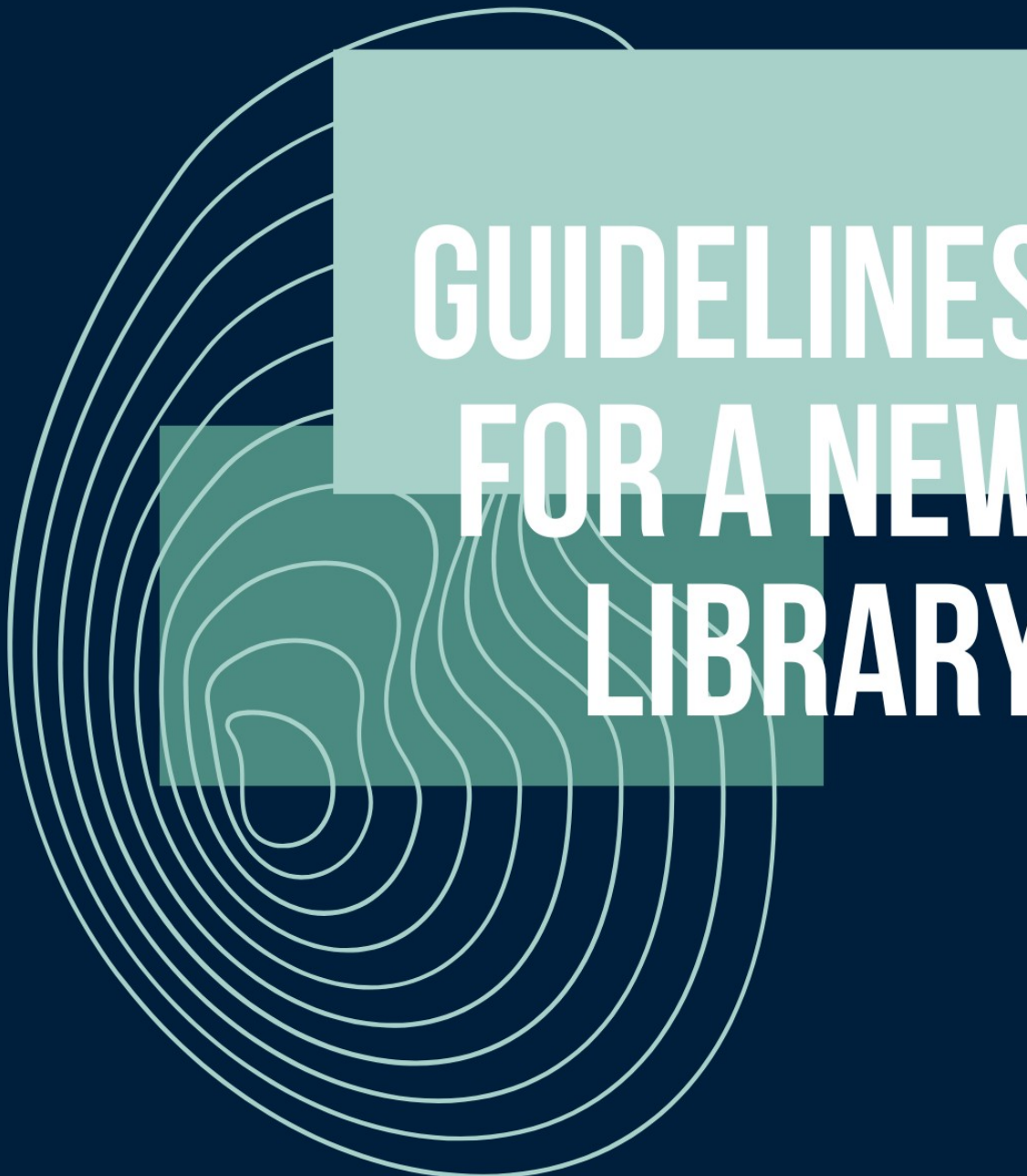


ENHANCING LIBRARIES AS COMMUNITY HUBS

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# GUIDELINES FOR A NEW LIBRARY

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**For information and contacts:** [byblios.adu@gmail.com](mailto:byblios.adu@gmail.com), <https://www.bybliosproject.eu/>

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**Authors:** Anita Montagna, Giulia Terenzi, Chiara Fasciani, Laura Caronna, Roberto Veraldi, Luísa Oliveira, Cecília Pinto, Silviu Daniel Brebulet, Florentina Ciomaga, Sophia Bickhardt, Raquel de Pedro

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# Handbook for Enhancing Libraries as Community Hubs

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# 1. Fostering international collaboration for library innovation

In an increasingly interconnected world, the role of local and school libraries is evolving beyond their traditional function as repositories of books. They are transforming into dynamic **community hubs** – vibrant spaces that foster learning, creativity, social interaction, and civic engagement.

This handbook is the culmination of **extensive international collaboration**, drawing insights from dedicated working groups and a series of interviews conducted across various European Union countries.

We aimed to **gather diverse perspectives, good practices, innovative ideas, practical tools, and actionable proposals** to strengthen this crucial role. By facilitating **cross-cultural exchange**, we've identified successful strategies that empower libraries to serve their communities better, address local needs, and adapt to future challenges. This collaborative effort not only highlights existing strengths but also inspires a fundamental shift in perception, ensuring libraries are recognised and utilised as **indispensable cornerstones of community life**.

This project phase specifically involved the creation of **international working groups** dedicated to collecting good practices, ideas, tools, and proposals for enhancing the role of local and school libraries as community hubs. These working groups comprised **14 experts** and **14 stakeholders**, ensuring a European and multidisciplinary approach, as well as a representative working group from diverse contexts and backgrounds.

There is a clear need to offer new services and cultural resources to citizens in order to address the evolving challenges of an increasingly complex society. The spaces and cultural resources of libraries can become new community hubs, fostering the creation of projects "tailor-made" to expand the role of libraries according to different cultural environments and people's needs.



This collection of ideas benefits from **the insights gained from previous phases of the project (WP3 and WP4)**, enabling the expansion of the library's role through new, innovative services and creative spaces. Furthermore, the guidelines highlight **new relevant skills for librarians** (identified in WP3) and link to valuable resources.

This manual is **freely available online** and includes links to a set of online resources and good practices to expand the library's role. These guidelines are primarily aimed at local stakeholders, librarians, teachers, school managers, managers in adult education, education staff, and other staff engaged in innovative services.

The chapters that follow are a direct result of the **voices from the field**—experts and stakeholders—who participated in our working groups and interviews. Their valuable reflections on how to enhance libraries as community hubs, along with their shared good practices, tools, and suggestions, form the core of this handbook.



## 2. Redefining the library: from repository to community hub

*“In my opinion, local and public libraries in our community have not yet fulfilled all the roles they could assume. Their involvement in civic life, as well as in cultural and social spheres, remains quite limited. I firmly believe that the library should be an essential space for the life of any citizen - a place for gathering, learning, and participation. However, here it is not always given the importance or value it deserves, which prevents it from reaching its full potential.”*

**(Library manager, Valladolid, Spain)**

The concept of a library as a community hub represents a significant paradigm shift, moving beyond its traditional role as a quiet repository of books toward becoming a **vibrant, inclusive space for learning, connection, and cultural participation**. While access to information remains a cornerstone, modern libraries, particularly in school and public settings, are increasingly embracing broader missions: to foster lifelong and life-wide learning, social inclusion, and personal growth.





As **Antonella Agnoli, consultant for cultural space design**, stressed:

*“The strongest barriers are **cultural**, not economic. We need to rethink who our publics are —always in the plural—and design libraries as spaces where people truly feel at home. A library must be open when people can actually come, including evenings and Sundays.”*

Libraries, she adds, can also act as **climate refuges**, offering safe, accessible, and welcoming environments in times of extreme weather.

A video from the Fundação Francisco Manuel dos Santos (“*Que papel social têm bibliotecas públicas?*”) explores how libraries are becoming **essential social anchors**, not only offering books but also creating safe, welcoming spaces where people can learn, connect, and build community ties.

Today’s libraries serve as **dynamic information centres and digital access points**, supporting literacy, critical thinking, digital fluency, and creativity through diverse formats and learning environments. In schools, they **complement formal education** by providing flexible, informal spaces where students can explore and express themselves more freely than in the traditional classroom setting.

*“This **learning library** really needs to get into people’s heads. A school library is no longer just a lending service, but a place where research, projects, and everyday learning can happen—from Year 1 through Year 13.”* (**Simone Frübing, School library specialist consultant of the public administration of the Berlin district Treptow-Köpenick**)

Interviews conducted in **Valladolid** revealed that school libraries significantly boost **youth engagement** with reading by offering a diverse and attractive selection of books for all age groups. These libraries are also increasingly integrating **digital resources**, such as computers, tablets, and online platforms, which provide students with more dynamic ways to learn and complete assignments.

*“Libraries are, above all, community spaces for learning and information. They serve as **open and inclusive meeting points**, providing access to knowledge and promoting lifelong learning. In the case of university libraries, their role goes beyond the academic: they must reach beyond the institution and **extend their services to the broader community**, thereby strengthening their social and cultural function.”* (**Director of the University of Valladolid, Spain**)

Libraries in Portugal are increasingly taking on the role of **learning facilitators** for citizens of all ages — especially in communities facing educational disadvantage. As highlighted by **Fernando Azevedo (CIEC – IE – Universidade do Minho)** in the report *Libraries as Community Centres Promoting Inclusion and*





*Lifelong Learning*, libraries are seen as **trusted, accessible spaces for personal growth**, especially in the context of **non-formal education and second-chance learning**.

As Azevedo writes:

*"Libraries provide an **inclusive, stigma-free environment** that formal institutions often lack — they are places where people can fail, learn, and try again without judgment."*

Librarians are no longer passive custodians but **active educational partners**, supporting teachers in **co-designing interdisciplinary learning experiences**. As an **early intervention specialist in Valladolid** noted,

*"Local libraries are a valuable resource in early intervention because they **bring books closer to families and promote reading from the earliest years**. In addition, many offer activities that stimulate children's language development, imagination, and social interaction."*

This highlights how libraries are playing an essential role not only in formal education but also in the **earliest stages of child development and family engagement**.



Adding to this perspective, **a librarian from Biblioteca Judeteana D. Zamfirescu Vrancea (Romania)** emphasises that libraries operate on two interconnected levels:

*"Local libraries are, on the one hand, **responsible for facilitating access to books** for those interested in reading, but also **for promoting reading to those who don't prioritize it**. On the other hand, local libraries are responsible for **providing cultural services** in a broader context – for instance, promoting local writers and other*

*cultural figures, as well as showcasing the local culture, history, and personalities. This last aspect is what makes libraries unique. It prevents them from competing with each other: while many libraries may share the same books, **their local events, shaped by cultural identity and specificity, make each library distinctive.**"*



Similarly, **school libraries play a dual role**: they ensure **access to textbooks and essential readings** while also serving as spaces for the expression of “institutional culture” through **educational activities** that reflect the school’s values, beliefs, and pedagogical priorities.

Portugal offers a valuable case study in reimagining school libraries as **inclusive, community-centered learning ecosystems**. According to **Manuela Paredes, Teacher Librarian and Coordinator of the School Libraries at the Cluster of Schools Francisco de Holanda in Guimarães**, school libraries are no longer just spaces for silent reading but must be understood as *"dynamic platforms that adapt to social, technological, and cultural transformations."* She stresses that their relevance depends on *"strengthening the skills of reading mediators, innovating educational practices, and actively involving families and communities"*

To truly serve all members of the community, libraries must also **prioritise outreach to underrepresented groups**, such as migrants, seniors, and people with disabilities, through targeted, inclusive programming. Yet, a demographic gap remains, particularly among middle-aged adults, who often feel disconnected from library services. **Expanding activities** such as language classes, public debates, creative workshops, and cultural competitions can help re-engage these groups and transform libraries into places of **shared civic identity**. In this context, libraries should not only deliver services but also **act as cultural organisers and facilitators**—offering spaces and resources for grassroots initiatives, partnerships with NGOs, and youth-led projects. In regions where access to theatre, opera, or other cultural events is limited and costly, libraries have **the potential to democratize culture** by hosting affordable and locally relevant events.

This transformation involves:

- **Active engagement**: Moving beyond passive service provision to actively engaging with community members, understanding their needs, and co-creating programs and services.
- **Multifunctional spaces**: Designing flexible and adaptable physical spaces that accommodate diverse activities, from quiet study and collaborative work to workshops, events, and community meetings.
- **Technological integration**: Leveraging technology to enhance access to information, facilitate digital literacy, and create innovative learning experiences.
- **Partnerships and collaborations**: Building strong relationships with local organisations, schools,



businesses, and government agencies to amplify impact and reach.

- **Community-led programming:** Empowering community members to shape library offerings, ensuring relevance and ownership.
- **Sustainability as a core value:** Embedding environmental, social, and economic sustainability into library operations, programming, and strategic planning.

This handbook will explore how libraries across Europe are embracing these principles, offering tangible examples and expert insights to guide future development.

## 2.1 Are libraries already perceived as community hubs?

*“Many times libraries are already seen as community centres because they don’t just offer books; they are also places where **people gather, share, and learn together.**” (Manager of Down Valladolid)*

Yet, as an **adult trainer and project manager from Asociația Alternative Educațională Vrancea** observed, this vision is not universal. In many contexts, libraries are still perceived mainly as quiet spaces for solitary reading and study. While some organise workshops or community events, these remain occasional rather than systematic.

As **Matteo Aluigi, a teacher for pupils with special educational needs in Pesaro (Italy)**, observed, many libraries still appear to the public as “ancient places” where the primary function is book lending. While some libraries actively organise events such as exhibitions or children’s readings, **the broader perception remains tied to traditional roles.** Overcoming this cultural barrier is key to transforming libraries into vibrant community hubs.

Signs of transformation are, however, increasingly visible.

*“In recent years, there has been a gradual shift in the way libraries are perceived. Their value as open, participatory community centers is beginning to be recognized. However, there is still a long way to go. The traditional view - focused solely on leading and studying - remains deeply rooted, and it is necessary to move forward a broader conception, one in which the library is understood as a **true agent of social and***



*cultural cohesion.*” (Director of the University of Valladolid)

**Anita Masini, an Italian literature teacher**, observed that “*public libraries are real meeting points, while school libraries still play a marginal role due to a lack of funding and proactive projects.*” Public libraries, she noted, are attentive to user needs, regularly updating their collections in response to readers’ suggestions.

A **Romanian librarian** explained:

*“In our library, we are already implementing more activities for groups of pupils (teachers, and sometimes parents) than individual activities. We are focusing more on workshops, debates, group reading and analysis, and various competitions, facilitating learning through discussions in a friendly environment.”*

This shift—from individual to **collective learning**—positions libraries as facilitators of **social interaction and participatory culture**.

An early intervention specialist in Valladolid reinforced this perspective:



*“More and more, libraries are perceived as dynamic community hubs. They actively organise cultural events, workshops, storytelling sessions, and book clubs, and often host talks with authors. They are becoming vital gathering spaces for neighbours, families, and students.”*

Portugal's **School Library Network (Rede de Bibliotecas Escolares – RBE)** and the **National Reading Plan (Plano Nacional de Leitura – PNL)** play a pivotal role in transforming libraries into agents of

**educational and social inclusion**. These initiatives aim to move beyond book lending, turning libraries into **intergenerational meeting points and cultural hubs** that support multiple literacies.

Paredes emphasizes that meaningful transformation must also include **structural partnerships**:

*“Rethinking the potential of school libraries as community centres depends mainly on the ability to establish **solid partnerships** with public bodies, NGOs and local associations. These collaborations*



are essential to reach **adult learners**, expand resource availability, and ensure the **sustainability of reading programs** and community engagement activities.”

Still, progress remains uneven. As a **Romanian practitioner** noted:

“Maybe some libraries are already there, based on very interesting and creative librarians, but **this is not yet the case for the majority of Romanian libraries.**” Parents, in particular, are not always engaged in school library activities, even when pupils participate actively.

“I believe it depends a lot on **the regional community** we are talking about. For example, I have had the opportunity to get to know some libraries in Catalonia up close, and there they are clearly perceived as community centers: they play a very important role for citizens and are fully integrated into cultural and social life. However, in Castilla y León, we still have quite a way to go. Here, libraries have not yet achieved that recognition or such a clearly defined community role. (Library manager, Valladolid)

From the Biblioteca Județeană D. Zamfirescu Vrancea came a candid reflection:

“They should be [community hubs], but they are not. Public libraries are not yet there—they need many changes and updates. Yes, they are organising more events and cultural workshops, but **librarians and managers must work hard to adapt libraries from places of solitude into spaces of social interaction.**”

**Communication and visibility** also remain key challenges. As one Romanian librarian admitted:

“Our activities are yet to be well-known in the community. We should work more on **promoting the innovative services** we are providing.”

**Digitalisation** is central to this shift: libraries are using social media, online workshops, and digital catalogues to align with the habits of younger generations.

**Spanish stakeholders** similarly stressed the importance of outreach. A special education teacher in Valladolid suggested:

“An advertising campaign would give libraries a boost, especially for reading workshops, cultural events, and similar initiatives.”

As one contributor summarised:

“I think in Romania we are going there, but we are not really there yet.”





Achieving the full potential of libraries as community hubs will require **systemic support, investment in digital infrastructure, and stronger recognition of librarians as educators, facilitators, and community leaders.**

*“This could be achieved through two fundamental elements: on one hand, by **promoting innovation** through modern infrastructure, technological resources, and continuous training programs; and on the other hand, by **fostering inclusion**, ensuring that all citizens have access to these services regardless of their age, education, or personal circumstances”* (Library manager, Valladolid)

This vision is already emerging in Spain, where different types of libraries **contribute in complementary ways** to education, culture, and social cohesion.

**Local libraries** serve as **meeting points and cultural anchors**, offering free access to books, newspapers, and increasingly digital resources, alongside workshops, book clubs, exhibitions, and internet access. **School libraries** play a crucial role in **promoting equity**, particularly for students who lack resources at home, by providing access to books, digital tools, and learning support. **University libraries** are evolving into academic and cultural hubs, combining repositories for open access to research with digital labs and collaborative spaces for innovation.

Together, these examples confirm the growing role of libraries as **inclusive meeting points that foster learning, exploration, and social participation**—particularly for vulnerable groups and people with disabilities.



## 2.2 New skills and competences for the librarian of today

*“The most important skills are not about cataloguing books, but about entering into **dialogue with the community**.”*



Antonella Angnoli argues that librarians must be **communicators, facilitators, and cultural mediators**, able to recognise local needs, combat misinformation, and promote well-being through **cultural participation**. She insists that libraries should employ **staff with diverse backgrounds**—such as theatre, social sciences, or communication—since these competences may be better suited to **engage the public and foster inclusion**.

A quote from a **Portuguese librarian** illustrates this shift in philosophy: *“We are not here only to lend books, but to **listen, to host, and to create dialogue across generations and cultures**.”*

To fully embrace their evolving role, librarians must move beyond being custodians of knowledge. They are increasingly called to act as **organisers and facilitators of public events** that foster learning, dialogue, and inclusion.

*“Library staff need to update their skills in **advanced digital competences**, especially in the knowledge and use of artificial intelligence. In addition, **communication, outreach, and marketing skills** are essential, as well as effective management of social networks to connect with diverse audiences and bring services to the entire community.”* (Director of the University of Valladolid)

This requires managing the full cycle of community-oriented initiatives—from **planning and promotion to implementation and evaluation**—while engaging diverse audiences, involving stakeholders, and collecting feedback to strengthen future activities.

*“Librarians of the future need a **deep knowledge of the publishing market**, combined with strong listening*





*skills to understand and respond to users' needs.” (A. Masini)*

*“To fulfil these roles, librarians must combine **scientific and humanistic knowledge**, with strong competencies in creativity, event and project management, and digital literacy. This blend of skills allows them to engage diverse audiences, manage innovative services, and connect the library to broader cultural networks.” (M. Aluigi)*

**Gabriele Karla, former head of Bernau City Library (Germany)**, describes the librarian of the future as a **multitasking professional**:

*“Libraries today are not only about books—they are **educational spaces, cultural venues, and social centres**. This requires librarians to be **flexible, empathetic, and skilled in both digital tools and intercultural communication**, while also being able to create low-threshold meeting places where people feel welcome without the pressure to consume.”*

This expanded role demands **creativity, initiative, and an openness to change**.

