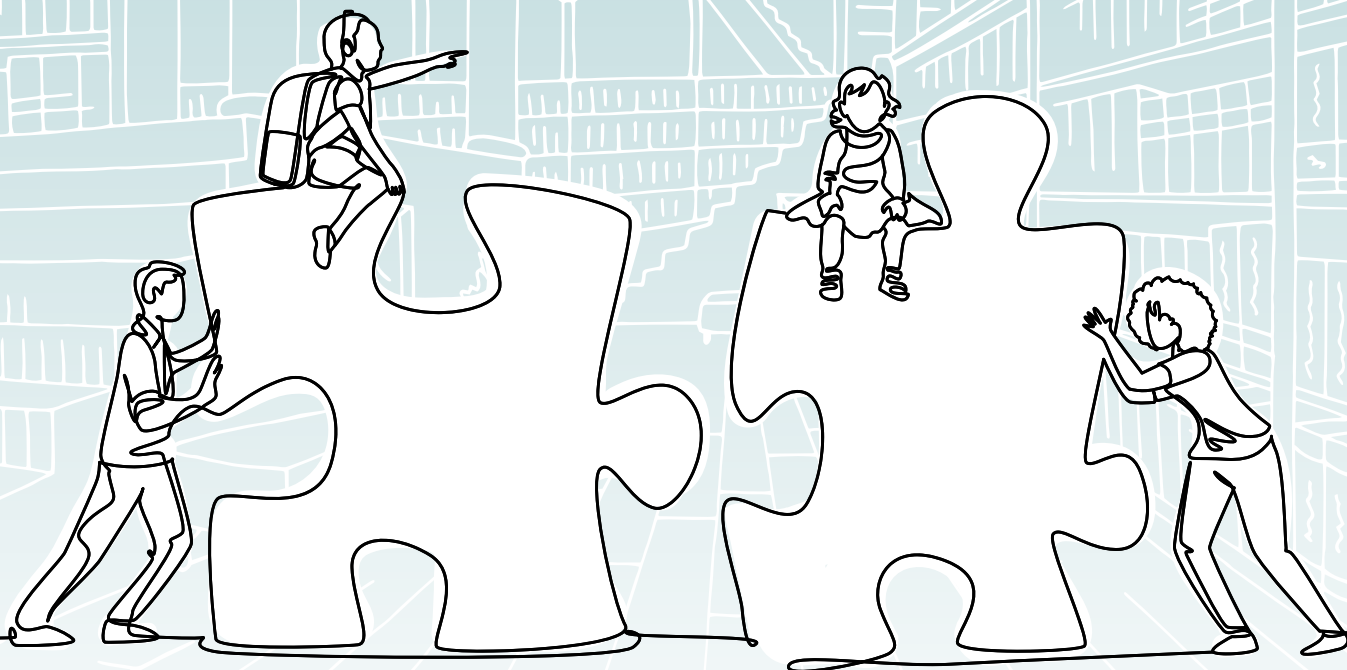




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# ROUGH GUIDE TO CITIZEN ENGAGEMENT IN PUBLIC LIBRARIES



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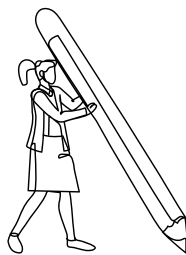
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# ROUGH GUIDE TO CITIZEN ENGAGEMENT IN PUBLIC LIBRARIES



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# PREFACE

by Anna Paola Quaglia and Ângela Guimarães Pereira

This rough guide is the output of the project 'Experiments of citizen engagement in public libraries', run in 2021 by the European Commission's Competence Centre on Participatory and Deliberative Democracy (CC-DEMOS), led by the Joint Research Centre (JRC), with Public Libraries 2030.

This pilot project had two ambitions. First, to support **civic experimentations** in public spaces or places of recognised or emergent public significance, such as public libraries. We focused on the issues of biodiversity depletion and the making of urban green infrastructures, as this pilot project complemented another ongoing participatory project, BiodiverCities. However, this toolkit also presents other case-studies, focusing on different issues.

We were interested in answering the following questions: can public libraries lead, support or host co-creation or deliberative processes through active involvement of their existing communities in participatory exercises? Can public libraries' infrastructure contribute to **the making of more inclusive and effective policies**? This rough guide suggests that our short answer to these questions is 'yes'.

This links to another, broader question: what kind of role do we want public libraries and other public spaces have in a democratic society? **The shrinking of democracies is to a great extent the result of shrinking democratic spaces** (see Hou and Knierbein, 2017).

Public libraries have historically re-adapted themselves to new circumstances, yet they have always been places where informational and social infrastructures intersect (Mattern, 2014). What do we want this intersection to look like in the future? Do we want to enhance the role of public libraries as everyday spaces of democracy (Crawford, 2005)?

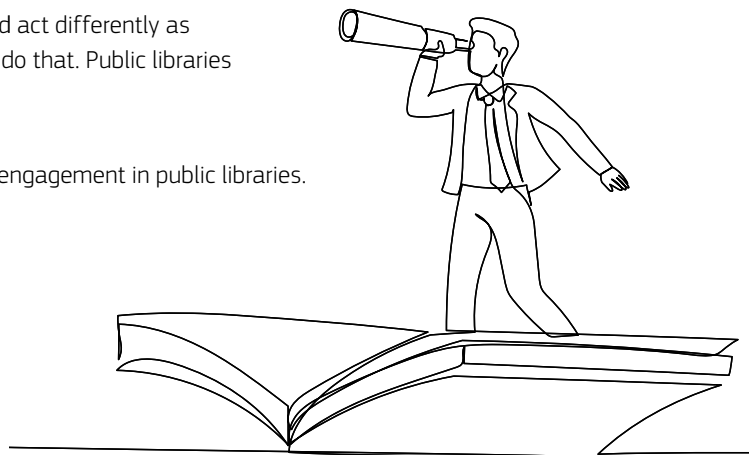
The second ambition of this pilot project has been to support the work carried out by the CC-DEMOS on public spaces and exploration of the different participatory and deliberative formats that are 'out there'. Indeed, one of the principles that sustains our work at the Competence Centre is that building partnerships to carry out meaningful participatory processes is essential for good deliberation. Without 'going where people go', **invited forms of public participation risk addressing the wrong problems, and engaging the usual 'suspects'**. It is therefore essential for policymakers at all levels – from European to local – to engage with those spaces that are already active, that are knowledgeable of the context and that are engaging with citizens in different ways.

