The strength of public libraries is also the strength of their networks. Main cooperation partners are kindergartens, schools, other educational actors and retirement homes, but also archives and museums. The spectrum of cooperation ranges from displaying information material organizing events (such as exhibitions, language courses for migrants and refugees, services for poor adult readers, reading coaches, courses about electronic media provided by the library staff, legal advice) to the mutual use of locations (learning studio, computer workstations, IT training room) as well as to the spatial and administrative consolidation in so called cultural and educational centres or in an education campus under common management.
POTENTIAL SUCCESS STORY
Netherlands

In the forefront of a planned new library act in 2015, the Sectorinstituut Openbare Bibliotheeken (SIOB) – responsible for the strategy and the development of the Dutch public library system – charged an external commission with a draft of future perspectives for library work in the year 2025. According to the title of the document “Bibliotheek van de toekomst: knooppunt voor kennis, contact en cultuur” (Library of the future: central place for knowledge, contact and culture), the commission considers the future role of the library as forum and network for knowledge, contact and culture. Particular importance is given to the element of contact, meaning the role as public meeting and communication place for most different social groups. The heading is “Van Collectie tot Connectie“ (from collection to connection).

With this profile the library will continue and enhance to play an indispensable social role in the future, because according to the authors of the study, the social framework in Dutch cities and villages will change significantly within the period considered. The demand for a “public third place” grows more important – and the library can become such a place by expanding its social role. Moreover the authors argue that - according to the common awareness – in the more and more globalised and digitized world the availability of “analogue places” gains demonstrably more importance. The prediction sometimes furthermore expressed that the library as physical place will disappear and will only continue virtually gets a clear rebuff from the authors.

Through its firm anchoring and physical presence in the local public life as well as its accessibility and reliability, from the Dutch point of view the library has the potential to become a future “Community Leader” (Bos 2014: 76).

Many rural regions have been facing serious changes: The general transformations in agriculture, industry and in small and medium sized enterprises cause a loss of many jobs. In smaller communities and in rural areas the population is declining with a continuously growing average age and the younger generations tend to leave these regions in order to work and settle in bigger cities.

While cultural institutions in big cities have been dealing with the ongoing social and demographic shift of the urban community, the institutions in smaller cities and in rural areas have to face more basic concerns. Even the conditions for cultural production are completely different there. The regional cultural institutions have to address a broader public and dispose of much closer budgets.

In many smaller municipalities, especially in the rural area, public libraries often are the only non-commercial cultural institution left, a protected public place where everyone can enjoy culture and education, work individually or within groups and communicate as well as a meeting point and for meaningful leisure activities.

Public libraries became centres of cultural life with extensive event offers which can cover all levels of society – like their media offer. In 2014 alone, German public libraries organized nearly 350,000 cultural events (German Library Statistics 2014).

National concepts for library development usually include the need of accessibility for people living in less central or sparsely populated areas, affected by the demographic
change as a major concern. CILIP, the British Chartered Institute of Library and Information professionals designed guidelines based on the question: "What makes a good library service?" These guidelines state explicitly:

"A good library service will deliver against key policy objectives and provide a positive future for children and young people, a fulfilling life for older people [...] A local library service must be [...] available to everyone and meet any special needs required by members of the local community [...] Library services should be available beyond the walls of the library, both online and via home delivery to vulnerable individuals." (CILIP 2009: 2-3)

The current programme „TRAFO – Modelle für Kultur im Wandel“ (Models for culture in transformation) of the German Federal Cultural Foundation is especially designed for rural areas and smaller communities. The Foundation aims to promote transformation processes by providing better cultural services. The main target of the project is the development of the public library Osterode to an open, non-commercial meeting place for communication, education and culture. Especially the integration and participation of immigrants and their participation in civic associations etc. is one target of the project. The public library shall be the networking hub of the whole project as well as the bridgehead towards the whole region (Kulturstiftung des Bundes n.d.).

SUCCESS STORIES FROM RURAL LIBRARIES

Public Libraries Romania

In Romania, librarians trained by Biblionet (IREX 2013) helped 116,000 farmers get EUR 180 million in subsidies via new Internet and computer services of the public library in 2011-2014. The 1,000+ librarians who participated in training decided to bring the services to their libraries together with the local mayors. Most of the mayors understood that this service is in the farmers’ interest. The programme helped farmers learn how to use the technology in libraries to access financial forms and submit them to the government, saving time and money.