*“Times change quickly, with new technologies, methodologies, and community needs, so it is important always **to be open to learning** and to finding ways for everyone to enjoy the services that libraries offer.”  
(Responsible for the assessment and diagnosis service, Valladolid)*

Core competences include:

- **Teaching and training abilities**, especially in school libraries.
- **Digital proficiency** and the integration of emerging technologies.
- **Intercultural competence** is essential for working inclusively with diverse audiences.
- **Flexibility, adaptability and continuous professional learning**
- **Event planning and facilitation skills**, enabling workshops, debates, and community activities.
- **Data literacy** enables understanding of user needs and evaluation of impact.
- **Advocacy and management competencies**, including fundraising, coordination, and networking.



Paredes highlights the importance of **digital inclusion and community engagement**, pointing out that the **integration of new digital technologies**, such as AI and Web 2.0 tools, can transform libraries into **spaces of experimentation and participatory culture**. However, she warns that *"this technological transformation requires **critical reflection on accessibility, family digital literacy, and the ongoing training of professionals**"*

*"All librarians especially need to continue developing skills in the digital field, as it is an area in constant change and essential for our work. I also consider it very important to cultivate **the ability to research and explore innovative methods**: how to engage users, how to introduce new library models, and, in particular, how to convey to younger generations the importance of these centers for their lives and for the community."* (Library manager, Valladolid)

As Simone Frübing observed:

*"As a librarian, I wish for **more training in didactics**. Many colleagues, especially those who are older, did not receive foundational preparation for working with children and had to learn everything on their own. **Systematic training** would strengthen both librarians and the role of the library within schools."*

Stakeholder voices further stress the need for **inclusion and diversity competencies**. A Spanish manager explained:

*"Librarians increasingly need **training in inclusion and attention to diversity**. They need to be familiar with supporting people with different abilities and needs, so that everyone can make the most of what the library offers and truly feel welcome."*

An early intervention specialist in Valladolid added:

*"The future of libraries lies not only in books or technology, but in their **ability to connect, nurture, and transform people and their communities**. For this, librarians must cultivate **adaptability to change and continuous learning**."*

**A Spanish speech therapist and special education teacher** echoed the same view:

*"Today, the role of the librarian goes far beyond managing books. They need to **stay up-to-date with new technologies, utilise digital resources, and lead cultural or educational activities**. This requires an open, curious attitude and a strong willingness **to engage in continuous learning**."*



**Diana Thiele, deputy chair of the Working Committee on School Libraries Berlin Brandenburg,** highlighted the growing responsibility of librarians in guiding young people through artificial intelligence:

*“Libraries will face a much larger area of responsibility in the future, which is currently not being addressed at all. They need to show both the opportunities and the limits of these tools, **guiding children towards responsible use.**”*



**Italian librarian and trainer Tito Vezio Viola** offers a forward-looking vision of the **school library as a generator of learning and civic engagement**. In a context where OECD data show persistent challenges in reading comprehension, he argues that librarians must:

- Embed the **library within the educational and community fabric.**
- Design activities that stimulate **curiosity and critical thinking.**
- Facilitate **cooperative and laboratory-based learning**, integrating print and digital resources.
- Act as **cultural catalysts** within territorial networks.

This reflects the broader historical shift in Italian libraries from closed, conservation-oriented institutions to **open, participatory, and inclusive spaces.**

A Romanian librarian from Biblioteca Județeană D. Zamfirescu Vrancea also emphasised **the need for adaptability**:

*“The biggest challenges are related to the ability to adapt to new realities and contexts. **Funding matters, but not as much as initiative, openness, and creativity.** Many activities—such as workshops, book clubs, or cultural presentations—don’t require large budgets, but rather **a genuine interest in responding to community needs.**”*

She further argued that librarians must also develop **adult training competencies**, including **public speaking, communication, and the ability to deliver lifelong learning activities**, so that libraries can expand their role as training providers.



Agnoli also pointed to the importance of **how public tenders are designed** when municipalities outsource library management. Too often, calls focus only on technical competencies such as cataloguing, overlooking the broader skills required for community engagement.

*“The question should not be who can catalogue, but **what kind of library do we want this to be, and which skills will make it thrive**”, she noted.*

Across all these perspectives, one message is clear: **the future of libraries depends as much on people as on resources.**

To become spaces of participation, learning, and cultural exchange, librarians and managers must combine **creativity, leadership, adaptability, and a commitment to inclusion.**

## 2.3 Gaps and needs in supporting the transformation of libraries

*“One of the most urgent needs is the **renovation of infrastructure**, because much innovation stems from that. We cannot talk about modern services if the spaces do not support them. It is true that some challenges have been identified and steps are being taken, but everything requires time and, above all, training. For example, training programs related to artificial intelligence are already being developed, which I consider a very significant advance.”*

**(Library manager, Valladolid)**

To fully realise their potential as **inclusive, learner-centred environments**, libraries must undergo both **cultural and structural transformation**. No longer confined to the role of quiet study spaces, they are increasingly called upon to serve as **dynamic settings for group work, informal learning, and open dialogue**—places where learners, particularly those who are vulnerable or less confident, can express themselves freely without fear of judgment or formal evaluation. This shift responds to a **growing need for flexible learning environments** that reduce social anxiety and foster meaningful participation.

A recurrent challenge, highlighted by a manager of Down Valladolid, is the **lack of digitalisation**:

*“Many libraries still don’t have enough technological resources, and this limits access to materials and services in modern formats. Making progress in this area would allow them **to reach more***



*people and better adapt to different ways of learning and participating.”*

However, this is not the case in **Portugal**, where a **significant national investment**—notably through the **School Libraries Network (Rede de Bibliotecas Escolares)** and **municipal strategies**—has strengthened **library infrastructure**, promoted **digital inclusion**, and expanded **access to innovative tools and resources**. Portugal’s experience demonstrates that, with adequate policy support and funding, libraries can successfully evolve into **digitally equipped, inclusive spaces** that meet the diverse needs of modern learners.

This underscores a dual gap: **technological infrastructure** on one hand, and **staff training in accessibility and inclusion** on the other—both essential for innovation and equity.

At the systemic level, several barriers persist. One is the **weak integration of libraries into broader community networks**. Partnerships with NGOs, cultural institutions, and educational hubs remain sporadic, when sustained collaboration could firmly position libraries within broader educational and social ecosystems. At the same time, many librarians struggle to meet rising expectations due to **gaps in digital, social, and communication skills**, compounded by **limited training opportunities and institutional constraints**.

An early intervention specialist in Valladolid pointed to the consequences:

*“Many libraries lack accessible materials such as books with pictograms, assistive technology, or sensory-adapted spaces. Moreover, the shortage of resources often prevents staff from receiving training on accessibility and inclusion. **Greater financial investment in resources and qualified personnel is necessary.** Similarly, **promoting participation** is also needed.”*

The Romanian context illustrates how policy frameworks are only beginning to adapt. The **formal recognition** of school librarians as part of the national teaching framework is an important step forward. Yet, it has also generated tensions with traditional educators who still perceive the librarian’s role as limited to book lending and silent supervision. Overcoming such outdated views requires **professional development** and a **cultural shift** that positions libraries as vital pedagogical environments and librarians as essential actors in the learning process.

A librarian from Biblioteca Județeană D. Zamfirescu Vrancea captured this reality:

*“There is no clear image, neither in society nor in local contexts, about what libraries should do in the present or in the future, and no shared vision of what they should look like. What is clear is that **libraries***





*will inevitably change, as those that remain merely book providers will soon face closure due to declining readership. To prepare for the future, libraries need to **embrace the role of cultural providers**, adapting nationally established services to local needs and identities. They must **imagine innovative ways to attract people of all ages**—and, equally importantly, retain them.”*

**Retention** is indeed one of the most significant challenges. As social and technological changes accelerate, many libraries have struggled to keep pace, resulting in a decline in adult engagement. Yet this also opens a significant opportunity: **adult learning**. As the same Romanian librarian explained,

*“Adult education is less developed in Romania compared to other European countries, and few institutions assume responsibility for organising training. **Libraries could fill this gap by offering free or affordable workshops and learning activities**, making opportunities accessible to those often excluded for financial reasons.”*

To meet these expectations, libraries must also strengthen their **fundraising and project-writing capacities**. In contexts where hiring specialised staff is not feasible, librarians themselves need to develop these competences. While public-private partnerships could support this evolution, current legislation provides limited incentives for sponsorship or private investment in public libraries.

In light of these realities, the librarian’s skill set must evolve to include:

- **Social and communication skills** – to engage diverse groups in both physical and digital spaces.
- **Digital proficiency** – to create and curate online content, and facilitate blended or virtual learning.
- **Intercultural competence** – to adapt services to increasingly diverse cultural and linguistic communities.
- **Creativity** – to design inclusive, innovative, and engaging activities.
- **Initiative and leadership** – to shape services proactively, advocate for relevance, and lead change.

*“It is essential to **transform staff attitudes and establish clear management policies that prioritize inclusion and innovation**. Having resources is not enough; bold decisions are needed from leadership, along with a commitment from the entire organization, to drive the cultural change demanded by today’s society.”* (Director of the University of Valladolid)

Without embracing this transformation, libraries risk marginalisation—or even closure. But with the right



**skills, mindset, and systemic support**, they can emerge as **true engines of inclusion, innovation, and community empowerment**.

## 2.4 Key challenges for libraries in becoming community-relevant

Despite their growing importance as learning and social hubs, many libraries—particularly school libraries—continue to face significant challenges in becoming fully inclusive, innovative, and responsive to the needs of their communities.

*“Today libraries face primarily two major challenges. The first is that **authorities need to genuinely believe in the role we play within our communities**. It is essential that they truly believe in it, because only from that conviction can progress be made. The second challenge is that, once this importance is acknowledged, **the necessary financial resources** are provided so that professionals can carry out their work with the quality and impact that the community deserves.”* (Library manager, Valladolid)

Key challenges include **securing adequate funding to access quality resources**, leveraging the digital transition proactively rather than passively, creating stronger networks among libraries, and **ensuring the recruitment of staff with creativity and innovation skills**. According to Aluigi,

*“**preserving public investment in culture, easing access to digital platforms, and training experts in digital humanism**”* are essential steps for supporting this transformation.

**Limited funding** remains one of the most pressing issues, leading to insufficient staffing, outdated collections, and inadequate digital infrastructure. **Financial constraints also restrict access to professional development**, leaving many librarians without the time, resources, or institutional support to upskill. The problem is especially acute in Romania, where school libraries are administratively tied to schools and cannot independently apply for external funding or sponsorship. Few have staff trained in project writing or fundraising, further limiting their capacity to innovate.

The **multifaceted nature of the librarian’s role** compounds these challenges.

*“The main challenge is **staff training**, at all levels, to adequately serve the diversity of users and groups. Libraries must be inclusive spaces, and this requires **professionals who are able to understand the needs of***





*very different people - from university students to groups at risk of exclusion or people with disabilities.”*  
(Director of the University of Valladolid)

A single librarian is often expected to manage book lending, cataloguing, digital systems, and maintenance while also facilitating workshops, designing educational activities, and engaging diverse audiences. **Each of these responsibilities demands distinct competencies.** Still, in many cases, **strict procedures and rigid institutional rules**—particularly in school environments—stifle creativity and discourage initiative.

**Social perceptions** remain another barrier. Librarians are too often seen as passive bookkeepers rather than as dynamic cultural and educational facilitators. They are sometimes **perceived as lacking the digital and communication skills needed to engage today’s learners.** This outdated image must shift if libraries are to become inclusive, forward-looking institutions.

The work of school librarians in Portugal has evolved to include **not only reading mediation and literacy development**, but also **cultural mediation, emotional support, and digital empowerment.**

**Filipa Moura, Inter-Council Coordinator for School Libraries**, highlights how school libraries are creating **inclusive programs** for children with different learning profiles, migrant backgrounds, and social vulnerabilities:

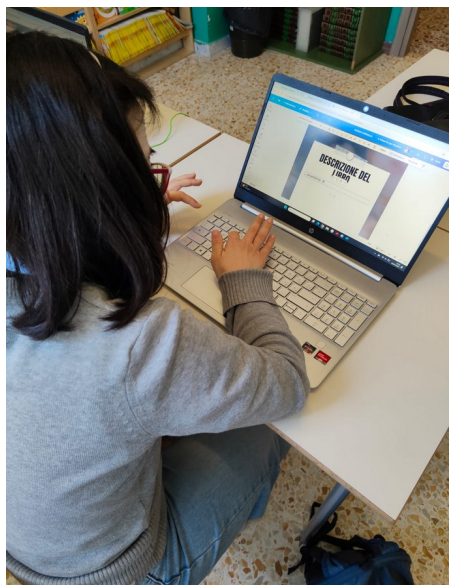
*"One of the key challenges is to ensure that **every student, regardless of their background, sees the library as a space where they belong, where they are represented, and where their stories matter.**"*

She stresses that school libraries must be *"co-designed with students and the wider community"*, incorporating activities that reflect **local identities, multilingualism, and participatory citizenship.**

In her view, the future of school libraries lies in their capacity to *"become facilitators of dialogue, creativity, and action in the school and in the territory around it."*

**Reaching underserved groups**—such as children with special educational needs, pupils from minority backgrounds, or families at risk of exclusion—remains a persistent challenge. At a systemic level, libraries must also advocate for their relevance in an era dominated by budget cuts and efficiency metrics, making the case to school leaders, policymakers, and funders that they are essential to **educational equity and lifelong learning.**

A persistent challenge noted in Portugal is the **declining involvement of families in promoting reading**, especially after primary school. As Paredes explains:



*"By the 7th year of education, the family's withdrawal is obvious and very difficult to overcome, as **socio-economic factors** come into play that do nothing to support this essential union."*

One of the most significant challenges, according to Masini, is to **strengthen reading education**.

*"It may sound paradoxical," she reflected, "but libraries are often used more as meeting and study places than for actual reading—especially among young people."*

She also stressed the importance of more substantial **support and collaboration with schools** to make libraries more relevant and **better connected to students' everyday learning**.

During our cross-national working groups, librarians identified key barriers, including:

- **Difficulties in connecting with potential users**
- **Adapting services to evolving needs**
- **Embracing digital transformation**
- **Assuming proactive roles**
- **Building collaborations across networks**

Overcoming these challenges requires not only investment in training, resources, and cross-sector partnerships, but also a **broader cultural shift that empowers librarians to act as innovators and facilitators**.

**Stakeholder voices** reinforce these findings. Across contexts, a recurring concern is the **lack of institutional and municipal support**, which prevents libraries from innovating, improving facilities, or developing inclusive programs. A professional responsible for the assessment and **diagnosis service in Spain** stressed:

*"Greater involvement of political institutions is necessary to support this transformation."*

Without such systemic backing, it will be difficult for libraries to adapt to new community needs and remain truly accessible, relevant, and impactful spaces for all.



## 2.5 From evidence to action: insights from WP3 and WP4

### WP3.1 Results - Towards a New Idea of Library

The European project Byblios promotes the social and professional inclusion of people with cognitive disabilities by reimagining libraries as inclusive community hubs. Within this framework, Work Package 3 (WP3) explored new opportunities, risks, and priorities for the “future library” through a Participatory Action Research (PAR) approach combined with comparative analysis of good practices. This article presents the WP3 methodology and results from five European countries — Italy, Portugal, Germany, Romania, and Spain — highlighting how libraries can become catalysts for learning, employability, and social participation.

Across Europe, libraries are evolving from repositories of books to dynamic learning environments that promote inclusion, participation, and active citizenship. The Byblios project explores how libraries can contribute to the social and professional inclusion of people with cognitive disabilities, aligning with broader transformations such as digital transition, lifelong learning, and career guidance for young people and adults.

Work Package 3 (WP3), titled “Towards a New Idea of Library,” aimed to understand how libraries can respond to these emerging needs and act as drivers of social innovation and inclusion.

### Methodology

Activity 3.1 was based on a Participatory Action Research (PAR) methodology: it represents a transformative approach to inquiry that prioritizes collaboration, critical reflection, and social change, making it particularly appropriate for the aims and structure of the BYBLIOS project. It fosters a dynamic process in which librarians, educators, young adults with disabilities, and other relevant stakeholders act as co-creators of knowledge. Within the context of the action research project (WP 3.1), qualitative methodology is essential for gathering detailed feedback from participants through focus groups, allowing researchers to understand the impact of the intervention and refine strategies based on real-world insights.

The investigation involved multiple stakeholders to explore the potential of a new future library in light of major social transformations. Participants were selected from library staff, including librarians, library assistants and other staff involved in daily operations (Library Front Office and Back Office). Libraries were examined as open and flexible spaces, located in urban, suburban, and rural areas, and embedded in public schools, community centers, municipalities, and adult education centres. The focus groups discussed the topic of libraries as social and cultural hubs, the future of them and hiring library staff with disabilities and



explored the challenges and opportunities associated with integrating them into the daily operations of libraries.

These are the main discussion points that will be discussed during the sessions:

1. **Introductions and Sharing Experiences:** Participants introduce themselves, describe their roles and backgrounds and share past experiences working with people with disabilities or other fragilities.
2. **Future of Libraries:** Discussion on areas of development for libraries, including the acquisition of new skills, career planning services for young people and the role of libraries as inclusive learning spaces.
3. **Accessibility and Inclusion in Libraries:** Sharing practices and examples on improving accessibility and inclusion for both staff and users , including architectural modifications, digital accessibility, mentorship and training.
4. **Hiring Library Staff with Disabilities:** Presentation of the “Byblios” Project and discussion on hiring library staff with disabilities or other mental and physical weaknesses, emphasizing the importance of diversity and inclusion in the workplace.
5. **Concerns and Challenges in Integration:** Participants can raise specific concerns and challenges related to hiring staff with disabilities or other fragilities, including accommodation needs, training requirements, and potential biases
6. **Support Strategies:** The group can brainstorm strategies and resources that could support the integration of staff with disabilities or other weaknesses, such as accessibility training, mentorship programs, and adaptive technology.

Research activities included focus groups and working groups in five European countries: Italy, Portugal, Germany, Romania and Spain. Each partner involved librarians, educators, policy makers, social service representatives and users with cognitive disabilities. The focus groups were conducted in groups of 4 people to allow information to be collected more easily and to delve deeper into the analysis topics. A total of **80 participants** were involved in the evaluation process, through **four focus groups of four people each** conducted in each of the five participating countries.

The main output was a report identifying new opportunities, needs, and priorities, as well as risks and barriers for transforming libraries into inclusive learning and employment ecosystems.



## Mapping of Good Practices and Key Findings

Following the participatory research, partners conducted a mapping of good practices across the five countries. The analysis focused on how libraries already act as inclusive environments that promote accessibility, autonomy, and social participation.

Four main dimensions emerged:

1. Social inclusion and accessibility
2. Training and employment pathways
3. Community engagement and networking
4. Digital inclusion and innovation



## Results by Country

### Italy

Four focus groups involved library staff, teachers, and inclusion referents from public, school, and university libraries, sharing professional experiences and perspectives on inclusion.

1. **Future of libraries:** Libraries are seen as community hubs and learning centers combining digital innovation with traditional reading. Participants envision libraries as inclusive and community-centered spaces, combining traditional reading offering innovative services and fostering social interaction
2. **Accessibility & inclusion:** Key challenges include physical accessibility, staff training, public awareness and resource limitations. Strategies proposed include adaptive technologies, mentoring, inclusive policies and continuous staff training.
3. **Hiring staff with disabilities:** Generally viewed positively, with proper training and mentorship. Inclusion of staff with disabilities is considered a way to enhance empathy and user experience. Barriers include prejudice, lack of leadership support and insufficient resources. In general, new generations are perceived as more receptive to inclusion.

Italian focus groups highlighted that libraries can evolve into inclusive, accessible, and socially engaging spaces. Critical success factors include leadership support, staff training, adaptive technologies, mentoring, and cultural openness. BYBLIOS is seen as a model for promoting inclusion in Italian and European libraries.