Throughout this pilot project, public libraries and librarians were our partners, and we are very grateful for that. We are particularly grateful to the authors-librarians of this toolkit for their inspiring work.

This pilot project aimed to support and partner with spaces where citizen engagement already takes place or can potentially take place, **enhancing their capacities to work differently**. However, we do not assume that organisations, including public libraries or public administrations, already know how to design a citizen engagement exercise. Through this work, we supported the work and potentials for civic becoming of some public libraries and we hope more collaborations will follow. The aim of projects like this one, is ultimately to support democratic liveliness and the making of a culture of participation, **with citizens** at its centre.

If we really hope to work differently as institutions and act differently as citizens, we need to learn – perhaps re-learn– how to do that. Public libraries are a good place to start.

Enjoy reading and using this guidance book to citizen engagement in public libraries.



## PREAMBLE



**This rough guide illustrates the unique contribution that public libraries can bring to citizen engagement in policymaking processes or other areas of public life. Here, citizen engagement is, understood as an invited form of citizen participation where public institutions invite citizens to openly discuss matters of concern and care (see glossary) and importantly, follow-up on the outcomes.**

Libraries have existed since ancient times <sup>(1)</sup>. Collections of documents and books existed in antiquity and were mostly kept in monasteries and universities or in private hands. Even then, libraries were about more than just reading; some ancient libraries were places that encouraged debate, creation and the sharing of ideas. Open access to a broader public, however, emerged only with the invention of book printing and the Enlightenment period of 17th- and 18th-century in Europe. As literacy increased, general interest in philosophy, history and reading became more common among more groups in society. As a result, libraries became increasingly open to a larger audience and provided book lending options. The beginning of the 20th century marked the start of democratic governments funding public libraries, making them uniformly open and free for everybody. Since then, the role of public libraries as a gateway to knowledge and information has evolved in our societies. Today, public libraries are much more than spaces hosting collections of books: they serve as public spaces, they inspire curiosity and they offer cultural and learning programmes to diverse communities.

**‘Constructive participation and the development of democracy depend on satisfactory education as well as on free and unlimited access to knowledge, thought, culture and information. The public library, the local gateway to knowledge, provides a basic condition for lifelong learning, independent decision making and cultural development of the individual and social groups.’**

(UNESCO/IFLA Public Library Manifesto 1994)

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<sup>(1)</sup> [The History of Libraries III – Enlightenment and romanticism.](#)



## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY – THE ROUGH GUIDE IN A NUTSHELL

This rough guide explores the role of public libraries in citizen engagement processes and, more generally, in the making and nurturing of democratic societies. Citizen engagement generally refers to invited forms of citizen involvement in policymaking and decision-making initiated by public institutions, including governmental bodies. It differs from uninvited forms of citizen participation characterised by a more spontaneous and bottom-up character. Inviting citizens to discuss a specific public issue requires the creation of a space of dialogue between citizens and public decision-makers (see glossary).

The case studies we present showcase a variety of tools and methodologies applied in various citizen engagement processes carried out by libraries across Europe. In Chapter 4 of this document, you will find a rough guide to start planning your own citizen engagement process. This includes understanding the multitude of roles public libraries can play to foster democratic liveliness and four key stages of a citizen engagement process.

We conclude with some ethical considerations that are applicable prior to and throughout a citizen engagement process. While you may encounter challenges and setbacks throughout your initiatives, it is important to remember that these initiatives aim to foster creativity, co-creation and a culture of participation that hopefully lasts once the process is over. In other words, citizen engagement processes through public libraries, should be seen in the context of their enhanced contribution to democratic life.

### THANKS TO

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## 1.

## INTRODUCING CITIZEN ENGAGEMENT IN PUBLIC LIBRARIES



This rough guide illustrates the unique contribution that public libraries can bring to citizen engagement, here understood as an invited form of public participation where public institutions invite citizens to openly discuss matters of concern and care (see glossary).

Throughout this rough guide, we showcase how public libraries can act as inclusive forums and active agents that enhance the social impact on their communities and beyond. Furthermore, we

argue that public libraries can play a greater role in the domain of policymaking as spaces where policy issues are formulated and collectively addressed.

Public libraries are not only places of knowledge sharing that provide access to free information or resources to interpret or reinterpret that information and create new outcomes from it. Many public libraries are also spaces of knowledge production, through multiple activities and learning where books and reading together with creative activities enable citizens to address everyday life [or less mundane] topics to be addressed.

The cultural and educational opportunities offered by public libraries aim to enhance critical and creative thinking, reframing issues and themes through debates, talks, forums, meetings, artistic performances, exhibitions, etc., generating new points of view to emerge and often new artistic (literary or other) objects <sup>(2)</sup>.

<sup>(2)</sup> <http://library.ifla.org/id/eprint/2564/1/156-kleemola-en.pdf> (p. 2).

Public libraries are public spaces that are typically open to and accessible by everyone, without entry fee, no entry requirements while offering free services. Public libraries often open for a large number of hours and, in some cases, at night. In recent years, amid the Covid-19 outbreak, many public libraries have tried hard to guarantee intellectual and physical accessibility.

Around the world, there are examples of public libraries offering services closer to the needs of their communities: everyday, creative or intellectual needs. That is why, it is common to find book events or book clubs scheduled alongside concerts, language or digital literacy courses, tax form completion support and many other activities. That is to say, public libraries are, in principle, engaged with the community they serve and the neighbourhood they are located in. It is clear that public libraries have been searching for new ways to engage citizens who are less present in their spaces or activities, for example and through partnerships and dedicated outreach.