Public Libraries Sri Lanka

The e-Library Nenasala Programme (Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation 2014) in Sri Lanka is a government-run initiative to increase digital literacy and access to technology among the nation’s poorest residents living in remote rural areas. The Nenasalas offer instruction in basic computer skills, guidance on accessing information through the Internet, and a wide variety of locally relevant knowledge to help people increase their income and improve their lives.
4. **LIBRARIES AS ANCHORS FOR THE HIGH-STREET**

“Urban performance currently depends not only on the city’s endowment of hard infrastructure (‘physical capital’), but also, and increasingly so, on the availability and quality of knowledge communication and social infrastructure - human and social capital” (Caragliu et al. 2009:1).

Public libraries are local institutions providing different basic services for the public. They have the highest frequency of visitors to a cultural or educational local institution and therefore are an indispensable component of the respective infrastructure in a local community. Public libraries develop their services based on the demands and interests of the citizens and in communication with their funding bodies and thus make a principal contribution to urban development. Their role as anchors for the high-street in the city is growing and becoming more and more evident. Even retail shops and shopping malls have recognized that the public library might be an interesting partner in increasing the attractiveness of a certain location. On the other hand the success of public libraries also profits from their position in urban key places where people can combine their various personal issues and intentions in one place.

**SUCCESS STORY**

**Idea Stores London/UK**

Since 2002, so called “Idea Stores” (Wills 2003: 107–120) were developed in London which soon became internationally renowned model-libraries. These “Idea-Stores” consequently integrate the demands of their environment with the classical library services and thus especially turned into knowledge and creation centres for lifelong learning. They were developed based on surveys of the target population. The general goal of these modern libraries is to be an important factor of the urbanistic upgrading of a deprived neighbourhood as well as providers of services for learning and education, especially for people from disadvantaged backgrounds. As a result of the surveys it became clear that people would use public libraries if they were close to the sphere of their everyday lives, and therefore the “Idea Stores” are located on the high-street in the middle of urban life in the respective neighbourhood. The same concept of being a part of a big “one-stop-shop” follow public libraries which are located in shopping malls. This concept is met in many countries around the world and sometimes the operating company of a shopping mall lease their premises to a public library at low costs because they recognize the benefit of having this well accepted cultural institution in their mall.

Urban planners have recognized the value of a public library as a highly frequented cultural institution for the target to revitalize an urban redevelopment area and to bring life into deserted parts of the city (Giersberg 2014). They know by now that the visitors of a public library very often become walk-in customers of shops, restaurants and cafés in the neighbourhood. Sometimes public libraries even initiate the settlement of commercial enterprises in their surroundings.

Against this background in the last years many metropolitan cities commissioned world-famous architects for the building of modern public libraries which became internationally renowned landmarks: for instance Birmingham, Seattle, Stuttgart, Tokyo, Vancouver and Vienna. The latest example is the Public Library of Arhus in Denmark.
In some cities the public library was the first new building in a newly developing area. In Amsterdam for instance the new Central Library was built in region close to the central railway station formerly used as cargo transhipment centre. Since the opening of the library this formerly almost deserted unattractive area soon became a highly frequented part of Amsterdam. The same effect is achieved in Arhus where the central library is the anchor point of a former harbour area with industrial plants separated from the central municipal area.

These modern and often architecturally extraordinary buildings offer welcoming premises for many purposes. They are highly attractive for the population of all ages and from all social groups and generally become a focal point of the community. Since 2013, Birmingham Public Library for instance is one of the biggest public libraries in Europe with its 31,000 square meter premises. The old library had become unattractive and was rather poorly frequented; with the new library the number of visitors increased by 250 percent: instead of 4,000 daily visitors the library now counts 10,000 visitors per day. The business environment profits from these numbers considerably (IFLA Public Libraries Section 2014).