## Portugal

1. **Role of libraries:** Evolution from places of study to cultural and social centers, integrating learning, socialization, and community; balance between paper books and digital resources; librarians as mediators, social support, and guidance for digital and cultural inclusion.
2. **Accessibility and inclusion:** Adequate physical spaces and infrastructure; cognitive and relational inclusion with attention to empathy and a sense of belonging; personalized support for students with disabilities or frailties.
3. **Integration of staff with disabilities:** Possible through specific training, teamwork, and digital tools; need for planning, mentoring, and awareness-raising to overcome structural and cultural barriers.
4. **Main challenges:** Lack of staff and resources; infrastructure that is not always modern; digital divide and literacy issues, even among adults; declining reading habits among young people.
5. **Opportunities and strategies:** Libraries as multifunctional and inclusive community spaces; collaborations with schools and associations for creative and accessible activities; digital technologies as complementary tools for accessibility and engagement; ongoing training and clear professional roles.

School libraries in Portugal are engines of inclusion, equity, and community, where integrating people with disabilities, balancing traditional and digital approaches, and staff training are key to addressing current and future challenges.





## Germany

The German focus groups highlighted the evolving role of libraries as multifaceted community hubs, blending traditional reading with educational, social, and digital functions. Across all groups, participants emphasised that libraries are no longer mere repositories of books but vibrant spaces fostering learning, social interaction, and inclusion.

1. **Libraries as Community Hubs:** Libraries serve as “third places” where users of all ages—children, young people, seniors—can gather, learn, and interact. Libraries increasingly provide workshops, language courses, digital literacy training, and spaces for social engagement.
2. **Skills for Future Librarians:** Beyond traditional cataloging, librarians require social, psychological, and pedagogical skills. Key competencies include empathy, communication, adaptability, conflict management and digital literacy.
3. **Digital Transformation:** Digital tools offer opportunities for learning and accessibility, but must complement rather than replace physical books. On the one hand, libraries aim to educate users on balanced and responsible technology use; on the other hand, resource constraints can limit digital integration and the adoption of adaptive technologies.
4. **Inclusion and Disabilities:** Employing individuals with mental disabilities is seen as both a moral imperative and an operational opportunity, enhancing team dynamics and fostering empathy. In this sense a successful integration requires ongoing supervision, tailored task assignment, staff training, and institutional support.
5. **Structural Challenges:** Common challenges across focus groups include insufficient funding, precarious staff contracts, limited training time and fragmented cooperation among institutions. Barriers also include stigma, limited staffing, financial constraints and organizational flexibility.

German libraries are transforming into inclusive, community-centered spaces that balance educational, social, and digital roles. Although challenges like limited resources and structural barriers remain, careful planning, staff training, and supportive institutional policies can help libraries become models of social innovation. Networking with schools, associations, and local authorities is essential to support long-term projects, literacy promotion, and inclusive employment.

## Romania



Also in Romania, four focus groups were conducted within the BYBLIOS project, with the aim of exploring perspectives on the inclusion of people with disabilities in public libraries.

1. **Role of libraries:** Libraries are evolving into multifunctional community hubs and digital mediators, balancing traditional books with digital resources. Librarians need digital, communication, empathetic, and creative skills to support users and community engagement.
2. **Inclusion of people with disabilities:** Users with intellectual or mental disabilities are generally welcomed, but staff integration is challenging due to recruitment procedures, lack of specialized training, and need for mentorship. Inclusion strategies include volunteering, task adaptation, and targeted training.
3. **Challenges:** Communication barriers, stereotypes, staff shortages, and complex hiring regulations limit full integration. Librarians feel a mix of empathy and caution.
4. **Opportunities and strategies:** Libraries can enhance social reputation, foster inclusivity, and provide meaningful roles for people with disabilities through mentoring, training, and adapted tasks. Digital tools and creative initiatives support accessibility and engagement.

Romanian libraries are adapting to digital and social changes, aiming to combine community support, technological advancement, and inclusion of people with disabilities, while facing structural and emotional challenges in staff integration.

## Spain

1. **Infrastructure and accessibility.** Libraries face physical and digital barriers, especially in historic buildings and rural areas. The adoption of accessible spaces and assistive technology tools is essential to ensure the inclusion and active participation of all users.
2. **Technology and digital services.** Inclusive technology, from accessible software to centralized digital platforms, is seen as a key tool for expanding access and facilitating learning. Training and ongoing support for users and staff are essential to fully exploit its potential.



3. Staff training and awareness. Staff require ongoing training on inclusive communication, disability, and bias, supported by mentoring and peer support. Awareness-raising helps create a welcoming environment and enhance everyone's skills.
4. Employment inclusion. Hiring staff with disabilities not only promotes equity, but also enriches libraries with diverse perspectives and improves the design of inclusive services and spaces. Practices such as accessible job postings and internship programs encourage active employee participation.
5. Collaboration and Community: Involving users, associations, schools, and families in planning activities ensures truly inclusive services. The exchange of experiences between urban, rural, and university libraries fosters innovation and best practices.
6. Leadership and Strategy: Active, inclusion-oriented leadership integrates clear objectives, shared protocols, and dedicated resources, translating intentions into concrete and sustainable actions over time.
7. Future Vision: Libraries are perceived as inclusive community hubs that combine learning, culture, socialisation, and digital access. Projects like BYBLIOS are key tools for disseminating inclusive practices, monitoring impact, and building equitable and welcoming environments.

## Cross-Country Insights

The comparative analysis across Italy, Portugal, Germany, Romania and Spain highlights a common European direction, showing that libraries of the future are evolving into inclusive, community-centred and digitally innovative hubs that move beyond their traditional roles as spaces for books or study.

- Libraries are shifting from traditional knowledge repositories to active inclusion hubs.
- They play an increasing role in career education, lifelong learning and employability.
- Key challenges include limited leadership engagement, insufficient staff training, physical and cognitive accessibility barriers and scarce resources.
- Solutions include investing in assistive technologies, creating accessible spaces, providing support tutors for staff with disabilities and promoting inclusive employment.



- The integration of digital and creative tools—such as storytelling, accessible design and gamified learning—enhances engagement.
- There is growing recognition of libraries as accessible, socially embedded and competence-oriented spaces.

## Highlights

- **Participatory Action Research (PAR)** involving 5 European countries explored how libraries can evolve into inclusive learning and employability ecosystems. A total of **80 participants** were involved in the evaluation process.
- **Good practices** were mapped across Italy, Portugal, Germany, Romania, and Spain, illustrating diverse models of social inclusion and innovation.
- Libraries demonstrated potential to foster **career development, digital literacy and lifelong learning** for people with cognitive disabilities.
- The study identified four core dimensions for the “future library”: **inclusion, training, community engagement, and digital innovation.**
- Findings define a **European vision of the inclusive library** as a catalyst for social participation, creativity, and sustainable community development.

## Conclusions

WP3 of the Byblios project demonstrates that libraries can serve as inclusive ecosystems for learning, work, and civic participation.

Through *Activity 3.1 – Participatory Action Research*, partners conducted focus groups to identify shared priorities, opportunities and barriers for the libraries of the future. The mapping of good practices provided concrete models that illustrate how libraries already act as agents of inclusion in diverse European contexts.



Together, these findings define a European vision for the “inclusive library”—a space that combines digital innovation, social inclusion, and career development, supporting people with cognitive disabilities in their learning and professional growth.

### **Rethinking the Future of Librarianship: Insights from Activity 3.2 – Needs Analysis of the Byblios Project**

The European project Byblios aims to promote the inclusion and employability of people with cognitive disabilities through the redefinition of libraries as inclusive and innovative community hubs. Within this framework, Activity 3.2 – Needs Analysis, part of Work Package 3 (WP3), investigated the future skill needs of librarians and related staff in light of social, technological, and educational transformations. The study engaged 114 librarians and 47 stakeholders across five European countries — Italy, Portugal, Germany, Romania, and Spain — and identified key areas for professional development, digital transformation, and pedagogical innovation. The findings informed the design of methodological guidelines and pedagogical models for the librarians of the future.

Libraries are at the crossroads of rapid social and technological change. Beyond their traditional role as repositories of information, they are increasingly recognized as inclusive learning ecosystems that foster social participation, digital literacy, and community engagement.

In this context, Activity 3.2 – Needs Analysis aimed to:

- Analyse the future skill needs of librarians and related professionals.
- Redefine the librarian’s role in inclusive, digital, and socially engaged contexts.
- Identify new pedagogical models and training pathways to support professional growth.

The activity builds on the outcomes of Activity 3.1 – Participatory Action Research, deepening the understanding of the evolving professional identity of librarians in Europe.

### **Methodology**



The project adopts an integrated methodological approach, combining qualitative and quantitative methods through a strategy of methodological triangulation. This approach aims to provide a comprehensive and multidimensional understanding of the political, social, relational, and economic implications linked to the evolving role of libraries and the training needs of their staff across different European contexts. From a qualitative standpoint, the project foresees the organisation and facilitation of in-depth thematic focus groups. In parallel, a quantitative strategy was implemented through the development and administration of two structured online questionnaires—one for **stakeholders** and one for **librarians**. These tools helped us to collect large-scale, comparable data on perceptions, competencies, training needs, and aspirations related to the professional development of library staff.

The quantitative approach involved:

- 119 librarians from public, school, and community libraries.
- 47 stakeholders, including educators, social service representatives, policymakers, and NGOs.

Data collection took place between March and June 2024 in Italy, Portugal, Germany, Romania, and Spain, using:

**The stakeholder questionnaire** was designed to gather insights from institutional and organisational actors who collaborate with or influence the work of libraries. It focused on the following thematic areas:

- **Role Evolution:** Perceptions of how libraries are responding to changing community dynamics, digital transformation, and social inclusion.
- **Training Needs:** Identification of essential skills required by library staff, with emphasis on digital literacy, accessibility, and user engagement.
- **Mentoring Capacity:** Assessment of the relevance of mentoring as a tool for professional and personal growth within library settings.
- **Inclusive Mentorship:** Reflections on the potential of mentoring programs to include people with disabilities and to foster inclusive workplace cultures.

**The librarian questionnaire** addressed library professionals directly and was structured to capture their perspectives, experiences, and expectations. Key dimensions included:



- **Evolution of Professional Roles:** Self-assessment of how their work has changed in relation to technological, social, and organisational shifts.
- **Digital Skills:** Evaluation of their digital competencies and confidence in applying them in daily tasks.
- **Specific Digital Skill Areas:** Including information and data literacy, digital communication and collaboration, content creation, cybersecurity awareness, and problem-solving in digital environments.
- **Mentoring and Support Roles:** Interest in becoming mentors and perceived readiness to support colleagues and trainees, particularly from diverse backgrounds
- **Inclusion and Disability:** Attitudes toward mentoring individuals with disabilities and perceived benefits of an inclusive workforce.





## Stakeholders' Results

The analysis of stakeholder questionnaires highlights the perspectives of local administrators, policy-makers, educators, and other institutional actors on the **evolving role of European libraries**. Overall, stakeholders perceive **libraries** as increasingly **dynamic, community-centered, and digitally capable**, with 61.7% reporting significant to profound transformations in their role. Nonetheless, some caution remains, with a minority noting minimal or no change, reflecting structural, political, or resource-related constraints.

Stakeholders recognize that **librarians generally possess solid digital skills**, with the majority rated as competent to very good, although there remains a need for ongoing professional development to keep pace with emerging technologies.

**Mentoring skills**, particularly the capacity to support trainees including those with disabilities, are seen as promising but underdeveloped; both librarians and stakeholders acknowledge gaps in structured training, confidence, and organizational support.

Country-level variations are notable, with Portugal and Spain showing full awareness of inclusive mentorship potential, while Italy, Germany and Romania indicate room for increased attention and advocacy.

The stakeholder data emphasize the importance of **context-sensitive strategies**, investment in staff training, inclusive mentoring programs, and inter-institutional collaboration to ensure that libraries can fully embrace their role as innovative, inclusive, and socially embedded hubs.

## Librarians' Results

The European survey of librarians from Italy, Spain, Romania, Portugal, and Germany highlights a profession in transformation.

A majority of respondents (68%) perceive **libraries as evolving significantly**, with 27.7% saying “evolving a lot” and 18.5% “completely evolving,” reflecting a shared view of libraries as dynamic, community-focused, and digitally engaged institutions. Only a small minority (less than 8%) perceives little or no change.

Regarding mentoring, 79.8% of librarians have considered the possibility of mentoring new trainees, including those with disabilities, indicating a strong professional openness to inclusion. Self-assessed



confidence in mentoring was moderate, with a median score of 5 on a 1–7 scale, suggesting that most feel reasonably prepared but that there is room to strengthen skills, particularly for those at the lower end of the scale.

European librarians increasingly see their role extending beyond traditional library functions to support **career development and lifelong learning**. Libraries are perceived as key spaces for education, skills acquisition, and professional growth. A majority of respondents recognise that libraries actively contribute to lifelong learning, offering programs, resources, and mentoring opportunities that support both personal and professional development.

### Key Competence areas

Across all countries, the analysis highlights **four key competence areas** for the future of librarians and library staff.

1. **Digital Transformation and Technological Adaptability** – Staff need to master emerging technologies, digital tools, and innovative platforms to support users, enhance services, and ensure libraries remain agile in a rapidly evolving digital landscape.
2. **Pedagogical and Mentoring Skills** – Librarians are increasingly expected to guide, train, and mentor new staff and users, including people with disabilities, fostering inclusive learning and professional development.
3. **Social Inclusion and Community Mediation** – Libraries must serve as accessible, community-centred spaces, mediating social engagement, cultural participation, and equitable access to information for diverse audiences.
4. **Career Development and Lifelong Learning** – Libraries act as hubs for personal and professional growth, supporting lifelong learning, skill acquisition, employability, and continuous education for all community members.

These four areas collectively define a modern, future-ready vision of library professionals as adaptable, inclusive, and educationally oriented agents of community development.



## Country-Specific Insights

### Italy

In Italy, the survey showed a strong educational orientation, with 35% of respondents being teachers and 20% being school librarians, together representing 55% of respondents. University librarians and “Other” roles each accounted for 15%, while public librarians were 10%

Most librarians perceive the role of libraries as moderately evolving with gradual changes in services and digital integration. Following this lead, digital skills are considered essential: in fact, 70% prioritised training in digital tools, while self-assessed competence is moderately high, with a median confidence of 5 (1 to 7 scale).

Focusing on mentoring, the Italian survey highlights that librarians strongly recognise its importance but feel only moderately confident in their abilities. 75% of respondents rated mentoring as essential, signalling that guiding, supporting, and inspiring others—particularly students, users, or new staff—is increasingly seen as a core part of their professional role. However, when asked about self-confidence, the median score was 5 on a 1–7 scale, with most responses falling between 4 and 6. This indicates that while librarians feel reasonably prepared, few feel fully equipped to mentor effectively, and none rated themselves at the highest confidence level.

Mentoring is also framed in an inclusive perspective: 85% of librarians expressed willingness to mentor trainees with disabilities, reflecting both ethical commitment and practical readiness to foster inclusion. Open-ended responses emphasized that mentoring supports skill development, autonomy, self-confidence, and social integration for mentees. Librarians noted that inclusive mentoring encourages the library environment to become more accessible, supportive, and socially engaged, benefiting both staff and users.

### Portugal

An analysis of the respondents to the questionnaire in Portugal shows a predominance of public librarians (15 respondents, 44.1%), followed by school librarians (11 respondents, 32.4%) and technical/operational assistants (8 respondents, 23.5%).

Participants perceived a significant evolution in the role of libraries, with 44.1% believing that libraries are "evolving a lot" and 26.5% considering them "completely evolved," for a total of more than 70%. Training



needs reflect this evolution: 76.5% indicated training in digital tools as a priority, 55.9% in information literacy, and 52.9% in program development, while 32.4% and 35.3% considered tutoring/mentoring and customer service skills important, respectively.

The questionnaire analysis reveals that Portuguese librarians perceive mentoring as a central component of their professional role. 52.9% of respondents considered it "very important" and 44.1% "important", confirming the widespread importance of this function. When asked whether librarians could mentor new colleagues, including those with disabilities, 85.3% responded positively, demonstrating a strong openness to inclusive mentoring practices, while only 14.7% expressed doubts or uncertainty.

Librarians' confidence in their own mentoring abilities is generally moderate-high: 70% rate it between 5 and 6 on a scale of 1 to 7 and only 8.8% report lower levels of confidence (2 or 3). These data highlight that, although mentoring is considered essential, many professionals recognise the need for additional training or support to increase their effectiveness. Participants also emphasised that inclusive mentoring fosters not only the development of practical and interpersonal skills in new librarians, but also the autonomy, confidence, and social integration of colleagues with disabilities, while strengthening the library's inclusive culture and ability to respond to the diverse needs of the community.

## Germany

In Germany, the majority of participants are public librarians (about 77%), followed by university librarians (18%) and school librarians (5%). Perceptions of the evolving role of libraries are generally positive: over 70% believe that libraries are changing significantly or profoundly, while a minority perceive only limited or moderate evolution.

Regarding training, digital skills are considered a priority, with nearly 95% of participants reporting the importance of digital tools and resources. This is followed by the ability to support users in information management (information literacy, 62%), customer service (59%), and tutoring/mentoring skills (59%). Program development receives greater attention from a third of participants, while some cite additional needs for inclusion, diversity, and institutional communication.

German librarians generally show good confidence in their digital skills (scale 1 to 7): approximately 70% place themselves in the middle range of the self-assessment scale (4-5), with 15% feeling above average and only a minority reporting low confidence. The focus is on essential skills such as information management,



digital communication, security, and problem-solving, while digital content creation is perceived as less central.

Mentoring is considered important by over 84% of participants, though their confidence in their own abilities varies: approximately half feel fairly confident, while a third express a high level of confidence. Furthermore, 87% of librarians have considered mentoring trainees with disabilities, indicating an openness to inclusive practices.

Open-ended responses show strong recognition of the value of including people with disabilities in libraries. Among the benefits reported are personal growth, autonomy, social integration, positive human relationships, security, and job stability. Librarians perceive libraries as accessible, collaborative, and stimulating environments that offer opportunities for development and active participation.

## Romania

In Romania, 70% of participants are school librarians, while 30% work in public libraries. When asked about the evolution of libraries' roles in the community, opinions were quite polarised. 30 % believed that the role of libraries was "evolving slightly" (value 3), another 30% thought it was "evolving a lot" (value 6), while 20% considered them "completely evolved" (value 7). The lowest positions, corresponding to "not evolving at all" (value 1) and "evolving very little" (value 2), were chosen by 5% each, and 10% selected "evolving quite a bit" (value 5).

Regarding training, a clear focus on digital skills emerges: 75% of librarians identify digital tools and resources as their top priority, followed by 45% who cite program development, 35% who cite customer service skills, and 30% who emphasise tutoring and mentoring skills. 25% consider information literacy skills essential, while 5% cite other training areas. Self-assessment of digital skills paints an overall positive picture: 40% place themselves at the highest level of confidence, 30% at level 6, and 10% at level 5, while only 20% rate themselves at intermediate levels (3 or 4). No one considers themselves to be slightly or not at all competent.

Mentoring is perceived as an essential aspect of the profession: 90% of librarians consider it "very important" and the remaining 10% "fairly important." Confidence in their own tutoring skills is good but varied: 35% rate themselves at 5 out of 7, 20% at 6, and another 20% at the maximum level of 7; 20% rate themselves at 4, and only 5% at 3. Overall, 75% of participants exhibit a medium-high level of confidence, but there is room for improvement through experience and targeted training.



When asked whether they had ever considered having librarians serve as tutors for new trainees with disabilities, responses were clearly divided: 50% answered "yes" and 50% "no." This highlights the need to promote greater awareness and training on inclusive practices, so that the potential role of librarians as mentors also extends to people with disabilities.

Open-ended responses to the opportunities and benefits of including people with disabilities in libraries generally take a predominantly positive stance. Several participants emphasised that the presence of people with disabilities could improve accessibility and encourage other users with similar experiences to frequent the library. Some responses, however, raised concerns about practical management or available resources, indicating the need for structural support.