Public libraries have great potential as spaces of democracy – in some cases, such potential has already been explored and fulfilled, as the case studies in this rough guide demonstrate. Public libraries have been increasingly making efforts to be friendly, useful and rich spaces, for the community they serve and society at large (see box Cologne Public Library's *Sprachraum*). The multiplicity of activities, the partnerships and the demographics of those who use the libraries, together with the flexibility of the provided services and the growing presence of public libraries in the everyday lives of people, these institutions are well placed to provide a welcoming environment in which different communities can deliberate and collectively act.

The peculiar mandate that characterises public libraries provides room for them to position themselves as unique actors in the policy making landscape – as potential partners, considering their intermediary role and ability to reach out to diverse publics and grassroots initiatives.



Political debate before municipal elections  
© Aarhus Public Library

## COLOGNE PUBLIC LIBRARY'S SPRACHRAUM <sup>(3)</sup>

### *A public library takes an active role in facing societal challenges with local partner organisations*

#### **When the library steps in as mediator between newcomers and society**

In 2015 Germany welcomed more than a million asylum seekers, and many of them came to Cologne, a city of over a million inhabitants. There was a great willingness among the local population to help, and many neighbourhood initiatives were founded. However, the demand for German language classes, practical help and advice, and use of spaces to meet and exchange was huge. This is where the Cologne Public Library stepped in and opened a volunteer-run meeting place, providing information and programmes especially for newcomers, where they could meet locals, learn German and get together.

The *Sprachraum* was conceived around the needs of newcomers as well as based on the knowledge and capacity of the library and local organisations. The *Sprachraum's* events, collection, digital resources and networking activities

<sup>(3)</sup> <https://www.stadt-koeln.de/artikel/63350/index.html>

provided a forum for a meaningful two-way communication. Many volunteers contribute to the *Sprachraum* project, helping newcomers with everyday life in Cologne.

#### **When the library facilitates access to knowledge, learning and people**

When the *Sprachraum* was opened, existing initiatives that worked with newcomers were invited to offer programmes in it. A team of volunteers was established to ensure a presence of three volunteers during opening hours. The volunteers received training and support from the library team.

Visitors can come to the *Sprachraum* without registration and the volunteers help them with German homework, if they do not understand an official letter or with writing job applications. In addition, there are regular events that are also run by volunteers, such as an open discussion group, where German learners talk together with facilitators for an hour about a particular topic.

The library team has also initiated events and sought volunteers when a specific need was identified (e.g. initiating 'German at Work: Nursing, Medicine, Health', a weekly event organised by volunteers with a medical background for nurses and doctors who want to have their professional degrees recognised in Germany). There is also a regular event for mentoring families with children.

#### **Constant change and challenge for the library**

Keeping an open and reliable space that is run almost entirely by volunteers requires considerable effort on the part of the library. Coordinating, supervising and training volunteers alongside programme development and public relations is very time consuming and a challenge for the library.



←  
Conversation table with  
refugees and citizens  
© Cologne Public Library

## WHY THIS ROUGH GUIDE?

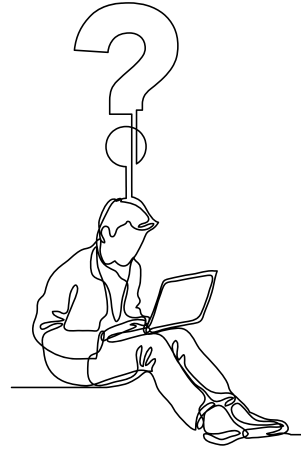
Many libraries in Europe are already active in the fields of community building and engagement, demonstrating considerable knowledge and expertise. However, citizen engagement approaches are still novel in the public library sector. This rough guide, which addresses libraries, practitioners and policymakers, illustrates how public libraries can act as facilitators of purposefully organised democratic processes.

According to Marie Østergaard (2021, pp. 212–221.), Director of Aarhus Public Libraries in Denmark, **three aspects** must be considered to create a hub for democracy and democratic practice in a public library.

1. Insist on broadening, diversifying and unfolding the **language** we use about democracy.
2. Allocate specific **resources** to test, experiment with and prototype what democracy looks like in our libraries.
3. Engage in international conversations to gain **perspective** and investigate how this approach might strengthen the library field on a global scale.

This rough guide can be seen as a contribution to this process. The document is co-authored by librarians from the Lisbon Public Libraries Network and Public Libraries 2030, a European advocacy organisation for public libraries. It includes first-hand accounts and stories told from a European network perspective.

The cases presented in this rough guide were collected using a survey we conducted through the PL2030 Lighthouse Libraries' network and experiences from the Joint Research Centre's BiodiverCities project on citizen engagement, which involved three public libraries<sup>(4)</sup>. The cases were selected to demonstrate a variety of methodologies and tools that public libraries have used in citizen engagement activities. Based on the collected experiences, we propose some practical guidance which is contained in this rough guide for citizen engagement in public libraries.



(4) In the framework of the JRC's [BiodiverCities project](https://knowledge4policy.ec.europa.eu/projects-activities/biodivercities-project_en), collecting practices of how to engage citizens in co-creating visions around urban nature, monitoring and solutions to improve urban biodiversity in the fields of planning and policymaking, three European local libraries in Lisbon and Valongo, Portugal, and in Novi Sad, Serbia, have conducted different types of activities involving citizens on the topics of biodiversity and urban green infrastructures. For more information about the project visit [https://knowledge4policy.ec.europa.eu/projects-activities/biodivercities-project\\_en](https://knowledge4policy.ec.europa.eu/projects-activities/biodivercities-project_en).

## INTRODUCING THEORETICAL CONCEPTS

This section will introduce essential concepts around citizen engagement.

### Participating in democracy



↑  
Workshop with teachers and  
educators at Multiplò, Cavriago  
© Multiplò

Creating a sustainable and lively democratic society requires political care at multiple levels. One of the key hallmarks and promises of democracy is the participation of citizens in the making of public life through engagement at the local level. This encompasses both invited and uninvited forms of citizen participation, enhanced by access to quality education and related opportunities. It has been shown that the involvement of citizens is crucial for the making and nurturing of a **trustful relationship** between citizens and their government. Also, informed and educated citizens are better placed to take an active role in democracy-making because they can process information more effectively. Therefore, it is vital to invest in education and citizen participation at the local level <sup>(5)</sup>.