Public libraries as well recognized and open public service institutions sometimes can be also deployed to upgrade underprivileged urban districts. The city of Salzburg in Austria successfully placed their new central library into an area with serious social problems in order to bring a new perspective for the population. In Sao Paolo the Central public library was positioned in an area with a huge favela as neighbourhood. Today the library is accepted as cultural learning centre for the population, especially for the students in the surrounding areas.
5. RECOMMENDATIONS

Public libraries could contribute to the political goals formulated at national and EU level more effectively and more efficiently if their enormous potential were more intensely and more consequently taken into account in local political decision-making processes: they have a lot to offer in the spheres of early childhood development, vocational education, lifelong learning, cultural formation, digital upskilling and social integration. Their productive contribution is unfortunately often ignored, both at national and at European level. Public libraries offer local politicians great support in reaching their objectives of providing excellent opportunities for education and learning for all citizens in their communities, improving skills through flexible learning pathways and supporting the fight against unemployment.

In 2009, EBLIDA and NAPLE launched the Vienna Declaration (EBLIDA 2009) for a Library Policy for Europe that identified challenges for libraries in legal, financial, technological, structural and organisational terms. Now it might be the right time for the European Parliament to act in favour of the millions of users of the European libraries.

Therefore the work of public libraries must be stabilized and should be further developed at the European level by:

5.1. Recognizing public libraries as key actors in education, digitization and integration into policy strategies at national and EU level

The positive socio-economic impacts of Europe’s 65,000 community based public libraries have been largely overlooked by policy makers for a very long time. There often is a lack of awareness and understanding of the modern role of public libraries in European communities. But as stated, public libraries have understood and met the new challenges of the 21st century by becoming modern community, creative and educational hubs. Their service provides access to educational, recreational, cultural and information activities to improve the quality of life for all citizens. In order to ensure and promote their vital support in the fields of culture, information, digitization as well as education and social integration they should be absolutely considered as important actors by political decision-makers when it comes to the development and implementation of respective strategies (including the 2016 New Skills Agenda and upcoming copyright proposals).

5.2. Creating a fund or programme for the innovation in public libraries and establish a sustainable European network of public libraries

Public libraries across Europe face similar challenges and needs. They are crucial actors for the creation and strengthening of European education and underpin the objectives of the Europe 2020 strategy by enabling “smart, sustainable and inclusive growth”. In order to support the transformation of libraries as engines of development and integration, EU
member states should consider the creation of a programme and the establishment of an European-wide network to monitor and support the work of public libraries in boosting the EU’s progress towards relevant targets in education and training, employment and culture. Public libraries already participate in the promotion tools of the EU such as Erasmus+, ERDF and LEADER, but still need urgent support for the further promotion of innovation – especially given the tightening of local budgets in recent years.

5.3. Creating a European (Public) Library Label, or (Public) Library of Europe

Traditional food and beverages across Europe (wines, beers, cheeses etc.) are benefitting of special labels that guarantee they respect qualitative norm and can be purchased with confidence by consumers. Some member-states have created a similar label for retail bookshops and for museums that ensure minimum quality standards. The creation of a European library label with special criteria would support the recognition of the importance of libraries in Europe. It would also help to work towards minimum standards that would be applicable Europe-wide (for example in terms of minimum square meter size per 1,000 inhabitants, minimum services provided, Wi-Fi access, minimum collection level, minimum staff related to opening hours, etc.). The idea would not be to have a competition to select the best library of the Europe, but to leverage libraries in inviting them to fulfil the minimum norms to receive the label. It might also be a way to help the EU to allocate specific budget lines to libraries.

5.4. Supporting data collection on European Public Libraries

There is currently relatively little data available on features and activities taking place in Europe’s public libraries. Gathering more detailed data and evidence on library use by citizens would help to build a more holistic and accurate picture of the role libraries are playing in communities and how libraries can be leveraged to support EU policies. Data showing the effectiveness, efficiency and outcome and the range of libraries are required by political decision makers as well as by the library professionals themselves, like NAPLE and IFLA. Data are extremely difficult to compile and exploit because they are not uniform across the EU member states. EBLIDA (with partners) started to work on data collection three years ago and are compiling statistical information, but it would be more effective with the help of the EU bodies or a specific project on data collection supported by a European grant.

4 In the 1990s the European Commission already had launched a program specifically dedicated to innovation in public libraries called PubliCA – Concerted Action for Public Libraries. This program caused and supported many Europe-wide initiatives for - mainly technical - innovation in libraries: s. http://cordis.europa.eu/libraries/en/publib.html).
6 In the 1990s in connection with the PubliCA programme there already was a project of collecting data relevant for public libraries from many European countries in order to have an actual overview about the state of public libraries. But without substantial funding this data collection could not be continued.
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