Regarding the benefits for people with disabilities themselves, an inclusive and optimistic view prevails: librarians believe that working in a library can foster social integration, personal development, skill acquisition, and autonomy. The library is seen as a place of learning and growth, capable of offering concrete opportunities for participation and building self-esteem.

## Spain

From Spain, the majority of respondents (66.67%) work as university librarians, while the remaining 33.33% work in fields related to pedagogy and education.

Regarding the evolution of the role of libraries in the community, the opinions gathered outline a strongly positive and dynamic vision. No participant indicated the lowest values on the scale (1–3), and a third of the sample (33.33%) believes that the role of libraries is evolving profoundly, while another 33.33% perceive a moderate but significant evolution. The remainder are divided between those who describe a "considerable" or "substantial" evolution (16.67% for each category). Overall, Spanish librarians view their institutions as undergoing a transformation, capable of redefining their identity and mission in response to new social, educational, and technological challenges.

When it comes to digital skills, participants showed a moderate level of confidence. Most Spanish respondents (about 67%) rated themselves around the middle of the scale (levels 4–5), while a few placed themselves higher or slightly lower. Training needs focused mainly on **digital tools and resources** (around two-thirds of respondents), followed by **information literacy** and **program development**. No one mentioned customer service or mentoring as priorities. Overall, respondents viewed **digital competence** as a





key, multifaceted aspect of their professional role, encompassing information management, online collaboration, safety, and problem-solving skills.

All respondents also stated that they had considered the possibility of librarians acting as mentors to people with cognitive disabilities, demonstrating a widespread sensitivity to inclusion. When asked to reflect on the benefits of including people with disabilities in libraries, participants highlighted four recurring themes:

- Inclusion and equal opportunities, with the library seen as a model of social justice and diversity.
- Enrichment of the work environment, thanks to qualities such as empathy, creativity, and resilience.
- Educational role, capable of promoting awareness and sensitivity towards accessibility.
- Practical adaptation of roles, recognising that some operational tasks may be particularly suited to people with cognitive disabilities.

Finally, regarding the benefits for young people with disabilities, a strongly positive picture emerges: library work is perceived as an opportunity for personal growth, skill development, and social inclusion. Participants emphasise the importance of increasing self-esteem, a sense of purpose, and the acquisition of practical and interpersonal skills, which can facilitate integration into the workforce and the community. The library is therefore seen as a nurturing and welcoming environment that offers concrete opportunities for learning, participation, and independence.



## Discussion

The findings from Activity 3.2 confirm that the librarian's role is undergoing a structural and functional transformation across Europe. The traditional custodian role is being replaced by a hybrid professional profile integrating:

- Digital expertise,
- Educational and mentoring capacities,
- Social innovation competences, and
- Community engagement skills.

This aligns with broader European trends emphasizing lifelong learning, inclusion, and employability. The results also suggest the need to embed pedagogical and digital competences into librarian training curricula, bridging cultural heritage with new learning technologies.

## Highlights

- 47 stakeholder responses and 119 librarian responses from five European countries contributed to a comprehensive needs analysis on the future of librarianship.
- The study identified **four key competence areas** for future librarians: **digital transformation, pedagogical and mentoring skills, social inclusion, and lifelong career development.**
- The data suggests a generally positive outlook in digital competencies, with the vast majority of **stakeholders (almost 83% of the stakeholder sample)** rating the **digital skills of librarians at a moderate to high level.** Notably, no respondents rated digital skills as very low
- A majority of the **librarians** (almost 68% of the librarian sample) believe the role of libraries is evolving significantly. This perception is consistent with the dynamics that in recent years have been redefining libraries as spaces for continuous learning, digital inclusion and cultural innovation.
- A growing shift toward “**pedagogical librarianship**” was observed, with about **80% of librarians** envisioning the librarian as a **mentor and learning facilitator** for new interns, even those with disabilities.



- Results reveal the **emergence of new professional identities**, positioning librarians as **digital mentors, inclusion agents, and community connectors**.
- Findings directly informed the **Report on Pedagogical Models and Methodological Guidelines for Future Librarians**, which underpins future training modules in WP4 and WP5.

## Conclusions

Activity 3.2 – Needs Analysis of the Byblios project provides evidence-based insights into the evolution of librarianship in the digital and inclusive era.

The survey of 48 professionals across five countries highlights a shared need for upskilling and role redefinition, centered on digital transformation and mentoring competences. The final output — a Report on Pedagogical Models and Methodological Guidelines for Future Librarians — provides a framework for policy innovation and capacity building.

These results will directly inform the training modules and educational resources developed in WP4 and WP5, contributing to a new European vision of inclusive, future-ready librarianship.



## **Inclusive Pathways in Libraries: The Byblios Protocol for Professional Inclusion**

The **Byblios project** promotes the professional and social inclusion of people with mild to moderate mental disabilities through the transformation of libraries into **inclusive learning and working environments**. Within this framework, **Work Package 4 (WP4)** aimed to design, test, and validate a **Protocol for Professional Inclusion** and a **Career e-Portfolio** as practical and pedagogical tools to support this process.

The WP4 implementation involved five European countries — **Italy, Portugal, Germany, Romania, and Spain** — and focused on defining an **attitudinal profile of trainees**, organizing **training and work experiences** within the context of new inclusive libraries, and developing **digital and reflective tools** for competence recognition. The activities led to the creation of a **reliable and transferable protocol**, a **Career e-Portfolio web platform**, and a set of **learning materials and storytelling videos** to support the evaluation of work-based learning in inclusive library environments.

The library is increasingly recognized as a **space of learning, community engagement, and inclusion**. WP4 of the Byblios project built on the theoretical and methodological framework developed in WP3 to translate it into **practical models of professional inclusion**.

Two main activities structured this phase:

- **Activity 4.1:** Definition and testing of a **Protocol for Professional Inclusion** of people with cognitive disabilities.
- **Activity 4.2:** Development of a **Career e-Portfolio** and related **learning materials** to support both organisation and evaluation of pilot internships.

These activities were implemented collaboratively by project partners in five European countries, each adapting the methodology to its **institutional, cultural, and regional context**.

### **Activity 4.1 – Definition and Testing of a Protocol for Professional Inclusion**

Activity 4.1 aimed to define a **common European framework** for supporting the inclusion of people with mental disabilities through **work-based learning experiences in libraries**.

The **Protocol for Professional Inclusion** includes:



- The **attitudinal and competence profile** of trainees with mild to moderate impairment.
- Guidelines for the **organisation of internships and training experiences** in libraries.
- Tools for **observation, evaluation and mentoring**.

The testing phase involved + **10 internships** organised and promoted by national partners in different regional contexts. Each internship combined **on-the-job training, mentoring, and learning documentation**, integrating the pedagogical principles of the Byblios model:

- **Personalisation of learning paths,**
- **Progressive autonomy,**
- **Mentoring and reflective learning,**
- Use of **libraries as inclusive community environments.**

The outcome of Activity 4.1 is a **tested and replicable protocol**, adaptable to various European contexts and capable of supporting both local and transnational initiatives for inclusion.

#### Activity 4.2 – Career e-Portfolio for People with Cognitive Disabilities

Activity 4.2 developed a **Career e-Portfolio**, a **digital pedagogical tool** designed to document and support learning during the internships.

The Career e-Portfolio:

- Collects **evidence of learning outcomes** achieved in real working contexts.
- Serves as a **support tool for mentors, tutors, and librarians** in evaluating progress.
- Encourages **self-awareness and motivation** among trainees.



The e-Portfolio supports the **organisation and evaluation** of internships and contributes to defining **future career pathways** for people with mental disabilities. Digital skills are also embedded in the tool, as the documentation and storytelling process enhances **digital literacy and autonomy**.

### Country-Based Implementation

The testing and implementation of the inclusion protocol took place in **five countries: Italy, Portugal, Germany, Romania, and Spain**.

Each partner adapted the framework according to national priorities, institutional settings, and available networks. While the activities shared common objectives, their operational focus varied:

- In **Italy**, the protocol was tested in a school library setting, involving two young women with Down syndrome in daily lending activities. Their participation fostered inclusion and awareness among children, who expressed genuine curiosity and affection, even creating drawings of the trainees as part of their shared experience.
- In **Portugal**, the implementation focused on the **digital inclusion dimension**, integrating the e-Portfolio as a self-assessment tool.
- In **Germany**, the testing focused on **organisational adaptation and mentoring models** among library staff.
- In **Romania**, the process involved **community libraries** and partnerships with local authorities and educational centres.
- In **Spain**, the emphasis was on **storytelling and audiovisual documentation**, resulting in **videos that capture each learning pathway**.

Across all contexts, the activities highlighted the potential of **libraries as inclusive workplaces** and **centers for lifelong learning**, capable of fostering autonomy, digital skills, and employability among people with mental disabilities.

### Results and Outputs

The implementation of WP4 produced three main tangible results:





1. A **tested and validated protocol for professional inclusion**, adaptable and sustainable in different regional and institutional contexts.
2. A **Career e-Portfolio platform**, serving as both a digital repository and a pedagogical support system.
3. A **collection of storytelling videos and learning materials** documenting the pilot experiences in all five countries.

The evidence collected during testing demonstrates that **structured mentoring, reflective learning, and digital documentation** can significantly enhance participants' self-efficacy, communication skills, and social inclusion.



## Highlights

- **Five European countries** (Italy, Portugal, Germany, Romania, and Spain) tested the **Byblios Protocol for Professional Inclusion**, promoting work-based learning for people with mild to moderate cognitive disabilities.
- **16 internships** were organized across libraries and cultural institutions, integrating **mentoring, reflective learning, and personalized training paths**.
- The **Career e-Portfolio web platform** was developed to **document learning outcomes, support mentoring, and foster digital literacy and self-awareness**.
- National adaptations highlighted diverse approaches: **digital inclusion in Portugal, organizational mentoring in Germany, storytelling in Spain, and community collaboration in Romania and Italy**.
- Results show that **structured mentoring and digital documentation** enhance participants' **autonomy, communication skills, and employability**, establishing libraries as **inclusive workplaces and lifelong learning environments**.
- WP4 outputs — a **validated protocol, e-Portfolio platform, and storytelling materials** — offer a **replicable European model** for professional inclusion through libraries.

## Conclusions

The **Byblios Protocol for Professional Inclusion** represents a **scientifically grounded and practice-oriented model** for promoting the employability of people with cognitive disabilities in cultural and educational institutions.

The integration of the **Career e-Portfolio** ensures continuity between **training, work experience, and competence recognition**, offering a scalable approach for European libraries and social inclusion programs.

Through its participatory and cross-sectoral methodology, WP4 provides a **replicable model of inclusive professional training**, where libraries act as **bridges between education, work, and community engagement**.

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### 3. International good practices: libraries as community cornerstones

Across Europe, libraries are implementing innovative strategies to serve as vital community hubs. This section highlights exemplary practices from Germany, Romania, Spain, Portugal, and Italy, offering valuable insights for other institutions.

As Antonella Agnoli reminds us, “we can reinvent **libraries as the heart of the community** — places of connection between people, **capable of triggering a positive process of cultural and civic growth.**”

**“Lifelong learning and adult education are essential.** If libraries do not take on this role, we will be missing a crucial opportunity for ongoing education and skills development among citizens.

**Civic participation** is also a highly relevant area, though more difficult to implement. The library can serve as a forum where the community listens, engages in dialogue, and participates in social life.

The library must place itself at the forefront of **innovation**, offering **continuous training**, supporting the development of digital skills, and acting as a **driver of cultural transformation.**



***Policies of integration** already exist—for example, in collaboration with ONCE—to guarantee access for people with disabilities. This commitment must be broadened and strengthened.”* (Director of the University of Valladolid)

Stakeholder voices advocate for libraries to integrate **lifelong learning, civic engagement, digital and cultural innovation, and social inclusion**. As noted in Spain, “*a combination of all these aspects would be necessary to create inclusive spaces where all people, regardless of their abilities, can learn and participate.*”

### 3.1 Germany: innovation and accessibility

German libraries are renowned for their **strong emphasis on digital literacy, accessibility, and community engagement**. Many have successfully integrated advanced technology while maintaining a focus on traditional library services.

- 1) **Digitale Stadtbibliotheken:** Many German city libraries, such as the Stadtbibliothek Köln, offer **extensive digital resources**, including e-books, online courses, and digital archives. They often host **workshops on coding, cybersecurity, and media literacy**, bridging the digital divide for various age groups. This proactive approach ensures that citizens are equipped with essential skills for the modern world.
- 2) **"Makerspaces" and creative hubs:** Libraries like the Zentralbibliothek in Düsseldorf have incorporated "Makerspaces" equipped with **3D printers, laser cutters, and robotics kits**. These spaces foster **creativity, innovation, and hands-on learning**, attracting a new generation of users and encouraging **collaborative projects**.
- 3) **Intergenerational programs:** German libraries frequently host programs that **bring together different generations**, such as "Reading Grandparents" or technology workshops where young people teach seniors how to use smartphones or navigate the internet. This strengthens social bonds and facilitates knowledge transfer across age groups.



- 4) **Integration and diversity:** Recognising diverse populations, libraries in Germany often provide **multilingual resources**, host **language exchange** groups, and offer **specialised services for refugees and immigrants**, acting as crucial points of integration and support within the community.

## 3.2 Romania: revitalising spaces and engaging youth

Romanian libraries, often operating with more limited resources, are making remarkable strides in **community outreach and youth engagement**, transforming their spaces into **lively cultural and educational centres**.

1. **Cultural events and workshops:** The "Mihai Eminescu" County Library in Botoşani regularly organises a wide array of **cultural events**, including **book launches, poetry readings, art exhibitions, and traditional music concerts**. These events breathe life into the library, making it a vibrant cultural hub.
2. **Reading promotion programs for children:** Many Romanian libraries prioritise programs aimed at fostering a **love for reading among children from a young age**. The County Library "Octavian Goga" in Cluj-Napoca has implemented successful **"Storytelling Hours" and interactive reading clubs** that engage children through creative activities and games.
3. **Community partnerships for social inclusion:** Libraries are increasingly **partnering with NGOs and local authorities** to address social issues. For example, some libraries offer free tutoring for disadvantaged students or provide spaces for social support groups, demonstrating their commitment to social inclusion.
4. **Modernisation of spaces:** Even with budget constraints, many Romanian libraries are undergoing modernisation, **creating inviting and comfortable spaces with modern furniture, improved lighting, and designated areas for different activities**, making them more appealing for community gatherings.





### 3.3 Spain: social cohesion and digital inclusion

Spanish libraries play a pivotal role in promoting **social cohesion, cultural diversity, and digital inclusion**, often serving as central hubs for neighbourhood life and lifelong learning.

1. **Neighbourhood libraries as social anchors.** In cities like Barcelona, neighbourhood libraries such as *Biblioteca Sant Antoni* are deeply woven into the local fabric. **They act as meeting points, host community association gatherings, and provide information on local services**, making them indispensable anchors of social life.
2. **Bridging the digital divide.** Public libraries are at the forefront of **digital inclusion**, offering **free courses on computer skills, internet usage, and digital literacy**. The *Bibliotecas Públicas de Madrid* system, for example, delivers a comprehensive program of workshops open to all citizens, regardless of prior experience, ensuring **equitable access to digital knowledge**.
3. **Celebrating local culture and heritage.** Many Spanish libraries also **strengthen community identity by curating exhibitions, hosting lectures, and preserving local historical archives**. These initiatives provide platforms for local artists, writers, and historians, while reinforcing pride in cultural heritage.
4. **Co-creation with users.** Increasingly, libraries **involve users directly** in the design and evaluation of services through surveys, focus groups, and volunteer programs. This **participatory approach** ensures that offerings reflect community needs and aspirations. Among the most inspiring examples are **easy-to-read workshops for people with intellectual disabilities**, often developed in partnership with Third-Sector organisations, such as associations and NGOs. These collaborations highlight libraries as not only providers of cultural resources but also **powerful enablers of social inclusion**, particularly for vulnerable groups.

### 3.4 Portugal: lifelong learning and cultural access

Portuguese libraries are characterised by their **strong focus on lifelong learning, cultural accessibility, and community integration**, often serving as essential educational and cultural resources, especially in smaller towns.



Portuguese public libraries are also becoming **critical spaces for intergenerational and intercultural exchange**. Activities such as **language cafés**, **storytelling sessions in multiple languages**, and **crafts workshops** for migrants and refugees are common, often co-organised with local NGOs.

According to Azevedo, in municipalities like Setúbal and Lisbon, libraries have become **“safe harbours” for newcomers, where cultural identities are respected and shared**. This approach promotes not only integration but also a more profound understanding among local residents and migrants.

1. **“Bibliotecas itinerantes”**: To reach isolated communities and ensure **broader access to resources**, some regions in Portugal operate mobile libraries. These vans bring books, internet access, and cultural activities directly to remote villages, **ensuring that no one is left behind**.
2. **Support for entrepreneurs and job seekers**: Libraries are increasingly offering **resources and workshops for small businesses and job seekers**. The Biblioteca Municipal de Loulé, for example, provides access to business databases, career counselling, and spaces for professional networking.
3. **Promoting Portuguese language and culture**: Libraries play a crucial role in promoting the Portuguese language and culture, both domestically and internationally. They host **language classes** for foreigners, organise **traditional music and dance events**, and **showcase Portuguese literature**.
4. **Accessibility for people with disabilities**: Many Portuguese libraries are making concerted efforts to improve accessibility for people with disabilities, **offering specialised collections** (e.g., Braille books, audiobooks), **adapted spaces**, and **assistive technologies**, **ensuring inclusive access for all**.

### 3.5 Italy: cultural preservation and community engagement

Italian libraries, while often deeply rooted in history and cultural preservation, are also evolving to become dynamic spaces for **community engagement, literacy promotion, and social inclusion**.

1. **“Patti per la lettura”**: Many Italian cities and regions have established “Reading Pacts,” **collaborative agreements between libraries, schools, associations, and local institutions to promote reading at all levels**. This initiative, often seen in cities like Bologna, establishes a widespread network for promoting literacy.



2. **Libraries as cultural event venues:** Beyond traditional reading rooms, Italian libraries frequently host a wide range of cultural events, including **literary festivals, author meetings, art exhibitions, and musical performances**. The Biblioteca Salaborsa in Bologna, housed in a historic building, is a prime example of a library that successfully blends historical preservation with modern cultural dynamism.
3. **Support for vulnerable groups:** Libraries are increasingly reaching out to vulnerable groups, offering **services for immigrants, the elderly, and individuals with disabilities**. Some libraries provide **language courses** for newcomers or organise **social activities** for seniors, acting as welcoming and supportive environments.
4. **Children's and teen programs:** A strong focus is placed on **engaging children and teenagers**. Libraries offer dedicated children's sections, storytelling sessions, creative workshops, and reading clubs for young adults, **fostering a love for books and learning from an early age**. The Biblioteca Civica Centrale in Turin is particularly active in this area.



## 4. Libraries and disability inclusion: good practices and projects

Libraries across Europe are increasingly committed to providing **equitable access to information, services, and spaces for people with disabilities**. This includes physical accessibility, accessible formats, specialised technologies, and inclusive programming.

According to Agnoli, libraries must be repositioned “*from purely cultural venues to pillars of cultural welfare*.” This means **integrating services with schools, social services, and local associations**. For example, schools could identify children left alone in the afternoons, while libraries coordinate with social services to bring them into safe, stimulating environments. In this way, **libraries become neutral spaces free of judgment**, directly contributing to community well-being.



### 4.1 Italy: promoting accessible reading and digital welfare

Italian libraries and their associated organisations are at the forefront of efforts to



enhance the accessibility of reading materials and digital resources for all citizens, particularly those with disabilities. A key player in this landscape is **Fondazione LIA (Libri Italiani Accessibili - Italian Accessible Books Foundation)**, a non-profit organisation dedicated to promoting a culture of accessibility within the publishing sector. While not a library itself, Fondazione LIA collaborates closely with libraries and publishers to create **extensive catalogues of accessible digital books** (EPUB, PDF), advocates for **"born accessible" content**, and offers **vital training and consulting on digital accessibility**. Complementing this, the **National Central Library of Rome (BNC Roma)** demonstrates a long-standing commitment to inclusivity through its **physical accessibility measures, specialised multimedia workstations** for visually impaired users, participation in the "Progetto Libro Parlato" for audiobooks, and an internal Typhlodidactic counselling centre. Furthermore, the **Italian Library Association (AIB)**, through its "Libraries for Digital and Information Welfare" project—part of the national "Repubblica digitale" initiative—actively **trains librarians in digital and information literacy, open education, and digital library management**, thereby fostering broader digital inclusion that directly benefits people with disabilities who increasingly rely on digital access. These collective efforts underscore Italy's dedication to **making knowledge and culture accessible to everyone**.