This guide presents case studies, methodologies, tools and approaches. We focus on invited forms of citizen participation, but this rough guide also includes and refers to examples of other community initiatives. This is for a simple reason: when institutions invite citizens to participate in an organised process, its 'success' will not depend just on how well it has been designed. Fit-for-purpose outcomes will depend on how well embedded the process is in the community (for different social groups) and in the larger institutional context. Is it meaningful to me as an individual and to us as a collective? Do I understand the purpose? Does the process actually allow a conversation to happen?

Moreover, it is important to note that citizens, if not included in impactful decision-making processes, can remain in positions of marginality, compelled to react rather than to act. In fact, our passive relationship with democratic processes can change only through our inclusion in processes of change. These processes can achieve more impactful outcomes if they are centred on specific problems and needs identified by citizens themselves – rather than on ex-ante framed institutionalised problems – and, if possible, in the search for creative collective solutions.

<sup>(5)</sup> <https://www.idea.int/sites/default/files/publications/democracy-at-the-local-level-handbook.pdf>.

## CITIZEN ENGAGEMENT AT THE PUBLIC LIBRARY

### Places of knowledge, spaces of democracy in the making

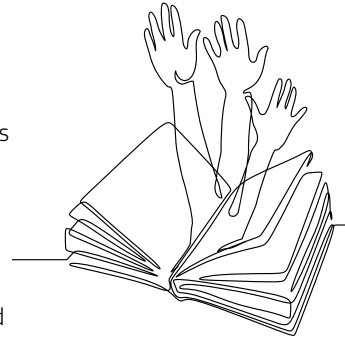
Public libraries are places where knowledge can be shared and produced through free access to books and a variety of learning opportunities. The promotion of reading and cultural heritage is among its key missions.

This mission's scope is large. Literary heritage itself includes countless elements that go beyond the book as an object, such as a work's intangible ideas, its language, its author and its web of influences and multiple contexts. Books can, of course, be drivers of conversations and relationships. In fact, some libraries use books to stimulate processes of engagement with a kind of 'books to action' dynamic.

From books to ideas, knowledge to action/interaction, and the sharing of stories that tell of the diversity of communities, public libraries can expand their scope from the promotion of reading to learning through experiencing, experimenting, innovating and sharing.

A major goal of public libraries throughout history has been to be accessible, representative and inclusive. Public libraries are places that are open to everybody. Anyone can enter and no one, in principle, is required to ask why one walked in – something library users know implicitly. Heterogeneous groups use libraries' spaces and attend their programmes and activities. Therefore, libraries are places of inclusion and tolerance among diverse people. Libraries allow people to meet groups and individuals who they would not have encountered elsewhere and who sometimes use different languages, whether that is a different spoken language, a different way of expressing ideas or a different body of jargon. Because of this fundamental quality, **public libraries can be regarded as local institutions with high democratic value, since they offer spaces where different people can share their voice and build understanding, regardless of their languages and cultural differences.** Moreover, public libraries are more and more about communion, vital experiences and learning together, than they are about silence. So, where better to start a conversation?

Public libraries can function as community hubs beyond their original role as gatekeepers of knowledge; they provide a safe space for citizens to meet, exchange and develop ideas.



David Lankes lays out the evolution of the public library's role in his text 'Library as Movement':

'We saw that the value we provide to the community was in the community itself. We became the third space, and instead of users, we had citizens or members. Our focus was not on collections alone, but on being a place where community members could come and think and work with, or without, those collections. Our newly emphasised focus was on civic improvement. We helped folks find jobs. We provided vital literacy services to youth and adults. We were a safe place to explore dangerous ideas. But it was the seeking for an identity that led to our next era, though it's more a later part of the third space era. But, for now, we'll call it the era of the community hub. We were not a community centre as in an open meeting room. We were not an indoor park with books. We were a learning centre and community hub. Our members became learners, and our focus rested squarely on the community creating its own knowledge and identity. Our tool of preference? The Makerspace. ... Instead of giving the books the best views from our new libraries of glass and steel, we created a destination. Our value was now in quality of life. We are, however, already starting to see the need for continued evolution in this approach.'

Another interesting perspective is articulated by Hannelore Vogt, director of the Cologne Public Library:

'Libraries can deliberately expand the concept of learning beyond book learning by combining progress and participation ... without citizen participation libraries cannot function as third places, which is why citizen participation is vital in this process.'

As Hannelore Vogt identifies, **participation should become an integral part of the public library**. As mentioned above, public libraries promote by default an active exchange between its community members that is driven and shaped by them, much in line with the rationale of citizen participation.

Along with the change to the public library's role, the role of the librarian has equally evolved. Librarians have become intermediaries to knowledge. They are required to have new skills as facilitators in a context of innovation and changing technologies. Thus, they are able to support both citizen engagement and citizen participation processes.



Public libraries have adopted an inclusive approach open to diverse communities. They reach out to various groups and possess a unique network. Since the outbreak of COVID-19, the role of the public library has become even more critical in creating a positive civic environment.

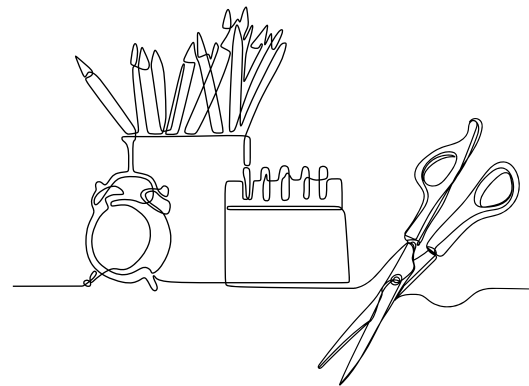
The Electronic Information for Libraries (EIFL) <sup>(6)</sup> notes that, despite lockdowns during the coronavirus pandemic, public libraries used available digital technology to support health workers and public health campaigns, provided communities with health information, strove to minimise the disruption to people’s lives by continuing to provide education and training services for children, youth and adults, and kept people connected to fight off loneliness and fear.