## 4.2 Germany: specialised libraries and technological solutions

Germany showcases a robust commitment to **library accessibility**, particularly through its strong tradition of specialised institutions and advanced technological solutions. The **German Centre for Accessible Reading (dzb lesen)** in Leipzig stands out as a pioneering and highly significant specialist library. It offers an **extensive collection of over 100,000 accessible titles, including Braille books, audiobooks in DAISY format, and tactile resources for children**, ensuring diverse formats are available to print-impaired individuals nationwide, often through remote access and personalised support. Beyond its direct services, *dzb lesen* also assists other institutions in **creating inclusive facilities and accessible communication**. Complementing national efforts, Germany is a key participant in the broader **AccessibleEU initiative**, which provides **guidance, training, and a digital library of good practices** to implement accessibility standards across Member States, directly benefiting German libraries. Furthermore, numerous **university libraries across Germany**, such as that at Universität Regensburg, offer **specialised services for students with disabilities**, including adapted workstations equipped with **assistive technologies** like screen readers and magnifiers, as well as **essential physical accessibility and extended loan periods**, collectively demonstrating a comprehensive approach to inclusion.



## 4.3 Portugal: focus on the visually impaired and social inclusion

Portuguese libraries demonstrate a significant focus on providing **services for the visually impaired** and utilising **innovative methods to promote social inclusion**. The **Biblioteca Nacional de Portugal (National Library of Portugal - BNP)** has been a leader in this area since 1969, maintaining and producing an extensive collection of **over 7,000 Braille items** (including a notable collection of musical works) and **1,575 audio titles**. The BNP facilitates broad access through **home lending and inter-library loan services**, further supported by a specialised reading room and resources on Braille standardisation.

Beyond traditional library services, Portugal also showcases innovative approaches to social inclusion, exemplified by "**The Living Library**" project in Valongo. Adapted from a Danish concept, this initiative invites "**human books**"—**volunteers from various marginalised groups, including people with disabilities—to share their personal experiences**. This creates a safe and structured environment for dialogue, effectively challenging prejudices and fostering greater understanding and empathy among participants, thereby **strengthening the library's role as a vital space for community connection and deconstructing stereotypes**.

**Desincoop** also developed this **non-formal methodology in collaboration with the Francisco de Holanda Cluster of Schools**. The last living library addressed the topic of inclusive fashion, featuring testimonials from women with reduced mobility, clothing designers for individuals with physical disabilities, a consultant for women with breast cancer, a gender-neutral product designer, and a multicultural clothing designer.

A documentary marking the **20th anniversary of the Rede de Bibliotecas Escolares (School Library Network)** in Portugal highlights the transformative role of libraries in **promoting equity**. By ensuring that every school has a library, the network has **reduced inequalities in access to books and digital tools**, especially for students from disadvantaged backgrounds.

## 4.4 Spain: universal accessibility and documentation centres

In Spain, a strong national commitment to **universal accessibility** is evident through specialised centres and resources that libraries actively leverage. The country has developed **comprehensive guidelines**, such as *"Libraries accessible to all: guidelines to bring libraries closer to people with disabilities and older*





*people"*, demonstrating a **straightforward national approach to inclusivity**. The Spanish Disability Documentation Centre (**Centro Español de Documentación sobre Discapacidad**) serves as a vital resource, offering a wealth of publications and information on disability to both libraries and the public. Furthermore, the **ONCE Foundation** (Spanish National Organisation of the Blind) provides **extensive digital library** resources and frequently collaborates with public libraries to **enhance access for individuals with visual impairments**. Academic institutions, exemplified by the Complutense University library (**Universidad Complutense de Madrid**), offer specialised services for students with special needs, including **assistance with document location, digitalisation, adapted reader places equipped with assistive technologies, flexible loan conditions, and tailored training**. Notably, Spain is also a leader in promoting **"Easy Reading" (Lectura Fácil) documents and cognitive accessibility initiatives**, ensuring that many libraries are integrating these simplified materials and workshops into their collections to cater to individuals with intellectual disabilities, learning difficulties, or low literacy.

## 4.5 Romania: focus on information access and infrastructure improvement

In Romania, libraries are increasingly acknowledging the critical importance of **accessibility**, particularly for visually impaired users, despite being in an ongoing phase of development. A study on Romanian county libraries revealed a **growing awareness of the necessity to adapt facilities for individuals with disabilities**. Currently, most libraries with accessible formats primarily focus on **providing resources for the visually impaired**, such as Braille and audiobooks, which they acquire through both purchase and donations. A significant number of these libraries also offer **technological support to facilitate information access and reading** for users with print impairments. The **"Carol I" Central University Library of Bucharest**, alongside other major academic libraries, exemplifies this commitment by **providing support for students with disabilities and special educational needs**, alongside **extensive digital collections and databases** that ease access for users facing physical navigation challenges. While direct library projects specifically targeting disabilities may still be emerging, Romania's broader **social inclusion initiatives**—such as those **promoting employment** for persons with disabilities—create a more inclusive societal context within which libraries can operate and often partner with organisations like the Motivation Romania Foundation.

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## 5. Work experience in libraries for people with disabilities: best practices and projects

**Work**, in its broadest sense, is about having a role, contributing, and fostering personal growth and development. This journey requires not just good intentions but preparation, professionalism, diverse perspectives, and a shared pool of knowledge across various services.



Before diving into specific countries, it's essential to highlight **the underlying principles that make such programs successful**:

1. **Individualised support and accommodation:** Recognising that each person with a disability has unique needs. This includes providing assistive technology, flexible schedules, adapted tasks, and job coaching.
2. **Meaningful tasks:** Ensuring the work experience involves real, valuable library tasks, not just busywork. This builds genuine skills and confidence.



3. **Clear goals and feedback:** Defining what the person will learn and achieve, and providing regular, constructive feedback.
4. **Mentorship:** Pairing the individual with a supportive, trained library staff member to guide them.
5. **Pathways to employment:** These programs should equip individuals for future employment, either within the library sector or beyond.
6. **Partnerships:** Collaborating with disability organisations, vocational training centres, and schools.
7. **Staff training:** Ensuring all library staff are trained in disability awareness and inclusive practices.
8. **Designated accessibility coordinator:** A staff member dedicated to overseeing accessibility, including work experience programs.
9. **Clear policies and procedures:** Formalising the process for recruiting, onboarding, supporting, and evaluating disabled interns/employees.
10. **Focus on strengths:** Identify and leverage the unique strengths and talents of individuals with disabilities.
11. **Celebrate successes:** Publicising successful work experiences to inspire other libraries and employers, and to encourage more disabled individuals to consider library careers.

By proactively developing and promoting these types of programs, libraries can not only enhance their own operations but also serve as **powerful models for inclusive employment** within their communities and beyond.



## 5.1 Italy: emerging integration & social cooperatives

In Italy, the strength of inclusive practices often stems from its robust network of **social cooperatives** and a growing emphasis on social inclusion, which libraries can significantly leverage. Many Italian social cooperatives, such as "La Carovana" in Rome and other local initiatives, **specialise in supporting individuals with intellectual or psychosocial disabilities**. Libraries can forge partnerships with these cooperatives to offer **structured work placements or internships**. In these arrangements, the cooperative provides essential support, including **job coaching**, while the **library** offers a **practical work environment** where individuals can perform tasks like shelving, organising materials, managing circulation, assisting with basic digital duties, or preparing event spaces.

While not always formal work experience programs, libraries like the "**Chiesa Rossa Library**" in Milan exemplify an indirect pathway to employment readiness. Renowned for its strong social orientation and engagement with vulnerable groups, including people with disabilities, this library's **focus on co-creation, adaptable materials** (e.g., tactile books, Braille, pictograms), and **diverse user engagement** creates an inherently inclusive culture, making it an ideal candidate for **piloting structured work experience initiatives**. Furthermore, **some libraries facilitate transitions from volunteer to paid work**, where informal volunteer roles can, with adequate support and training, evolve into paid internships or even permanent positions, thereby offering **tangible pathways to employment for individuals with disabilities**.



## 5.2 Germany: structured vocational training and inclusive higher education

Germany benefits significantly from its well-structured vocational training systems and a robust **focus on inclusion in higher education, creating** promising avenues for **library-related work opportunities** for individuals with disabilities. While dedicated vocational training specifically for individuals with disabilities in library roles may be uncommon, many vocational schools (**Berufsschulen**) that train for administrative, office, or information management positions often **incorporate modules or partnerships that can facilitate placements within libraries**. These programs are **typically adapted for students with disabilities, with libraries providing practical experience** in tasks such as data entry, cataloguing support, digital archiving, administrative assistance, or preparing materials.

Furthermore, **German university libraries**, exemplified by institutions like the University of Cologne or the University of Konstanz, are committed to inclusive education and increasingly offer **accessible internships to students with disabilities** pursuing library science, information science, or related fields. These internships are designed with accommodations such as **accessible workstations, flexible hours, and mentorship**, enabling students to acquire invaluable professional experience. Libraries also sometimes cooperate with *Werkstätten für behinderte Menschen* (**WfbM - Workshops for people with disabilities**), which provide **vocational training and employment opportunities for individuals with disabilities, by offering external work placements** that allow participants to gain experience in a public library setting.



## 5.3 Portugal: social support organisations and accessible skill development

Portugal's efforts to foster employment opportunities for people with disabilities are notably supported by a **robust network of social support organisations** that champion **social and vocational integration**. Among these, the **AFID Diferença Foundation** in Amadora stands out as a key actor, focusing on **autonomy, social support, and vocational education and training** for individuals with disabilities. Libraries in Portugal can establish **formal partnerships** with organisations like AFID to host **structured work placements**, focusing on skills relevant to library operations, or to **co-develop specific training modules** that can be integrated into broader vocational programs.

Beyond individual organisations, Portugal also benefits from **national-level networks**, such as **FENACERCI** – the National Federation of Cooperative and Solidarity Institutions for Citizens with Intellectual Disabilities – which supports and represents more than 50 **CERCIs** (Cooperatives for the Education and Rehabilitation of Disabled Citizens) across the country. As highlighted on [FENACERCI's](#) official website, this network promotes **inclusion, advocacy, and quality services**. It will play a **crucial role in disseminating the Byblios project**, particularly through partnerships with local organisations such as **CERCIGUI** and **Desincoop**. Moreover, **hundreds of local organisations**, such as **APPACDMs** (Portuguese Associations of Parents and Friends of Mentally Disabled Citizens), also provide coverage across the national territory. However, they typically operate independently within their municipalities.

Portuguese libraries—particularly in smaller municipalities—are increasingly recognised as **accessible community spaces** and **training grounds for digital inclusion**. By expanding their digital literacy programmes to include “**digital skills for the workplace**”, and by offering **volunteering or informal work experience** within these initiatives, **libraries can support people with disabilities in developing customer service and technical support competencies**.

Many municipal libraries also engage in **local partnerships with social services**, creating **short-term work experiences** focused on general administrative support, shelving, or material processing. These collaborations are often **informal, flexible, and tailored to the individual**, aligning with the inclusive principles promoted by Portugal's national strategy for accessibility and inclusion.

As underlined in the [General Directorate for Books, Archives, and Libraries \(DGLAB\)'s guidelines](#),





**accessibility must be seen as a proactive, ongoing commitment.** Portuguese libraries are embracing this view, not only by **adapting physical spaces**, but also by **creating work-based learning opportunities** that contribute to real inclusion. These efforts show how **libraries can become active agents in the transition towards inclusive, rights-based, and community-rooted models of employment.**

## 5.4 Spain: ONCE Foundation and vocational integration

Spain stands out with the **ONCE Foundation**, a global leader in supporting blind and visually impaired individuals, whose robust **vocational integration programs** often serve as a model for other countries. While ONCE primarily focuses on its members, its **extensive experience in professional qualification and work skills training** is highly relevant for libraries. Libraries in Spain could directly partner with ONCE to **host internships** for its members in **accessible library roles**, such as audio production, accessible digital content management, specialised research support, or customer service, all with appropriate assistive technology. They could also **collaborate on accessibility audits**, training and employing visually impaired individuals to assess library digital platforms and physical spaces, thereby gaining invaluable expert feedback. Furthermore, libraries can actively engage with the ONCE Foundation's **"Inserta Empleo" program**, which aims to **integrate people with disabilities into the labour market**. This program can be utilised as a recruitment channel for library positions, internships, or vocational training placements, and libraries can benefit from Inserta Empleo's expertise in **workplace adaptation and job coaching**. Building on efforts in Germany, **Spanish university libraries**, such as the Complutense University Library, are also well-positioned to offer **structured internships to students with disabilities**, seamlessly integrating them into library operations as part of their academic or vocational pathways.

## 5.5 Romania: emerging opportunities and NGO partnerships

In Romania, progress in fostering work opportunities for people with disabilities is frequently driven by dedicated **NGOs and the increasing professionalisation of its library sector**. Organisations such as the **Motivation Romania Foundation**, which focuses on mobility and independent living, or other NGOs supporting intellectual and developmental disabilities, often run vocational training programs. **Libraries can strategically partner with these NGOs to offer work placements or practical training modules** in tasks like basic office work, data entry, material handling, or event assistance. Given that formal internship programs for individuals with disabilities in some Romanian libraries are still emerging, **structured**



**volunteer-to-work schemes** can serve as a valuable stepping stone. Libraries can offer clearly defined volunteer roles that provide **practical skills**, with the understanding that **successful volunteers may be considered for future paid opportunities or receive strong references for external employment**. Furthermore, Romanian libraries, especially at the county and university levels, have a significant chance to seek **pilot projects with international funding** (such as Erasmus+ or other EU programs) specifically designed to offer vocational training or internships to people with disabilities. These projects could **focus on in-demand areas like digital skills, accessible content creation, or specialised administrative support**, allowing Romanian libraries to adopt and adapt best practices from across the EU.



## 6. Enhancing inclusivity: A path forward

*“Once people with disabilities are integrated into library activities, we cannot go back.”*



As Antonella Agnoli highlights, true inclusion means involving them not only in support tasks but also in **active, visible roles**—helping children choose books, participating in workshops, or co-leading cultural initiatives. This ensures that **inclusion is not merely symbolic, but is embedded in everyday practice.**

To ensure libraries continue their transformation into truly inclusive community hubs, a range of actions can be taken to better serve people with disabilities. This commitment to inclusivity involves deepening **community engagement and co-creation**, where the principle of **"Nothing about us, without us"** is paramount, ensuring individuals with disabilities are involved at every stage of **service design**, from targeted needs assessments to hosting disability-led programs. Libraries must also prioritise **digital accessibility**, moving beyond basic website compliance to ensure all digital content is usable with **assistive**



**technologies.** This includes exploring AI for accessibility and developing accessible VR/AR experiences. Furthermore, enhancing **physical and sensory environments** is crucial, extending beyond basic ramps and elevators to include quiet zones, adjustable furniture, tactile signage, and optimal acoustic design. Expanding **accessible collections and formats** to include easy-to-read books, picture communication systems, and adaptive toy libraries will diversify offerings. Critically, libraries must cultivate a **culture of inclusivity among staff** through comprehensive disability awareness and sensitivity training, proficiency in assistive technologies, and inclusive hiring practices. Ultimately, embracing **innovative programming**, such as sensory-friendly events, adaptive recreation, life skills support, and advocacy education, will truly empower people with disabilities within the library space.

## 6.1 Strategies for inclusive libraries

*“An inclusive school library should be open all day, staffed by at least two permanent librarians, and integrated into the school’s everyday life. It should **involve people with disabilities not only in mechanical tasks, but also in interactions with children**—helping them select books, supporting group visits, and modelling inclusion as a normal part of school culture.” (Professor Dr. Ulrike Wels, University of social work and education, Berlin)*

Aluigi highlighted three inspiring practices:

- **Digital access:** the activation of *Media Library Online (MLOL)*, offering free access to e-books and digitised resources, which expanded cultural opportunities during his university years.
- **Partnerships:** collaboration with municipalities and local associations to co-organise events, linking libraries with a dynamic territorial network.
- **Welcoming environments:** attention to study spaces, outdoor areas, and extended opening hours, which encouraged students to spend more time in libraries and fostered socialisation.

The regional program **“Cultura Diversa”** in Castilla y León provides a model of **systemic inclusion**. Activities such as radio workshops for people with intellectual disabilities and their families (Palencia), easy-reading clubs for caregivers of people with Alzheimer’s (Zamora), and social inclusion through dance workshops (Burgos) illustrate how libraries can collaborate with cultural institutions, NGOs, and universities to reach groups often excluded from cultural participation.



In an interview for Portuguese Radio and Television (RTP), **educator Fátima Fernandes** emphasised that **reading habits must be cultivated as social practices, not just individual ones**. Libraries, she argued, should design activities that bring readers together across generations, making reading a **shared cultural experience** rather than a solitary act.

Building on these practices, several strategies emerge for advancing inclusive libraries:

### 1. Deepen community engagement and co-creation

- **“Nothing about us, without us.”** Involve people with disabilities and their representative organisations at every stage of service design, from needs assessment to evaluation.
- **Targeted needs assessments.** Conduct interviews, focus groups, and accessibility audits with individuals with disabilities to identify barriers and understand their aspirations.
- **Partnerships with disability communities.** Collaborate with local associations, special schools, rehabilitation centres, and support groups.
- **Disability-led programming.** Empower individuals with disabilities to lead workshops, book clubs, and cultural events that reflect their interests and experiences.



## 2. Advance digital accessibility

- Go beyond basic web accessibility standards (WCAG) to ensure **all digital resources**—e-books, audiobooks, databases, streaming media—are compatible with assistive technologies.
- Provide **accessible digital literacy workshops**, such as those on screen readers, voice recognition, and accessible apps.
- Advocate for **“born accessible” content**, ensuring new digital acquisitions are free of accessibility barriers.
- Explore the use of **AI** to generate captions, transcripts, audio descriptions, or simplified language versions.
- Develop **accessible VR/AR experiences** that enable immersive learning for individuals with mobility or sensory limitations.

## 3. Enhance physical and sensory environments

- Create **quiet zones and sensory rooms** with adjustable lighting, seating, fidget tools, and noise-cancelling options.
- Introduce **sensory-friendly hours** with reduced noise and softer lighting.
- Organise **sensory storytimes**, integrating visual aids and multi-sensory elements for children with diverse needs.
- Go beyond ramps and elevators with **tactile signage, high-contrast wayfinding, ergonomic furniture, and improved acoustics**.
- Pilot **digital wayfinding tools** (apps, AR beacons) to support navigation.



#### 4. Broaden accessible collections and formats

- Expand collections to include Easy-to-Read books, pictogram-based materials, tactile and multi-sensory books, and adaptive toy libraries.
- Prioritise **inclusive representation**, acquiring materials that portray characters with disabilities and diverse experiences.

#### 5. Cultivate an inclusive culture among staff

*“Building inclusive libraries requires more than infrastructure or policies; it requires an **inclusive mindset among educators and librarians**. Self-reflection, openness, and willingness to challenge one’s own prejudices are crucial. True inclusion depends on democratic attitudes as much as on institutional structures.” (Professor Dr. Ulrike Wels)*

- Provide **mandatory disability awareness and sensitivity training** for all staff.
- Train staff in **assistive technologies** and accessible software.
- Adopt **inclusive language guidelines** to ensure respectful communication.
- Develop **inclusive hiring practices** that actively employ people with disabilities in library roles.

#### 6. Innovate through inclusive programming

- Extend **sensory-friendly practices** to adult programs, film screenings, and workshops.
- Offer **adaptive recreation**, such as accessible gaming, inclusive art workshops, or “maker” activities.
- Partner with organisations to deliver **life skills and employment support**—digital skills, independent living, and job preparation.
- Provide **advocacy and rights education** on disability rights and self-advocacy.





- Organise **intergenerational programs** connecting disabled youth and seniors, fostering mentorship and mutual learning.

Ensuring **physical, linguistic, and digital accessibility** must remain a core principle of inclusive libraries. More importantly, inclusion is not only about facilities or collections—it is about cultivating a **culture of participation, equity, and belonging**, where diversity is recognised as a source of strength.

## 6.2 Fostering sustainable employment for people with disabilities: a collaborative vision

“**Inclusion in school libraries can also mean offering jobs to people with disabilities.** With clear communication, routines, and supportive teams, these individuals can find **meaningful employment in libraries**, enriching both the staff and the community.” (Simone Frübing)

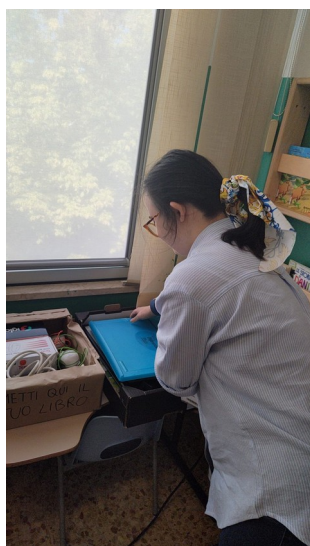
**The employment gap for people with disabilities** remains significant across the EU. A long-term strategy necessitates **systemic changes in policy, a cultural shift in the workplace, and targeted support** that empowers individuals. Libraries and governments have distinct yet complementary roles.

Governments play a pivotal role in fostering truly inclusive libraries by enacting and enforcing supportive policies and driving systemic change. This involves **strengthening and harmonising anti-discrimination legislation and its enforcement**, moving beyond mere quotas to ensure robust, reasonable accommodation laws and broadly defining "disability" in line with the UNCRPD. Furthermore, governments should **invest significantly in inclusive education and vocational training**, funding early intervention, seamless transitions from school to employment, and accessible lifelong learning opportunities. To encourage employment, they must **incentivise and support employers for inclusive hiring and retention** through targeted financial incentives, expanded **"supported employment" programs**, support for disabled entrepreneurs, and public-sector leadership in inclusive practices. Finally, a crucial aspect is to **promote awareness and combat stereotypes** through national campaigns, employer forums, improved data collection, and **coordinating services to streamline bureaucracy** by establishing "one-stop shops" and simplifying access to benefits, thereby reducing administrative burdens for people with disabilities seeking support and employment.



“Inclusion is not only about structural accessibility or simplified language, but also about **social participation and creating opportunities for disadvantaged people to work in libraries**. Libraries should not only serve people with disabilities, but also integrate them as active contributors, making **inclusion part of everyday life.**” (Professor Dr. Ulrike Wels)

Libraries can serve as crucial **"social infrastructure" and "bridging institutions"** to complement government efforts, particularly in the long term. They are uniquely positioned to become **central hubs for career and entrepreneurship**, both accessible and inclusive. This involves **partnering with public employment services, NGOs, and vocational rehabilitation centres** to offer specialised career counselling, resume/CV writing workshops, and interview preparation specifically tailored for individuals with disabilities seeking employment. Libraries can provide **accessible workstations with assistive technologies** for online job applications and skills assessments, and even create **"Job Clubs"** for individuals with disabilities to offer **peer support and networking opportunities**. Support for entrepreneurship and small businesses, including **workshops on business planning and access to professional networks**, can also empower individuals with disabilities toward self-employment.



Furthermore, libraries play a vital role in **bridging the digital divide for employment opportunities**. They can offer advanced digital skills training in areas relevant to remote work and establish themselves as **hubs for assistive technology training**, teaching patrons how to use specialised tools essential to the workplace. By becoming remote work resource centres, libraries can provide **training on teleworking best practices and accessible remote platforms**, acknowledging the flexibility this offers. They also play a role in **promoting "soft skills" and workplace inclusion** through workshops on communication, conflict resolution, and teamwork, as well as "workplace simulations" such as mock interviews. Libraries can host **events to raise disability awareness among local employers and highlight** the benefits of a diverse workforce.

Critically, libraries should **advocate for inclusive employment within their own sector** by leading by example through the active implementation of inclusive hiring practices for people with disabilities in their own staff roles and by creating accessible internship and volunteer programs. Lastly, libraries serve as essential **information and referral hubs**, maintaining up-to-date resources on government programs and support services, and establishing strong referral pathways to relevant organisations.



In the long term, the **combined efforts of governments and libraries** should aim to:

- **Create a fully accessible talent pipeline that spans from** early education to continuous professional development.
- **Foster an "inclusion-by-design" workplace culture:** Where reasonable accommodation is standard, not an exception.
- **Empower disabled individuals as active economic contributors:** Recognising their skills, potential, and diverse perspectives as assets.
- **Build resilient, equitable communities:** Where economic participation is a right for all, leading to greater self-determination and societal well-being.



## 6.3 Strategic shifts for a new vision

The vision of the library as a community hub is not merely an incremental change; it demands a **fundamental movement in perception and practice**. This transformation is supported by extensive research and the insights of leading experts in librarianship and community development.

To embody this vision, libraries must implement several **strategic shifts**:

- **From collection-centric to community-centric:** The primary focus shifts from accumulating vast collections to understanding and responding to the specific needs, aspirations, and challenges of the community. This involves ongoing needs assessments, community dialogues, and a willingness to tailor services to meet individual needs.
- **From passive access to active engagement:** Libraries must actively reach out to community members, promoting services, and inviting participation. This means developing outreach programs, hosting events outside library walls, and collaborating with diverse community groups.

*“Looking to the future, libraries can also foster new forms of engagement by involving children, young people, and adults as reporters or ambassadors of the library, strengthening intergenerational participation and shared ownership of the space.” (Manager, Valladolid)*



- **From static spaces to dynamic environments:** Library buildings should be reimagined as flexible, multi-functional spaces that can adapt to various activities – from quiet study and technology exploration to collaborative projects, public forums, and cultural performances. This often involves rethinking furniture, layout, and technology infrastructure.
- **From information gatekeepers to knowledge facilitators:** While providing access to information remains vital, libraries also become facilitators of knowledge creation and sharing. This includes offering workshops, supporting local research, providing platforms for community voices, and fostering peer-to-peer learning.



- **From isolated institutions to collaborative networks:** Libraries thrive through partnerships. Collaborating with schools, local government, non-profits, businesses, and cultural organisations amplifies impact, leverages resources, and creates a more cohesive community support system.
- **From reactive to proactive:** Instead of merely responding to trends, libraries should proactively anticipate community needs and emerging technologies. This requires continuous professional development, innovative program design, and a willingness to experiment.



## 7. Practical tools and proposals for implementation

*“At our university library, the **Office 365 tools** are very useful for organising activities and coordinating work with different members of the community. However, I believe we could still make more efficient use of electronic resources, or even rethink how we invest in them, so they have a greater impact. In addition, training in new technologies, especially in **artificial intelligence**, is key: in our case, we are just beginning to explore these tools, but most of us are still unaware of many of their possibilities, which makes continuous training essential to support innovation both in libraries and in adult education.”* (Library manager, Valladolid)

*“**LibGuides** are also a handy resource for creating accessible and up-to-date library guides. They make it possible to organise and share information clearly, which supports autonomous learning and digital inclusion.”* (Director of the University of Valladolid)

To translate this vision **into reality**, international working groups focused on sharing practical tools and actionable proposals:





- **Community needs assessment toolkit:** A guide and set of templates for libraries to conduct comprehensive assessments of their community's demographics, interests, gaps in services, and potential partnerships, drawing on methodologies used across various countries.
- **Flexible space design guidelines:** A practical handbook offering principles and examples for transforming library spaces into multi-functional, adaptable, and inviting environments. It includes modular furniture ideas, technology integration tips, eco-lighting suggestions, and acoustic considerations.
- **Partnership development framework:** A step-by-step guide on identifying, approaching, and sustaining collaborations with local organisations, schools, businesses, and government entities. It features templates for Memoranda of Understanding (MOUs).
- **Digital literacy program curriculum bank:** A repository of successful digital literacy curricula and workshop materials covering basic computer skills, internet safety, media literacy, and introductory coding for various age groups.
- **Impact measurement and evaluation toolkit:** A suite of tools and metrics for measuring the social, economic, and environmental impact of library activities. It includes survey templates, focus group guides, SDG-aligned data collection methodologies, and evaluation models.
- **Funding and grant application templates:** A curated collection of successful grant proposals and funding strategies from different countries, offering practical guidance for securing financial support for community hub initiatives.
- **Green library audit checklist:** A self-assessment tool to evaluate energy use, materials sourcing, waste management, and sustainable procurement in library operations.
- **Community sustainability events toolkit:** Guidelines and planning tools for organising sustainability-themed workshops, eco-fairs, repair cafés, and community learning events.
- **Digital accessibility and literacy modules:** Training resources and templates for promoting inclusive access to digital tools and platforms, ensuring all community members can engage with technology effectively.
- **Establish a "Library innovation fund":** Propose the creation of an international or national fund specifically dedicated to supporting innovative library projects focused on community hub





development, with a focus on pilot programs and scalable initiatives.

- **Develop joint training programs:** Advocate for the creation of joint professional development programs and workshops for librarians, focusing on skills essential for community engagement, program design, and partnership building. These could be offered online or through exchange programs.
- **Create a "Best practices exchange platform":** Launch a dedicated online platform where libraries can easily share and discover good practices, case studies, and resources related to their community hub initiatives, fostering continuous learning and inspiration.
- **Advocate for policy changes:** Work with national and international library associations to advocate for policies that recognise and support the evolving role of libraries as essential community infrastructure, ensuring adequate funding and resources.
- **Launch a "Global library community hub challenge":** Organise an annual challenge or award program to recognise and celebrate innovative library projects that exemplify the community hub model, promoting friendly competition and widespread adoption of best practices.

## 7.1 Bidok – open digital library for disability and inclusion

The bidok platform (BehindertenIntegration-Dokumentation), developed by the University of Innsbruck, offers an exceptional model of a fully accessible, open-access digital library focused on disability and inclusion. Key features include:

- **Barrier-free full-text access:** Over 1,500 academic and grey-literature texts, including scientific papers, working documents, and local publications, are available in PDF/UA (Universal Accessibility) format.
- **Inclusive language options:** A parallel library in *Leichte Sprache* ("easy reading" accessible German) ensures usability for individuals with cognitive or learning disabilities.
- **Participatory and emancipatory ethos:** Advocating for disability studies grounded in the principles of the UN CRPD, bidok engages researchers with disabilities as active creators of knowledge [opus4.kobv.de/7DISTA/7Wikipedia/7](https://opus4.kobv.de/7DISTA/7Wikipedia/7).



- **Networking and outreach:** Includes e-learning, multilingual content, accessible archives on disability history, violence prevention, and support for professional inclusion ([bidok.uibk.ac. at](http://bidok.uibk.ac.at)). [Wikipedia](#).

How libraries can use Bidok as a model:

- Adopt **PDF/UA** and accessible formats to upgrade their own digital collections.
- Provide **easy-reading materials** and translate key resources for cognitive accessibility.
- Encourage **community co-creation**, engaging people with disabilities as partners in content creation.
- Host **accessible digital archives**, open-access platforms, and resource-sharing with local NGOs, universities, and disability experts.

## 7.2 Design Thinking for Libraries Toolkit

The Design Thinking for Libraries toolkit, developed by IDEO in partnership with the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, provides a **practical, human-centred innovation framework tailored explicitly for libraries worldwide**. Rooted in the key phases of empathise → define → ideate → prototype → test, the toolkit **enables library staff to engage deeply with their communities, uncover emerging needs, and co-create effective services and spaces**.

In Romania, public libraries, some of which are supported by the **Biblionet program**, were among the first in Europe to pilot this approach. Librarians from the Metropolitan Library of Bucharest and the National Library of Romania participated in workshops, where they engaged in real-world empathy exercises, prototyping sessions, and iterative testing. One Romanian librarian reflected:

*“Through Design Thinking, I have learned **to pay attention to details, to review each situation from other perspectives and most importantly, to use the focus group**. By collaborating with people of different ages and from different domains, new extraordinary ideas have been generated!”*

This process transformed library staff into **co-creators of their services**—shifting the mindset from passive service delivery to **active experimentation**, rapid prototyping, and user-driven innovation. The impact is



clear: libraries are evolving into community innovation labs, using iterative design to stay relevant, inclusive, and responsive to social change.



## 7.3 Key recommendations for building inclusive and engaging libraries

*“The most important thing is to **open the doors**: to embrace a culture of open access, promote learning at all levels, and prioritise the development of digital skills. The library must place itself at the service of the community, offering programs and services that respond to its real needs.”* (Director of the University of Valladolid)

As highlighted by the Portuguese General Directorate for Books, Archives, and Libraries (DGLAB), **accessibility and inclusion must go hand in hand**, especially within public libraries, which are called to become **genuinely inclusive institutions**—not only promoting inclusion but embodying it in their spaces, services, and content.

- **Start with the community:** Always begin by asking users what they need, want, or would find helpful. Include not only your regular visitors but also underrepresented groups and individuals who don’t typically visit the library. Their voices are essential for shaping truly inclusive services. As a librarian from Biblioteca Județeană D. Zamfirescu Vrancea emphasised:

*“For me, the most important recommendation is **to really know the community**. Librarians are increasingly becoming like artists, providing creative work for a smaller or larger community. Like artists, librarians should ‘know their audience’ and give them what they need or want. It’s not all related to scientific analyses of needs; it’s not only about questionnaires, interviews, or collecting and interpreting data. **It can also be about intuition, about sensing what potential readers want, and even about trial and error.** However, we should really understand what the community expects from us.”*

- **Adaptability and innovation** are fundamental in programming and space management (Fernando Azevedo). Libraries that succeed in becoming community hubs are those that **listen closely to local needs** and **co-create solutions** with their users. In one example from **Northern Portugal**, a public library transformed part of its building into a **makerspace and podcast lab** for young people, guided by the idea that:



*"When young people create in the library, they feel it belongs to them."*

- **Design flexible, multifunctional spaces** that can accommodate a range of events, learning sessions, and informal gatherings. Facilitate opportunities for users to connect, collaborate, and communicate. Be open to hosting keynote speakers or external experts, and explore partnerships with other institutions that offer educational or social services. Going beyond legal compliance, DGLAB encourages libraries to adopt **universal design principles**: ergonomic furniture, tactile floor markings, strong colour contrast, accessible shelf heights, and clear signage that supports independent use by everyone, including people with physical or cognitive disabilities.

*"A fundamental recommendation would be the **renovation of library spaces**. Many libraries still retain a traditional format inherited from the 19th and 20th centuries, which limits the activities they can offer. If we want to diversify our functions and truly become community centres, **we need adaptable and versatile rooms**, capable of hosting everything from workshops and talks to book clubs and cultural activities of all kinds."* (Library manager, Valladolid)

- **Invest in librarian training**: Equip library staff with **the skills necessary for community engagement, inclusive communication, and digital tools**. This not only enhances service quality but also empowers librarians to respond proactively to the diverse needs of users.
- **Guidance on managing libraries as cultural centres**—diversifying services, fostering community events, and navigating digital transitions—would be a valuable resource.
- **Promote consistently and strategically**: Make your activities visible and accessible. Share past events and results within the library (e.g., through displays or storytelling panels), and promote upcoming opportunities through external channels, including social media, school networks, and community platforms. Stakeholders emphasised that **promoting activities in ways that appeal to diverse groups** is crucial to ensuring their **long-term success and sustainability**.
- **Organise workshops to promote reading among children and adults**, fostering intergenerational engagement and lifelong literacy. Among the recommended practices is **opening libraries for storytelling workshops**, which not only diversifies programming but also attracts a broader audience. Masini recommends creating **monthly reading groups** to sustain participation and build community.



- **Use social media not just as a dissemination tool**, but as a powerful means to build community and strengthen engagement. Practical advice includes **using accessible language for all ages and circumstances**, ensuring that communication remains inclusive and universally understandable.

One practical example observed in several Romanian and Portuguese libraries involves **publishing weekly book recommendations** specifically for seniors on platforms such as Facebook. These short reviews, written by librarians, created a sense of personal connection and trust. As a result, not only did the online community grow, but **more seniors began visiting the library in person**, feeling that the librarian behind the digital posts could offer **personalised, thoughtful guidance**. This simple, low-cost strategy demonstrates how digital tools can foster stronger relationships and bring new energy to the library space, particularly when tailored to the needs of specific user groups.

- Libraries must overcome the traditional sense of competition and adopt a **collaborative approach** across institutions. As Karla highlights, libraries must remain “places without pressure to consume, where people can learn, exchange ideas, and feel at home.” She underlines the importance of **partnerships**, noting that collaboration between public and school libraries can significantly strengthen reading promotion, cultural participation, and **community building**. In a time of rapid change and increasing challenges, the survival and transformation of libraries depend on working together, through shared resources, joint initiatives, and mutual support. *“If libraries are to survive,” a Romanian school counsellor and project manager notes, “they will survive together; otherwise, they will be closed one by one.”*
- **Digitalisation** must go far beyond inventory systems and record-keeping. Libraries need to fully enter the digital realm, not only to modernise internal processes but **to align with the habits and expectations of younger generations**. From social media presence to offering digital books and audiobooks, embracing technology is essential.
- Libraries must **expand their inclusivity** by tailoring services to a wide range of users. This means offering large-print books or magnification tools for the visually impaired, audiobooks for blind users, and ensuring both social and solitary learning spaces. The ultimate vision is of a library where **“even blind people could find something to read”**, a bold yet attainable slogan that encapsulates what inclusive, modern libraries should strive for. As Thiele highlights, inclusion *“is an ongoing process that requires constant adaptation and further development. It is important not only to design services for people with disabilities, but to involve them and include their perspectives actively.”*



- Encourage librarians to adopt a **more proactive, entrepreneurial mindset, not only in designing activities for new categories of readers but also in seeking alternative funding sources** while continuing to offer services free of charge.

*“A fundamental barrier to inclusive libraries is the absence of systemic support and permanent staff. Without dedicated personnel, inclusion remains dependent on individual passion and voluntary efforts. To move forward, **policies must secure sustainable staffing** and embed school libraries within the education system.”* (Professor Dr. Ulrike Wels)

In today’s rapidly changing cultural and educational landscape, librarians must expand their role, becoming facilitators, promoters, and bridge-builders. A significant part of this shift involves **strengthening both personal and institutional communication skills**, which are essential for attracting new users and, more importantly, for building lasting relationships with the community.

- **Learn from other libraries**, both locally and internationally. Observing and adapting **good practices** can be a powerful way to innovate without starting from scratch. Libraries are encouraged to **build partnerships**, invite experts from more advanced or experienced institutions, and even co-organise events.

*“An overview of local socio-cultural partners and a portfolio of exemplary library practices would provide valuable models to adapt and replicate locally.”* (M. Aluigi)

*“In Germany, the **Pro School Library** initiative connects advisors from across the German-speaking area, with regular online exchanges and in-person meetings. Such networks, alongside the Frankfurt Declaration and IFLA guidelines, are vital for clarifying what school libraries should achieve and for **raising awareness** among educators and policymakers.”* (S. Frübing)

This collaborative approach not only enriches the library’s offer but also reinforces the idea that innovation in libraries grows stronger through connection and **shared learning**.

Here is a **framework for international working groups**:

1. **Define clear objectives**: Each working group should establish specific, measurable, achievable, relevant, and time-bound (SMART) objectives for collecting good practices and developing proposals.
2. **Establish communication channels**: Utilise online platforms (e.g., shared drives, video conferencing tools) to facilitate regular communication and document sharing among members from





different countries.

3. **Develop a data collection methodology:** Create standardised templates for documenting good practices, including details on context, implementation, outcomes, challenges, and scalability. This ensures consistency and ease of comparison.
4. **Facilitate peer learning and exchange:** Organise virtual workshops, webinars, and potentially in-person visits (when feasible) to allow members to share experiences, discuss challenges, and learn directly from each other.
5. **Regular reporting and dissemination:** Establish a schedule for reporting progress and findings. This could involve creating case studies, white papers, or presentations for broader dissemination within the library community and to policymakers.