The transformation of the public library into a hub for democracy comes not only from the libraries themselves. In some corners of the globe, libraries’ potential has also been understood and picked up by policymakers. For example, in the last few years, public libraries in three northern European countries (Finland, Norway and the Netherlands) were mandated by legislation to take an active part in initiating democratic discourses.

**‘In future, libraries would also contribute to the promotion of active citizenship, democracy and freedom of expression. It is important that libraries will cooperate with other municipal actors and with organisations, associations and other local communities. This way, libraries could enhance the vitality of a municipality and the surrounding region.’**

This statement is from the Finnish Minister for education and science (2017–2019), Sanni Grahn-Laasonen, at the occasion of the reform of the [Finnish Public Libraries Act](#) in 2017.

Public libraries also provide the opportunity for the kind of open discussion and dialogue that can ensure the sustainability of projects. Acting as effective intermediaries and active partners, they can provide bridges that can ensure sustainable partnerships between traditional decision-makers and citizens of communities.

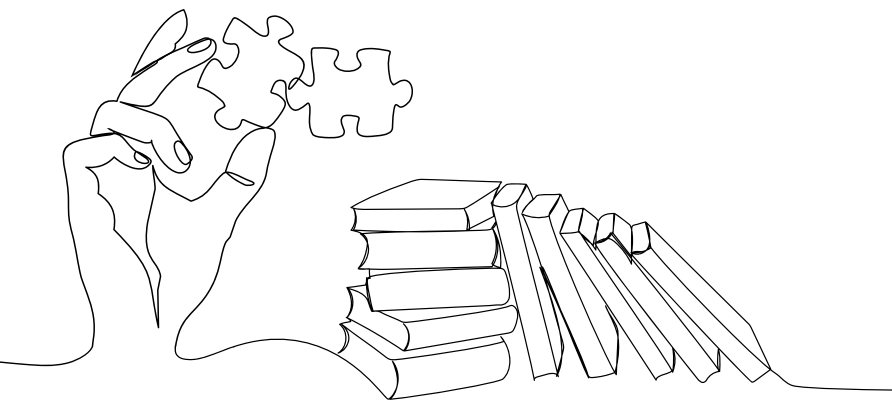


<sup>(6)</sup> EIFL is a not-for-profit organization that works with libraries to enable access to knowledge in developing and transition economy countries (in Africa, Asia Pacific, Europe and Latin America) to support sustainable development; <https://www.eifl.net/page/about>

The processes of opening and moving towards more inclusive and participatory forms of governance are emerging all over the world <sup>(7)</sup>. Pairing up with public libraries that have built long-term relationships with their communities, can help with engagement with minorities who are not easy to reach.

Many public libraries are undertaking efforts to reduce social, digital and literacy exclusion through several learning initiatives, including as safe places for citizens experiencing homelessness, discrimination or racial intolerance, for example. They can also be places that welcome the kind of ‘insurgent citizenship’ that builds narratives that challenge conventional ones <sup>(8)</sup>.

Librarians are used to interact with people of all walks of life. Librarians tend to have good skills for building and securing long-term relationships, and they are often good mediators (see Albert, 1987). Therefore, in public libraries, partners should be able to find proficient professionals who are prepared to manage the tensions or conflicts around the relationships and expectations of different actors. Because they map out <sup>(9)</sup> their communities and establish relations with the entire social tissue, public libraries can also bring to the table, besides citizens from the community, other partners, such as associations and communitarian institutions.



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<sup>(7)</sup> OECD, 2020.

<sup>(8)</sup> See Holston, J. (1995).

<sup>(9)</sup> Community mapping is a systematic approach, largely developed in the USA, to getting to know the people, places and resources that surround a public library. Many libraries use this tool to adapt their programmes and activities to local needs ([ConnectedLib – 1. What Is Community Mapping?](#)).

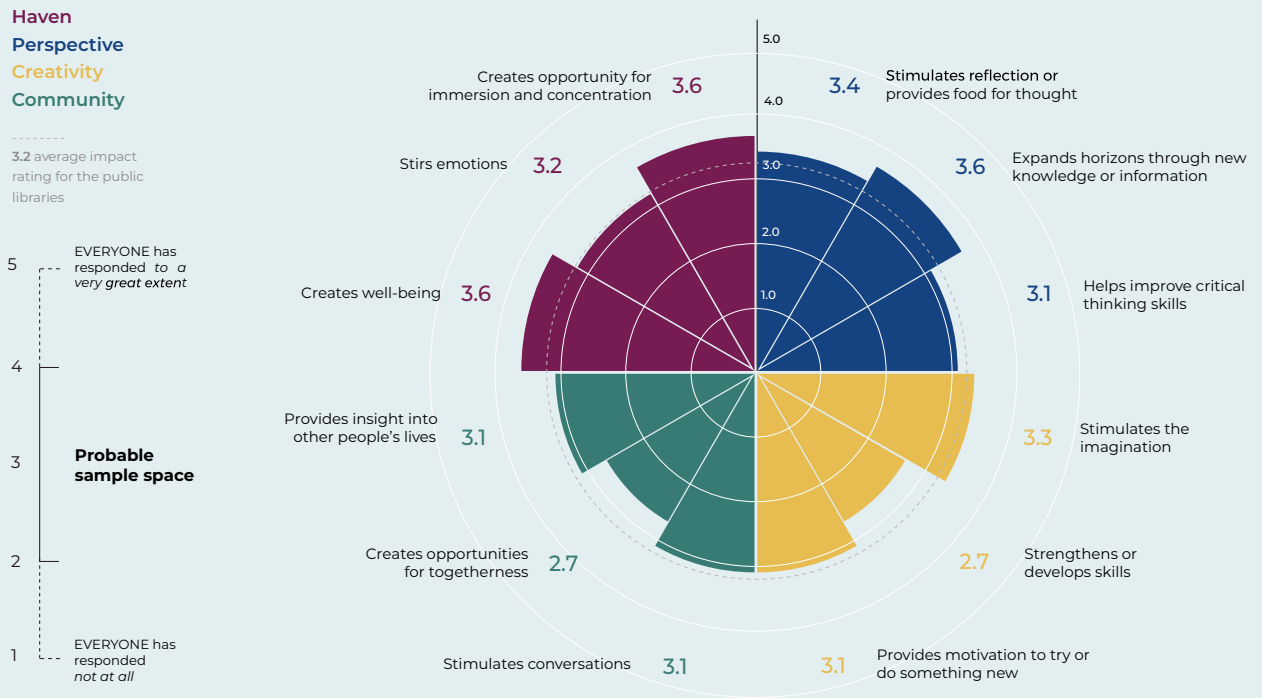
## THE IMPACT OF PUBLIC LIBRARIES IN DENMARK: A HAVEN IN OUR COMMUNITY

In 2021, the Roskilde Central Library initiated a study <sup>(10)</sup> to establish a deeper understanding of the different types of impact public libraries have on their citizens. The study was based on the acclaimed British research project The Cultural Value Project from 2019, investigating how culture translates into impact and value.