## 7.4 Common mistakes to avoid in inclusive library planning

*“One of the main mistakes is holding on to a concept of **exclusivity** that limits access or participation. We must also avoid **resistance to change**, which hinders innovation and openness to new initiatives.”* (Director of the University of Valladolid)

To ensure that library practices remain truly inclusive, effective, and responsive to user needs, it is equally essential to be aware of common pitfalls that can undermine engagement and accessibility:

- **Assuming what the community needs without asking:** one of the most frequent errors is for library staff to believe they know what is best for their users without conducting consultation. In school libraries, this becomes even more problematic when pupils' opinions are dismissed on the assumption that they are *“too young to know what’s good for them”*. Respecting students as capable contributors is crucial to creating an inclusive learning environment.
- **Ignoring societal change and digital transformation:** libraries that fail to adapt to technological and cultural shifts **risk becoming disconnected from their communities**. The digital transformation and new social roles assigned to libraries require staff to reassess their functions, tools, and services continually.



*“One of the most common mistakes when renewing library services is not properly training staff or not adapting the spaces. In addition, many professors in our university do not make use of the services themselves, so they do not motivate students to do so. Also, they recommend bibliographies which are often outdated, and there is a strong underutilization of the excellent databases and resources the university offers. For this reason, when innovating and digitising, we must ensure that the library remains accessible, approachable, and useful for the entire community.”* (Library manager, Valladolid)

- **Working in isolation:** avoid trying to do everything alone. **Collaboration** with teachers, other librarians (even from different institutions), and community professionals can significantly enhance the library's impact and reach.
- **Prioritising appearances over usability:** activities and programs that look good on paper—because they meet administrative expectations or align with institutional policies—can fall flat if they are too complex for users to understand or participate in. For example, long-term projects may appeal to management. Still, if they involve extended timelines or numerous steps, they may be overwhelming for the intended beneficiaries, especially those with additional needs or disabilities. Masini also cautioned against *“spending money unnecessarily on new servers,”* highlighting the need to prioritise meaningful services over purely technical investments.
- **Ignoring staff and user opinions** undermines relevance, engagement, and trust. As one Romanian librarian from Biblioteca Județeană D. Zamfirescu Vrancea emphasised:

*“From a librarian’s perspective, **I think the biggest mistake we could make would be to believe we don’t need to change**—to try to maintain our ‘job description’ as it was when we were hired, to see ourselves only as book providers, and to assume that other activities are tasks for teachers, managers, or other specialists.”*

This perspective highlights a crucial point: **resistance to change** is one of the most significant risks for libraries today. Librarians and managers alike must adopt a **dynamic mindset**, embracing innovation and expanding their roles to meet the evolving needs of their communities.



- Librarians should not design activities based solely on personal preferences or on **top-down directives** issued by central authorities. Instead, they must learn to **listen actively to the communities** they serve, understanding local needs, interests, and expectations. While following regulations provides a sense of safety and predictability, **true innovation emerges from taking risks, experimenting with new formats, and co-creating initiatives with users**. A common pitfall is assuming that librarians or managers inherently "know what is best." This **top-down approach** can result in mismatched services and missed opportunities. User-centred design and participatory planning ensure that innovations are relevant, needed, and truly serve the community. Training programs for librarians should therefore emphasise **community engagement, needs assessment, and participatory planning**, enabling libraries to evolve into truly inclusive, relevant, and vibrant spaces. A **user-centred approach** is not just a strategy—it is a prerequisite for libraries to remain meaningful and future-proof in a rapidly changing society.
- “A critical pitfall is the so-called **resource labelling dilemma**: support is often tied to diagnostic categories or ‘labels’, which can stigmatise individuals and exclude those who fall outside strict definitions. A **resource-oriented education policy** should ensure that inclusion does not depend on labelling, but on **universal provision of support**.” (Professor Dr. Ulrike Wels)
- Innovation should not be pursued as an end in itself; “**innovation for innovation’s sake**” is often a misguided objective that leads to unfocused or ineffective initiatives. Instead, any effort to innovate within libraries must be anchored in a **deep understanding of users’ needs**, preferences, and expectations. Library development strategies should be informed by **research, data collection, and continuous feedback from beneficiaries**.
- Stakeholders and experts cautioned against “**losing focus on inclusion and universal access**” when innovating services, reminding libraries to prioritise equity as a guiding principle. Thiele cautions that one of the most significant risks is to reduce school libraries to “*a room with books that are never opened*” or to misuse access as a form of punishment. She argues that **standards and positive, inclusive practices are essential to prevent libraries from being sidelined in schools**. Karla warns that structural barriers often limit inclusion in libraries:  
  
“*There is still a lack of flexibility, of openness to new roles, and of political support. Without these, it is complicated to create opportunities for people with disabilities or to realise the inclusive potential of libraries fully.*”



*“Libraries make culture accessible to people who are economically disadvantaged or who have learning difficulties, such as dyslexia or disability. As libraries innovate, they must not lose sight of **universal accessibility**, because inclusion has always been one of their greatest strengths.” (M. Aluigi)*



## 7.5 Inspiring examples from international working groups

- 1) An inspiring example of inclusive library practice comes from the **Scoala Gimnaziala I. Basgan Focsani (Romania)**, where a **“no questions asked” policy** has recently been introduced. During school breaks, any student is welcome to enter the library, take a book from a designated shelf, or use a computer to find something to read, without needing to speak to a librarian unless they choose to. **Designed initially to support shy or introverted students, this approach has unexpectedly appealed to a broader range of pupils, including those known to be highly sociable in other settings.** Many students now choose the library as a place **to regulate their emotions**, find peace during difficult moments, or simply read without the pressure of other distractions.

The success of this practice lies in its simplicity and in the freedom it offers, a contrast to the structure of traditional classroom activities that require constant interaction and performance. In the library, students are **allowed to be alone with their thoughts**, a book, and no interference—an experience that many find rare and valuable within the school environment. This **discreet and low-barrier access** not only meets the emotional and social needs of pupils who might otherwise be reluctant to enter the library, but also **creates a positive association with the space**, potentially encouraging them to return for other activities and opportunities for learning and connection. For both the library staff and school leadership, **this approach has become a powerful way to foster participation, reduce barriers to access, and promote the library as a safe, learner-centred environment, where support is present but not imposed, and where every student can engage on their own terms.**

- 2) At **IC Vanni in Viterbo (Italy)**, the **C. Cruciani Library** stands out for its **deep integration into school life** and its evolution into a **space of civic growth, creativity, and inclusion**. With over 8,000 books ranging from academic resources to inclusive children’s literature in multiple languages, the library is physically and pedagogically embedded across the entire school. It promotes **active student engagement** through animated readings, debates, theatre, and bibliotherapy, with a special focus on **emotional expression and sustainability**. The library also hosts a dedicated *Legality and Democracy section*, aligned with the IBBY network and the Library of Legality (BILL), offering more than 200 curated books to **support intercultural dialogue and environmental awareness**. The initiative is sustained by **close collaboration with parents**, primarily through a local social promotion association. It demonstrates how libraries can act as



catalysts for emotional well-being, civic participation, and community connection.

- 3) A notable example of the evolving role of school libraries comes from a case shared by a **project manager at Asociația Alternative Educațională Vrancea (Romania)**, which highlights a school library that, thanks to strong **support from school leadership**, actively **involves parents in educational activities**. While it is often easier to engage parents of younger children, who are typically more open to participating in shared learning experiences, this initiative stands out as a promising model for **how school libraries can redefine their role within the wider educational community**. Similar approaches are also being implemented in Portugal, where libraries increasingly act as **bridges between schools and families**, fostering collaboration and shared responsibility for students' learning. These initiatives reinforce the idea that school **libraries can play a central role in creating inclusive, participatory educational environments**.

What makes this initiative successful, above all, is the **strategic partnership between the librarian and the school leadership**. In the early stages, reaching parents can be challenging for librarians alone, and the involvement of the school manager is essential for building initial connections. However, the sustainability of parental engagement depends on **how well the activities are designed**, offering not only educational value but also enjoyable, meaningful experiences that encourage parents to return and continue participating. This approach highlights the importance of collaboration, thoughtful activity planning, and responsiveness to the needs of all participants.



- 4) In **Bergamo (Italy)**, the library of **IIS Vittorio Emanuele II** offers another powerful model, highlighting the importance of **memory**, access, and **participation**. As part of the Bergamo Library Network, it offers interlibrary loans from a catalogue of over 22,000 volumes. Beyond access, it fosters a **reading culture** through relay readings for remembrance days, author talks, and national reading campaigns. The school is now implementing an ambitious **library renovation to improve accessibility and comfort**, including redesigned spaces and a reorganised heritage collection. The effort reflects a commitment to modernising school libraries while preserving their role in promoting **civic identity, cultural heritage, and student agency**.
- 5) A remarkable example is the **Lúcio Craveiro da Silva Library (Portugal)**, winner of the 2021 *Acesso Cultura Award* in the "**Physical Access**" category. The jury praised its commitment to **equity and autonomy** through the **adaptation of its physical space**, including ramps, tactile paths, lowered counters, accessible bathrooms, and inclusive signage. The library also provides braille materials, audiobooks, audio guides, and **assistive technologies**, in addition to maintaining an **accessible website**—demonstrating a deep understanding of, and commitment to, **diverse user needs**.
- 6) The **Multiplo Library in Cavriago (Italy)** combines library services with a **cultural centre**, running the project "**Multiple 20–30**" to engage young adults through art, literature, and debate. This illustrates how libraries can act as **cultural mediators across generations**.
- 7) Another standout initiative is from the **Municipal Libraries of Valongo (Portugal)**, which implemented an **Augmentative and Alternative Communication (AAC)** system using pictograms from the **ARASAAC project**. This initiative **supports users with complex communication needs**—such as individuals with autism, intellectual disabilities, or non-verbal communication—helping them navigate library spaces more independently.
- 8) A successful initiative in **Valladolid (Spain)** involves **easy-reading workshops** designed for children or people with disabilities. These workshops aim **to make reading enjoyable without barriers**, serving as inclusive activities that enhance the library's role as a welcoming and accessible space. **Co-designing** was key to the success of these workshops, as it enabled the direct inclusion of users' opinions and **real needs**, including educators, families, and organisations that work with people with disabilities.
- 9) The **Camila Basso Castillo Library** at the **Cardelli Art School in La Spezia (Italy)** is a notable case of how a library can blend art, music, and innovation. With two sections dedicated to different





school tracks, the library houses unique collections—including rare music recordings, vinyl records, and art journals—and provides access through national library networks. **Students themselves contributed** to designing the library’s visual identity and participated in cataloguing and digitalisation projects. The library has also piloted the use of **artificial intelligence** to support inventory management and information retrieval, showing how emerging technologies can be integrated into student learning pathways. Moreover, it has engaged **over 50 students in work-based learning (PCTO)**, giving them a central role in managing library services and activities.

- 10) In the *Inclusion in Libraries* podcast by the weltgewandt Institute for Intercultural Political Education (Germany), Maxi, a young woman with a visual impairment, shares her determination to build a career in libraries. Her **two-week internship in a Berlin school library** involved shelving books, attaching barcodes and labels, and scanning items—tasks she performed with enthusiasm. Maxi particularly values libraries that offer cultural programmes, courses, and clubs, fostering both learning and social interaction. She envisions working in an accessible library near her home, in an environment that combines quiet study spaces with opportunities to connect with others. While she faces challenges such as poorly configured computer settings and making telephone calls, Maxi’s story highlights the importance of personalised adaptations and supportive work environments. Encouraged to pursue further internships, she continues to explore different library contexts, showing how **perseverance, targeted training, and inclusive design can open meaningful career paths for people with disabilities**.
- 11) In **Bari (Italy)**, the **Lombardi Library at IC Grimaldi-Lombardi** serves as a powerful example of a library functioning as a **community anchor** in a socio-economically disadvantaged area. Managed through a partnership with a social cooperative and a foundation, this 1,000 m<sup>2</sup> facility includes Braille books, comics, and illustrated albums, and is fully equipped for **inclusive learning**. It is open to the public and designed as a **shared, multifunctional space** that hosts intergenerational readings, cineforums, theatre labs, and author talks. Rooted in the school’s mission **to combat educational poverty** and social marginalisation, **the library demonstrates the transformative impact of cross-sectoral partnerships, participatory design, and open access**.
- 12) In **Berlin**, the “**Reading Cellar**” in **Kreuzberg** demonstrates how a school **library can integrate creativity and everyday learning**. As Thiele explains, it offers workshops with authors and illustrators, stop-motion activities, and letter-making with stamps and typewriters, creating a vibrant model of an inclusive, participatory learning environment.
- 13) As highlighted by Fernando Azevedo in the report *Libraries as Community Centres Promoting*



*Inclusion and Lifelong Learning*, one particularly impactful initiative is a **library-based digital literacy programme for adults in low-income neighbourhoods**. This program, led in partnership with local municipalities and social services, offers **basic digital skills, CV writing, and access to e-government tools**, empowering citizens to participate more fully in modern life.

- 14) At **IC Leonardo da Vinci (Olevano sul Tusciano, Italy)**, the school library plays a central role in supporting students' **emotional development and digital citizenship**. The school has developed a series of interdisciplinary projects centred on the theme of *the power of emotions*, aiming to help students recognise, express, and care for their emotional world while engaging with literature, digital tools, and civic values.

The project *“Io leggo perché c'è qualcuno che scrive per me”* combined **reading promotion with creative writing and video production**. Students created parody videos inspired by famous authors, exploring the emotional motivation behind writing and reflecting on how literature can become a gift of one's inner world to others.

In *“Scacco matto al web”*, students took part in a life-sized chess game designed **to raise awareness about digital safety and cyberbullying**. Through analogies between chess strategies and online behaviour, students learned to navigate the web safely and responsibly, identifying fake news, hackers, and cyberbullies through creative storytelling.

With the activity *“Abbasso i muri bianchi”*, students explored the principles of **non-hostile communication online**. Through the creation of digital artworks and participation in national contests, they reflected on the importance of **empathy, respectful language, and the shared responsibility of building a positive digital environment**.

Finally, the interdisciplinary project *“La forma delle emozioni”* blended **reading promotion, emotional literacy, and artificial intelligence**. Inspired by surrealist art and supported by national reading programmes (*Libriamoci, Maggio dei libri*), students created a digital video that merged introspection, AI-generated visuals, and expressive music, offering a therapeutic exploration of inner life and emotional courage.

- 15) A powerful example comes from the **Bernau Library in Germany**, which underwent a major renovation between 2019 and 2022. As Karla recalls, the library was transformed into a true **social centre**, with open, inviting spaces designed for all generations. It has since launched innovative initiatives, such as **language training groups for immigrants**, offering low-threshold access to



German through informal conversations, and **programming workshops for children** that connect digital literacy with creativity. These activities demonstrate how libraries can transform themselves into vibrant, future-oriented community hubs.

- 16) In **Loures and Odivelas**, two socially and culturally diverse municipalities in **Portugal**, school libraries are increasingly playing a strategic role in promoting **equity, participation, and local engagement**. According to **Filipa Moura**, Inter-Council Coordinator for School Libraries, this transformation is only possible through a **cross-sectoral vision**:

*"We must ensure that school libraries are not isolated projects. They must be part of a broader educational and social ecosystem that involves schools, municipalities, cultural institutions, and social services."*

Moura emphasises that in these territories, often marked by social inequalities and high percentages of immigrant families, **libraries have become safe, welcoming spaces** where students and their families can **access knowledge, develop critical thinking, and engage in civic life**.

- 17) In **Cagliari (Italy)**, the **innovative library at IIS De Sanctis–Deledda** is pioneering education in **non-violent communication** and **emotional literacy**. Working closely with students and teachers, the library has developed multimedia resources, including **a podcast series on online hate speech**. It also **promotes peaceful dialogue through peer education and circle time**, while offering practical guidance on **preventing bullying and managing conflict**. The library's roots trace back to a grassroots initiative in the 1990s and have grown through national programmes like **Biblioscuole** and the National Digital School Plan. Today, it is an open, fully networked learning centre that offers training courses, participates in reading promotion campaigns, and serves as a reference point for the entire school community.
- 18) An inspiring example of inclusive practice comes from **Valladolid (Spain)**, where the workshop **"Historias que nos unen"** (*Stories that Connect Us*) was **co-designed** by a public library in collaboration with the Down Valladolid association. The initiative demonstrates how libraries can act as **community hubs for creativity, inclusion, and intergenerational learning**. The workshop brought together individuals with Down syndrome, their families, librarians, volunteers, and educators in a two-day program of **storytelling, collaborative art-making, and shared reflection**. Activities were designed according to **Universal Design for Learning (UDL)** principles, ensuring multiple ways of participation—through words, images, gestures, or performance.



Key features of the initiative included:

- **Accessibility and adaptability:** use of visual prompts, pictograms, quiet spaces, and multisensory materials.
- **Co-facilitation:** library staff worked alongside social workers and educators to adapt content and ensure emotional safety.
- **Family involvement:** parents and siblings participated directly, reinforcing relationships and shared learning.
- **Empowerment:** individuals with Down syndrome were given space to share their own stories and identities, building confidence and autonomy.

This case illustrates how **small-scale, low-budget initiatives** can have a profound community impact by fostering **social cohesion**, promoting **diversity awareness**, and **facilitating peer bonding**. It also shows the potential of libraries to become **inclusive cultural spaces and even future workplaces** for people with disabilities, aligning with broader European goals of accessibility and equity.

- 19) At **IC Assisi 3 (Italy)**, the project *"Leggere Insieme"* (Reading Together) reimagines the school library as a **shared space of imagination**, rooted in the belief that reading is a powerful tool for learning and personal growth. Implemented across the entire school and embedded in the official three-year educational plan (PTOF), the initiative promotes reading through innovative methods, including **writing and reading workshops**, **shared read-aloud sessions**, and **narrative-based orientation paths**. The library, conceived as a **"third space"** — open, multifunctional, and accessible — spans multiple school buildings and includes both physical and digital collections via **MLOL Scuola**, Italy's largest digital library network. A key strength of the project lies in its **collaborative model**: teachers, parents, volunteers, and former educators work together to catalogue books, manage lending services, and co-create activities. **Students engage** in practices like **Book Talks**, where they reflect on their reading by designing creative objects (e.g., book boxes, one-pagers) that visually express their personal interpretations of the stories they've read. These are then displayed in the library as lasting memories of learning. Meanwhile, **read-aloud sessions (LaAV)** **encourage diversity and critical reflection** while supporting students in developing **orientation skills and emotional literacy**. The initiative is sustained through a combination of school funding and voluntary donations, reflecting a strong sense of shared responsibility across the community.



- 20) A compelling example comes from the **Castilla y León Library (Spain)**, which launched the **“Patient Readings”** initiative at the University Hospital of Valladolid. Curated collections of easy-to-handle books, comics, and large-print volumes were made available to patients, supported by trained volunteers. The program went beyond lending: it included **read-aloud sessions, writing workshops, reading clubs, and film screenings**, all tailored to **different age groups**. The initiative demonstrates how libraries can extend their services to those unable to access them directly, promoting **well-being, creativity, and social connection** during hospital stays.
- 21) In **Covilhã (Portugal)**, the Municipal Library established a **multisensory room**—the **“Espaço dos Sentidos”**—dedicated to **stimulating learning** through touch, light, sound, texture, and scent. This sensory lab, divided into rooms for both **sensory stimulation and integration**, uses **Snoezelen therapy** to enhance educational success, particularly for children and youth at risk of exclusion. It exemplifies how libraries can become **innovative, therapeutic, and educational spaces**.
- 22) **The Biblosuvich library at IC San Giovanni (Trieste, Italy)** stands out for its work on **visual literacy and artistic expression** within a distributed school library model. The school librarian — ideally a trained teacher with a dedicated role — acts as a **cultural mediator**, connecting faculty, regional networks, and public library systems. Through participation in regional programmes such as **LeggiAMO 0-18** and in collaboration with the Damatrà cooperative, the school has hosted diverse projects that combine reading promotion with art education. One particularly impactful initiative arose in the post-COVID period, when direct access to the school library was restricted. To maintain **engagement**, the school implemented **“surprise book bags”**, inspired by a practice from another city. Paper or fabric bags containing a selection of books were distributed to each class, which students then decorated with original slogans and artwork. This low-tech, creative approach not only maintained access to literature but also became a springboard for **artistic co-creation**.