The outcomes of this study illustrate the qualities of public libraries we are referring to in this rough guide. It demonstrates the multifaceted form of impact manifested in the users' experience. The study identifies four categories of impact: haven, perspective, creativity and community. The study shows how the different library services (e.g. collections, events, physical facilities, staff guidance) contribute to the impact categories.

<sup>(10)</sup> [The impact of public libraries in Denmark: A haven in our community.](#)

### Impact compass – the overall impact of public libraries



↑  
 Impact compass of public libraries in Denmark, taken from a study carried out in 2020 by Roskilde Central Library  
 © Roskilde Central Library

## Going further

Promoting actions of citizen engagement through partnering with decision-makers will position public libraries as important actors in society, contributing to long-term, meaningful changes for their communities. They can be the fuel that triggers greater commitment and closer relationships between policymakers and citizens, as well as among citizens. In doing so, public libraries can have a decisive role in the rising of decentralised models of democracy, and the creation of important and sustainable democratic projects, based on power sharing together with the nourishing experiences of relating with different points of view.

Through selected case studies, this rough guide illustrates how public libraries are dealing with this complex and challenging task. Even if the potential of public libraries, in principle, self-evident, there are several underlying questions and challenges that should be kept in mind. The case studies illustrate how these questions and challenges can be approached. Further guidance and tools can be found in Chapter 4 of this rough guide.

Whereas public libraries have plenty of opportunities to engage directly in collaborative and co-creation projects with citizens, they also face various challenges, for instance, the integration of vulnerable and excluded groups.



## SUMMING UP WHAT THE PUBLIC LIBRARY CAN BRING TO CITIZEN ENGAGEMENT IN POLICYMAKING

Public libraries as hosts, key organisers of activities such as debates, forums and citizen panels, and as institutions that have active relationships across all spectrums within their communities, can:

- provide safe and inclusive spaces for engagement between citizens and policymakers;
- promote diverse and dissonant expressions of ideas, which can contribute to the ongoing evolution of democratic systems;
- reaffirm a culture of democracy based on the values of freedom, equality, inclusiveness, diversity, parity and openness;
- support active levels of citizen participation;
- provide insights into community life;
- provide data on the impact of participatory processes.

Another challenge relates to the skills and roles of the librarians moderating participatory activities. What skills are needed? How do they manage to sustain the projects, manage expectations, deliver on what is promised and maintain momentum?

Moreover, can libraries, act as 'service providers' and implement citizen engagement on behalf of public administrations?

What are the ethical limits and concerns?

How can we bring citizens' proposals be brought to various levels of governance - European, national, regional and local?

Are we able to critically reflect on mainstream narratives and search for alternative and inclusive narratives, with the help of diverse audiences?





## 2.

# STORIES OF CHANGE? EXPERIMENTING WITH CITIZEN ENGAGEMENT IN PUBLIC LIBRARIES

This chapter presents case studies and effective tools, methods and approaches employed by libraries across Europe to engage citizens in policymaking. Libraries all over the world have been experimenting with participatory methodologies to engage citizens – rather than users – and regain relevance as part of the social fabric of their communities. In doing so, they strive to go beyond book lending positioning themselves as civic knowledge facilitators, with a new enhanced mission: empowering societies through knowledge and active participation of citizens. Some libraries are pushing forward, implementing models

of participation that overcome hierarchies, sharing power with citizens and positioning themselves as reliable partners to support policymaking processes.

- › De Krook Library, Ghent, Belgium: the Comon project

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- › Aarhus, Denmark: make their voices heard in a climate citizens' assembly

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- › Multiplo, Cavriago, Italy: co-producing the library's strategic development plan for 2023

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- › Lisbon, Portugal: a green library is growing in the city

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- › Novi Sad, Serbia: creating new spaces of dialogues

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- › Valongo, Portugal: building biotecas in green spaces

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- › Democracy at the library in Finland: a project by Sitra

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We present five case studies that we consider illustrative of the different roles that public libraries can play in the context of citizen engagement in policymaking, through multiple formats and various outcomes.

It is important to note that we differentiate between a library **hosting, engaging** in and **participating** in a citizen engagement process: 'hosting' refers to the provision of space for an activity, 'participating' refers to a library taking an active part in a process initiated by another organisation and 'engaging' refers to a library initiating and carrying out the citizen engagement process.

A detailed explanation of some of the methods employed in these case studies can be found in Chapter 4 and the annexes.

## DE KROOK LIBRARY, GHENT, BELGIUM: THE COMON PROJECT

### AT A GLANCE

#### A PROJECT ON HEALTHCARE

- De Krook Library initiated a co-creation process, in partnership with Ghent University, Ghent City Council and Imec, a research and design centre for nanotechnology and digital technologies.
- The aim was to make healthcare more understandable for everyone in a diverse city by using digital technologies.
- In a five-day innovative process named a ‘make-a-thon’, students developed prototypes that would be further developed and tested.



ROLE OF THE LIBRARY	METHOD	TOOLS
– Hosts and participates	– Dialogue café – Make-a-thon*	Digital and analogue tools (depending on the activity)

↑  
Ghent public library  
© Eric Bouvier

\*A Make-a-thon is a creative and hands-on process where participants transform innovative ideas into physical and digital prototypes.