The school also developed **chalkboard-painted walls** — both indoors and on the exterior garden-facing wall — where children could create **temporary reading-themed murals** as part of ***Il Maggio dei Libri***, a national book celebration. These large-format, student-designed murals explored personal relationships with books and reading, **combining literacy with civic and artistic expression**.

Another flagship initiative, developed in partnership with the Examina Association, involved a group of primary students in a **multimedia publishing lab**. Over four sessions, students worked with illustrator Armando Miron Polacco to storyboard, illustrate, and co-author a digital picture book inspired by the life of scientist Margherita Hack. This hands-on **experience in storytelling and**





**visual composition** not only built key creative competencies but also highlighted the library's role as a dynamic **learning lab for civic identity, collaboration, and expression**.

- 23) The **Burgos Public Library (Spain)** hosted an innovative **storytelling session in Spanish Sign Language (LSE)**, organised with FESCAN (Federation of Deaf Associations of Castilla y León), accompanied by an inclusive dance performance (Danza Diversa). The event ensured **communicative accessibility** for deaf audiences, brought together hearing and non-hearing participants, and highlighted the potential of libraries to act as **cultural spaces of inclusion and diversity awareness**.
- 24) **IIS Einstein - De Lorenzo (Potenza, Italy)** has transformed its library into a creative and collaborative space that supports the **development of transversal skills and fosters career guidance**. Through “orientamento narrativo” (narrative-based guidance) and reading labs focused on identity-building, the school engages students—particularly those at risk of disengagement—in discovering their **aspirations and talents**. The library is the heart of this process, offering curated resources, multimedia content, and space for dialogue and reflection.
- 25) Masini highlighted the **Idea Stores in London**, where she completed a three-month internship, as an inspiring model. These spaces combine library services with a wide variety of courses for different age groups, turning the library into a **vibrant educational and cultural hub**. Their success, she emphasised, lies in the **variety of their offerings** and their ability to engage diverse audiences.
- 26) *“The creation of a **thematic section dedicated to children’s and young adult literature**, which opened the doors to new audiences and strengthened intergenerational connections.”* (Director of the University of Valladolid)
- 27) **IC Jovine (Campobasso, Italy)** has developed an inclusive library model in synergy with the National Civil Service and local cultural agencies. Its initiatives include family reading groups, a **“bookcrossing” project managed by students**, and a strong emphasis on **student voice and participation**. The library also plays a pivotal role in intergenerational learning activities, helping to **build bridges** between students, families, and the local community.
- 28) The **Biblioteca da Escola Secundária José Falcão in Coimbra (Portugal)** exemplifies how school libraries can serve as **cultural hubs**, hosting debates, exhibitions, and student-led projects that **bridge academic learning with creativity and civic engagement**.
- 29) Now in its sixth year, **L’Angolino** is the student newspaper of the **Istituto Omnicomprensivo in**



**Città Sant’Angelo (Pescara, Italy).** It promotes civic awareness, reading literacy, and active citizenship through themed monthly editions aligned with key civic and cultural events. Conceived as a **whole-school and community-wide educational tool**, *L’Angolino* reflects a vertical curriculum approach spanning primary to upper secondary education, engaging students of all ages. The editorial board is composed of high school students from multiple tracks (Linguistics, Human Sciences, and Scientific), supported by the school library and the regional network Bibliars (Abruzzo School Libraries Network). Each edition features a special section by younger pupils (*L’Angolino dei Piccoli*) and is distributed digitally and in print across local shops and community spaces. The newspaper provides students with an authentic, **participatory learning experience rooted in civic life**, addressing a specific annual theme in each edition. Through *L’Angolino*, **students conduct interviews, investigations, and community reporting, enhancing their media, social, and critical thinking skills**. Interviews involve local stakeholders, including teachers, school staff, families, municipal leaders, associations, and law enforcement agencies. Students have covered powerful personal stories, such as the experience of a Ukrainian mother fleeing war, as a gateway to geopolitical awareness. *L’Angolino* serves as a tool for **collective identity-building, intercultural education, and civic participation**, reinforcing students’ roles as both learners and active citizens. It is a compelling example of how school libraries and student media can collaborate to foster a vibrant civic culture across age groups and communities.

- 30) The **Lisbon Library Network (BLX) in Portugal** developed the **“BiodiverCidades”** initiative, using **World Café and Design Thinking methodologies** to foster citizen debate and create greener, more sustainable urban spaces. This highlights how libraries can be drivers of **sustainability education and participatory urban planning**.
- 31) The **Tweebonnen Library in Leuven (Belgium)** launched participatory initiatives where **citizens co-designed cultural and educational activities with librarians**. These experiments show how libraries can act as **shared civic laboratories**, fostering dialogue, collaboration, and collective decision-making.
- 32) The project was developed with **ONCE** at the **Faculty of Filosofía y Letras**, where bibliographic resource guides were adapted across all terminals to offer **greater accessibility** for people with visual impairments. *“The success was due mainly to staff involvement and a strong commitment to people. When teams believe in projects and place active users at the centre, the results are both visible and sustainable.”* (Director of the University of Valladolid)
- 33) **IIS Garibaldi (Macerata, Italy)**, an agricultural technical school, has created a library that **intertwines sustainability, storytelling, and digital innovation**. Projects include oral history





interviews with local farmers, the co-creation of podcasts on environmental topics, and interactive exhibitions **curated by students**. The library serves as a **bridge between traditional knowledge and future-oriented thinking**, helping students connect with their territory while imagining new possibilities.

- 34) In **Valongo (Portugal)**, the *Biotecas* project invited **citizens to co-create community libraries in local neighbourhoods**, ensuring access to books and cultural activities for all. These small-scale, community-driven libraries illustrate the **importance of proximity, participation, and inclusion**.
- 35) **IIS Aldini Valeriani (Bologna, Italy)** integrates its library within a broader digital ecosystem that promotes inclusion and 21st-century skills. **Students take an active role in managing the library**, curating digital resources, and co-designing thematic exhibitions that link literature, technology, and social issues. The school's inclusive approach is also reflected in its multilingual resources and reading workshops, which are **tailored to students with diverse linguistic backgrounds**.
- 36) In **Aarhus, Denmark**, the **DOOK 1 Library** launched the project *"Make their voices heard in a Climate of Change"*. Young citizens co-created strategies to address climate challenges, reinforcing libraries' role as **platforms for youth participation and democratic engagement**. Beyond its climate initiatives, the Dokk1 Library in Aarhus has become a **global reference for participatory design**, involving residents in shaping the library's spaces, services, and even furniture. This highlights how **architecture and service design** can be tools for empowerment and ownership.
- 37) **IIS Morelli Colao (Vibo Valentia, Italy)** has implemented a **cross-disciplinary approach** to its library, **connecting literature, art, and sustainability**. The library offers thematic pathways, such as **"Books for the Earth"**, and collaborates with NGOs to promote civic engagement and environmental awareness. **The space is designed to be flexible and welcoming**, encouraging both individual and collective learning experiences.
- 38) The **City Library of Subotica (Serbia)** developed **inclusive projects** for minority-language speakers, providing **books, storytelling sessions, and language workshops** in Hungarian, Croatian, and Serbian. This model demonstrates how libraries can foster **multilingualism and intercultural understanding** within diverse communities.
- 39) An inspiring initiative comes from **Biblioteca Judeteana D. Zamfirescu**, a school library in **Romania**, where the team has been running the **"Holiday Library"** project for 18 years. This long-standing programme offers a series of **summer activities** designed to keep children engaged when



school libraries are typically less accessible. The activities include **English lessons, financial education workshops, creative labs, and free language assessments** (speaking and writing evaluations conducted by speech therapists). The project's success lies in its **continuity, consistency, and responsiveness** to the needs of children. As one librarian explains:

*“The idea came from the children themselves, who approached us many years ago during the summer holidays, asking for our services even if they were not regular library users. We listened, and gradually shaped activities that could respond to their interests and needs. In the first years, it was more challenging and less efficient, but over time we became better at both listening and designing creative, meaningful responses.”*

Participation has grown steadily every year, and **positive feedback from children and families** continues to encourage the team to expand and refine the programme. The “Holiday Library” demonstrates how **attentive listening, co-design, and flexibility** can transform libraries into dynamic community hubs, even outside the formal school calendar. According to a Romanian school counsellor, the project's success lies in its **creativity, inclusive design, and strong partnerships**, including the voluntary involvement of school librarians and teachers. The fact that **it manages to engage children in educational activities during their break** is, in itself, a testament to its impact. It reflects how libraries, when working hand in hand with schools and the broader community, can play a central role in cultural enrichment and holistic development, even outside the formal school calendar.

- 40) *“At the university library where I work, we have a small room that we use for various activities, such as **talks, workshops, or book clubs**. Among all of them, I would especially like to highlight the **book club** we have been organising for the past twelve years. It involves **professors, students, and administrative staff**, and has been very successful because it not only promotes reading but also creates bonds, encourages interaction, and allows us to get to know other areas of the institution that would otherwise remain distant or even unknown. I believe the success of this book club is due to several factors. A significant one is **the communication fostered between the university's different departments**. By bringing together professors, students, and administrative staff in the same space, **bonds are formed that go beyond the academic realm**. This mix of participants brings diversity and enriches the dialogue. Also influential are the closeness and familiarity that develop over time: **the club not only brings us closer to books, but also closer to each other**, creating an atmosphere of trust and community within the institution.”* (Library manager, Valladolid)



- 41) The **IC Piave San Cassiano (Alba, Italy)** has developed a multi-faceted approach to school libraries as spaces of **inclusion, sensory well-being, and participatory design**. Presented at the Turin International Book Fair, three initiatives exemplify their vision of the library as a tool for active citizenship and educational equity.
- **The Multisensory Room (Snoezelen):** Installed within the school library *Liberamente* thanks to the CRC Foundation's 2020 "New Didactics" call, this white, adaptable space is equipped with lights, sounds, tactile elements, and visual stimuli designed to support children with severe disabilities, especially those on the autism spectrum. **It is a space of calm exploration and multisensory engagement for all students.** Teachers and educators undertook formal training to activate the room, which is now used in synergy with inclusive education plans (PEI/PDP). Plans include opening the space to external users such as social associations, mothers and children, or elderly groups in the community.
  - **Inclusive Communication through Augmentative and Alternative Communication (AAC/CAA):** In 2023, second-grade students created an animated story based on "*Little Blue and Little Yellow*" by Leo Lionni, utilising stop-motion animation and AAC subtitles. They also designed a giant AAC book by collectively selecting symbols. **The project fostered teamwork and accessible literacy, enriching the school's collection of inclusive texts.** These outputs were showcased at the *Buoni Frutti per Tutti* exhibition, organised by the Kairon association.
  - **Macrino Library: A Case of Participatory Redesign.** The secondary school library underwent a comprehensive restyling in 2016 through a participatory process involving students, teachers, parents, the municipality, and local associations. Furnishings and professional support were donated, while volunteers—including alumni, retired teachers, and youth with disabilities—continue to manage the space. **The library offers students the opportunity to engage in civic service, including cataloguing, lending, and reader support during alternative education hours.** Teachers also use the library for interdisciplinary and creative activities. The space now fosters friendship, responsibility, and a strong sense of belonging.
- 42) The **Oodi Library in Helsinki (Finland)** redefines the concept of a library by integrating maker spaces, recording studios, kitchen labs, and co-working areas. It is designed not only as a place for reading but as a **"house of citizens,"** where culture, technology, and community life converge.



- 43) The **Sala Borsa Library in Bologna (Italy)** combines its library services with **exhibition areas, public debates, and children’s storytelling programs in a central civic space**. By merging culture and civic engagement, Sala Borsa demonstrates the role of libraries as **crossroads of community life** in urban centres.
- 44) In **Belgrade (Serbia)**, the **Biblioteka Grada Beograda** launched projects to **engage marginalised groups** through easy-reading clubs and community partnerships. These programs demonstrate how libraries can serve as **inclusive platforms for cultural participation**, particularly for individuals with disabilities or those at risk of exclusion.
- 45) **Mauro Bettarini Library at IIS Giotto Ulivi (Borgo San Lorenzo, Italy)** has a long-standing presence in the school, offering a vast book collection, large dedicated spaces, and qualified staff. After a period of decline due to limited resources, a group of committed teachers began reimagining **the library as a vital educational and community space**, following the IFLA Guidelines for School Libraries. They launched a structured project inspired by professional training with AIB (Italian Library Association), progressively transforming the library into a **dynamic space for reading promotion, co-design, and civic engagement**. Key initiatives include:
- **“Vivi-amo la biblioteca” (Living the Library)**: a work-based learning (PCTO) programme where students take active roles in managing and promoting the library.
  - **“Lettori Forti” (Strong Readers)**: a student-led group fostering peer-led reading events and community initiatives.
  - **“La biblioteca degli alberi” (The Library of Trees)**: a creative project connecting the library with outdoor spaces and the broader Mugello territory through nature-themed storytelling.
  - **The Agenda 2030 Day**, held annually since 2017, is a school-wide event that brings together students, teachers, local associations, universities, and experts through workshops and debates on the 17 SDGs. Activities are both educational and career-oriented, involving younger students from local lower secondary schools.
- 46) The **De Krook Library in Ghent (Belgium)**, partnered with Ghent University and IMEC to create a **Living Lab for co-creation in health literacy**. Citizens collaborated with researchers and librarians to design and prototype a medical device, making healthcare information more understandable and accessible. This example illustrates the transformative potential of libraries as **innovation labs for civic engagement and social well-being**.



- 47) **IC Manzoni - Dina e Clarenza (Messina, Italy)** uses its school library as an **inclusive platform** to support students with special educational needs. It hosts reading aloud sessions, book-based role-playing games, and expressive writing labs **co-designed with special education teachers**. The library is also a site of **social-emotional learning**, where storytelling builds empathy, respect, and cooperative behaviours.



## 8. Conclusion: Building a brighter future, together

The transformation of libraries into community hubs is not merely an aspiration; it is a necessity in an increasingly complex and interconnected world. By embracing this vision, **learning from international good practices**, and leveraging the insights of experts, we can ensure that libraries remain indispensable institutions – **places where knowledge flourishes, communities connect, and individuals thrive**.

The **collaborative spirit** of international working groups will be the driving force behind this transformation. By sharing our collective expertise, creativity, and commitment, we can build a future where every library is a dynamic cornerstone of its community, **inspiring learning, fostering social cohesion, and empowering citizens to shape their own destinies**.

*“The library of the future will be a **truly welcoming and inclusive space**, rich in books, computers, films, digital tools, and **creative** environments, designed to **support** learning, connection, and **knowledge-sharing** across all ages and social or cultural backgrounds. Far from being limited to quiet study or passive book lending, it will host workshops, discussions, and collaborative activities that reflect the **diverse** interests and needs of its community. It will be a place where **formal and informal learning coexist**, where people don’t come to be instructed by expert librarians, but rather to **learn with** them and with one another—building a shared culture of curiosity, creativity, and lifelong learning”. (School librarian, Scoala Gimnaziala I Basgan Focsani, Romania)*

*“The library of the future should be **a place of memory, knowledge, and culture, but also of innovation**,*





**creativity, and connection to the community.**" (Fernando Azevedo, CIEC – IE – Universidade do Minho)

*"I envision libraries as **multifunctional centres**: spaces that rent out rooms for training courses, offer e-readers, organise author meetings, host playful activities for children such as treasure hunts or games, and provide digital literacy workshops. They should become true **meeting centres**, where people move among the shelves not only to find books but also to attend lessons, workshops, or cultural events. Crucially, **students of all ages must be involved** in shaping this vision, ensuring that the library remains deeply connected to their needs and perspectives."* (A. Masini, Italian literature teacher)

*"The library of the future is a place that is **easily accessible and fully digitised**".* (Early intervention specialist, Valladolid, Spain)

*"The school library of the future is envisioned as a **safe, welcoming environment** for both **formal and informal learning**, a place where **students, teachers, and parents** can explore, learn, and grow **together**. Unlike the more structured dynamics of the classroom, the library offers a **flexible, less formal setting that encourages** meaningful interactions across generations and roles. Here, the **love for printed books** can coexist and blend with a growing interest in **digital tools and online reading**, reflecting the diverse ways in which today's learners engage with knowledge. In this space, the librarian is not merely a keeper of information or an expert dictating how to learn, but rather a **learning partner and facilitator**, supporting each individual's path with empathy, guidance, and openness".* (Project manager, Asociația Alternative Educaționale Vrancea, Romania)

*"When I think about the library of the future, I am actually referring to models that **already exist in other countries**, which I had the opportunity to learn from during my Erasmus experience for university staff. I visited libraries in **Finland**, both university and public, and I was impressed by how they structure their services: the **layout** of the rooms, the **materials**, and above all, the way they encourage **interaction**. For example, in one university library, the **café** is at the very heart of the building, with no walls, and many professors and staff work there. This allows them to connect, get to know each other's work, and turn the library into a true community space. In our context, it still seems almost like a dream, but I believe that is the direction we should aim for."* (Library manager, Valladolid)

*"A place always **open to children**, where they can retreat without fear of prohibitions, a **space integrated into teaching and everyday school life**, hosting events and projects that foster creativity, participation, and value-free reading."* (Diana Thiele, deputy chair of the Working Committee on School Libraries Berlin Brandenburg, Germany)





*“Looking ahead, I envision libraries primarily as **meeting spaces**: places where students at all levels come together to study, and where citizens gather for events on socially relevant topics. The unifying thread is positioning the library as a **place of encounter—of people and ideas—rather than just a service provider.**”* (Matteo Aluigi, teacher for pupils with special educational needs in Pesaro, Italy)

*“A **library where even blind people can read** represents a powerful and inclusive vision for the future—one where books are no longer the only or primary means of accessing knowledge. As digital tools, audiobooks, screen readers, and other assistive technologies become increasingly accessible, libraries have the opportunity to redefine themselves as spaces where everyone, regardless of ability, background, or age, can **learn and participate**. In this transformation, the role of the book may become secondary, but the library’s mission as a space of culture, knowledge, discussion, and community will remain essential. The future library will be a dynamic environment for dialogue, workshops, and creative engagement, where librarians offer not just access to books, but guidance, support, and meaningful connections for all”. (School counsellor, C.J.R.A.E. Vrancea, Romania)*

*“A learning centre, a **place for exchanging ideas** around a book or cultural-scientific topic, and a space that brings everyone closer (inclusion-adaptation) to reading and culture in general.” (Special education teacher, Down Valladolid, Spain)*

*“The library of the future should be an **open, inclusive place** where **students are involved** in designing the space, older pupils help younger ones, and people with disabilities find **meaningful roles**. A school library should feel like a ‘**small living room**’—a multifunctional space for reading, research, meetings, and creativity.” (Simone Frübing, School library specialist consultant of the public administration of the Berlin district Treptow-Köpenick)*

*“I imagine libraries inspired by the models of the Nordic countries: **open, flexible, and inclusive** spaces that bring together **culture, learning, innovation, and community** in one place.” (Director of the University of Valladolid)*

*“The **library of the future** should be a **place for culture**, combining **local traditions with national and international perspectives**, and organising small, even individual **activities** as well as **large workshops and public events**. It should be **closely linked with other local cultural and educational institutions**—such as museums, theatres, schools, and adult training centres—to **co-organise** events and initiatives. Partnerships will **condition the future of libraries**, as fewer and fewer institutions will be able to achieve their objectives **on their own.**” (Librarian, Biblioteca Județeană D. Zamfirescu, Vrancea, Romania)*



*“Looking ahead, preserving **paper documents** in the digital era, ensure that the **traditional and the innovative coexist** in tomorrow’s libraries.”* (Responsible for the assessment and diagnosis service, Valladolid, Spain)



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