### BACKGROUND

De Krook Library regularly engages with the local communities, along with local cultural, scientific and technological partners, with the ambition to enable them to take an active role in public life and to find solutions to issues that affect them (e.g., access to health).

This vibrant space, showed in the picture, houses the public library, laboratories and offices of Ghent University, and the Imec research and design centre for nanotechnology and digital technologies. This space brings together knowledge, culture and innovative entrepreneurship, becoming a hub for Ghent inhabitants.

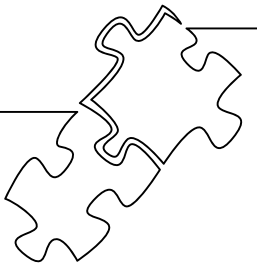
The library supports the development of digital skills and facilitates experimentation in co-creation with citizens, opening itself up to new collaborations and critical reflection.

It functions as a place of community building where the future can be shaped together by people who collaborate to build better solutions.

## CITIZEN ENGAGEMENT EXERCISE

In February 2021, the library brought together a group of scientists, technologists and creatives who invited citizens to participate in brainstorming around the question ‘how can we make Ghent a healthier city, with technology as part of the solution?’.

The library set out a plan aiming to reach diverse audiences. They communicated with different groups of citizens, contacting 11 neighbourhoods of Ghent City Council via local library branches, entrepreneurs, businesspeople, non-profit and grassroots organisations, activists, youth networks, doctors and patients to participate and share their feedback. The “Comon” project invited students from four disciplines to join interdisciplinary teams and work on prototypes.



### PROCESS

#### Step 1

The underlying idea behind the project was to use the library professionals’ experience in working with citizens and their in-depth knowledge of the library’s own collection, together with the expertise of the partners from the university and Imec, who focused on the process using the urban living lab methodology. They addressed the following challenge: “How can we make healthcare more understandable for everyone in our super-diverse city?”

#### Step 2

A group of experts, doctors and patients were brought together to exchange ideas. This marked the starting point of the creation of knowledge and competence crossover.

#### Step 3

To refine the challenge further and to exchange on possible solutions, the Comon project initiated a series of events involving experts from the public health sector and different groups of citizens. The activities were announced via the libraries’ communication channels. Again, the library acted as a bridge between different groups by bringing together people from different backgrounds.

Brainstorming sessions, workshops and interviews were carried out, and a social media campaign was set up. Dialogue cafés were organised throughout the process to reflect on ethical and philosophical aspects of the challenge, supplemented by additional sessions to explain existing medical software applications – such as tools for pain tracking and tools that translate medical terms – while addressing needs and concerns. Other activities included the building of health commodities.

The most important outcomes from the process was the realisation that access to healthcare is not only about understanding information, but rather is link sources trust and to barriers related to origin, age, location, home situation, etc.



With a clear view of the challenge, the project team involved further various people to think about practical solutions, to be used in a next step. The idea was to approach the solutions from multiple perspectives exploring their meanings by different people.

#### Step 4

Nine innovative ideas were used as conversation starters in 11 neighbourhoods in order to collect feedback from citizens.

Feasible solutions were then discussed by the students in a workshop with the invited experts aiming to analyse the results collected from the interviews and outcomes from previous workshops.

#### Step 5

In February 2022, the Comon project hosted a 'make-a-thon' over five days, inviting students from interdisciplinary backgrounds (medical, technical, social) to work together in small teams to create prototype technical solutions. Nine prototypes competed for prizes. The winner, Dolox, allows patients to track their pain levels to make communication with medical staff easier. Other prototypes included Ringli, a phone bot that calls patients to prepare for their consultation, in their own language, and Medi Memo, a smart memo that recaps and enriches medical consultations by taking notes and linking to online medical resources.

The city of Ghent decided to financially support the development and testing of the prototypes.

### EUROPE CHALLENGE

This project is part of the Europe Challenge for Libraries of the European Cultural Foundation (in cooperation with non-profit organisations Public Libraries 2030 and Democratic Society), which focuses on the question of how different communities around Europe contribute to the building of public spaces and engage in democratic conversations. Ten public libraries participated in the first edition, and a further 30 in the second edition of the Europe Challenge.

The Europe Challenge addresses some of Europe's most pressing challenges in a networked way, by working with libraries and their communities across Europe.

Local questions are often questions shared by many Europeans. With the Europe Challenge, we support the prototyping of solutions to some of the most pressing challenges we face across Europe. We believe citizens must be part of the solutions and that libraries can offer them the space to work together effectively.

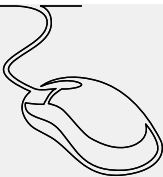
More info: <https://theuropechallenge.eu/>

## LESSONS LEARNT

- Looking at a societal challenge in an interdisciplinary perspective, generates rich and interesting results. But bringing together different perspectives, whether they are social, medical, scientific or entrepreneurial, together with ordinary citizens with their lived experiences and matters of concern, creates opportunities to learn from each other and think of solutions that are fit for purpose.
- The impact of projects such as Comon are not limited to identifying and implementing the right solution. The impact of encounters happening throughout the engagement process on individuals and communities, and the new collaborations that arise as a result are equally significant. What do people take away and bring back to their own lives and workplaces? These ripple effects are part of the potential impact.
- A library is a great place to organise a project focused on finding solutions for societal challenges. People visiting a library come from different walks of life, and a library like De Krook in Ghent is therefore a perfect place to connect to a broad variety of citizens – it's a small town within a city.



←  
Ghent public library,  
general library  
activity  
© Nathalie Samain



## TO KNOW MORE

<https://visit.gent.be/en/see-do/de-krook>

<https://www.comon.gent/>

[The Europe Challenge](#)

[The Europe Challenge presentation for Europe Day\\*22 – YouTube](#)

**AARHUS, DENMARK:**  
**MAKE THEIR VOICES HEARD IN A CLIMATE  
 CITIZENS' ASSEMBLY**

**AT A GLANCE**

The climate crisis is one of the biggest problems we are facing. The City of Aarhus decided to implement a Citizens' Assembly, with the support of the library, to involve citizens in shaping policies to reduce greenhouse emissions from private transport. The Citizens' Assembly took place between January and March 2021. The project management was led by the civil society organisation Citizen Change.

ROLE OF THE LIBRARY	METHOD
– Participates	– Citizens' assembly



↑  
 Online citizen's assembly  
 © Aarhus Public Library

**BACKGROUND**

One of Aarhus City Council's ambitions is that the city will be carbon-neutral by 2030. To achieve this objective, one thing was clear: citizens should get involved, and share their voices and testimonials in the first Citizens' Assembly on climate issues in the city of Aarhus.

This assembly was designed and implemented following the principles formulated by the OECD in the report '[Innovative citizen participation and new democratic institutions](#)' <sup>(11)</sup>. It was put into practice through cooperation between the public library, the Aarhus City Council's Department of Technical and Environmental Services and the Department of Citizen Service, as well as civil society partners (Citizen Change and the Adult Education Association).

<sup>(11)</sup> The OECD published the report Innovative Citizen Participation and New Democratic Institutions in June 2020. It gathers close to 300 representative deliberative practices to explore trends in processes, identify different models and analyse the trade-offs among different design choices and the benefits and limits of public deliberation. It includes 'good practice principles for deliberative processes for public decision making' based on comparative empirical evidence gathered by the OECD and in collaboration with leading practitioners from government, civil society and academia.

The project was developed as a collaborative process where partners contributed with knowledge from their respective areas.

The library contributed primarily with insights on public participation and knowledge on the incentives and reasons for their community to engage in participatory activities.

After gathering citizen's insights, and after much dialogue and debate, all the information obtained served to inform recommendations addressed to the city's sustainability committee.

### **CITIZEN ENGAGEMENT EXERCISE**

The city's sustainability committee identified the need to get to know more about people's ideas and thoughts on how to reduce carbon dioxide (CO<sub>2</sub>) emissions from private transport.

Involving citizens in planning activities offers many advantages. First, citizens – through local communities' situated knowledge – have resources (knowledge and experience) when it comes to addressing the specific problems they experience in their daily lives.

Second, the involvement of citizens in urban development fosters a sense of citizen ownership of the issue and the solutions to address it. When projects are instigated by and for citizens, it strengthens their commitment to creating sustainable development.

**The citizens' assembly** (*borgersamling* in Danish), which had been identified as the most suitable way of meeting the proposed objective, is a deliberative method in which a randomly selected group of citizens is informed about a social challenge by experts, collectively discuss, and subsequently prepares and votes on recommendations on how to address it.

### **PROCESS**

#### **Step 1**

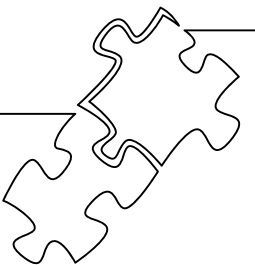
An invitation letter was sent to 10 000 randomly selected citizens in Aarhus. The invitation contained all necessary information about the project: the objectives, time frame, estimated time every participant should expect to spend on the project (20 hours) and process.

#### **Step 2**

Out of the 10 000 citizens who received the invitation letter, 380 citizens reported back that they wanted to participate in the assembly. They all filled out a form with information about their age, geographic location, level of education, income, etc.

#### **Step 3**

Based on the 380 filled-out forms, a representative group of 24 people was drawn to participate in four online meetings totalling 17 hours.



## NINE RECOMMENDATIONS FOR ACTION WERE SENT TO THE CITY'S SUSTAINABILITY COMMITTEE \*

1. Prioritising traffic – making the city attractive to pedestrians and cyclists in Aarhus city.
2. Parking outside the city – park your car and take the shuttle bus.
3. Public transport – the future of public transport: green, sustainable and flexible.
4. Cycle paths – cyclists' paradise: infrastructure for cyclists that is conducive to an accessible, safe and efficient way to get around Aarhus.
5. Prioritising space for activities – experiences, oases and thriving shopping.
6. Attitudes – business as a driving force for change.
7. Transport hubs – more and visible.
8. Parking for bikes – better and more beautiful space for parked bikes.
9. Experiments and temporality – reallocation of space in the city in time-limited periods.

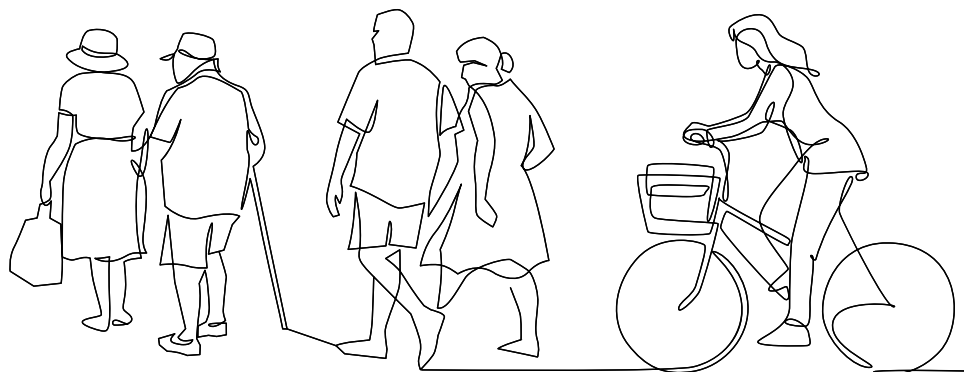
[\\*Mini-borgersamlingen om klimavenlig transport: 9 anbefalinger med tanke på byen vi ønsker.](#)

## POLICY OUTCOMES

The citizens' assembly produced nine recommendations on how to reduce CO<sub>2</sub> emissions from private transportation in Aarhus. The recommendations were passed on to the city's sustainability committee.

The sustainability committee was not obliged to act in accordance with the recommendations, which were merely consultative to their future decisions.

Hence, this assembly was not well anchored in the policymaking process. Citizens' Assemblies should not be used if there is no follow-up on recommendations.



**‘A thorough evaluation was conducted after the assembly. The evaluation showed that the participants experienced the assembly sessions as safe spaces where they, in a trustful atmosphere, could express their opinions. The evaluation also showed that the participants in general would have liked more time to process the information they received from the guest experts and stakeholders.**

**As an overall impression, we, who planned the assembly, found it remarkable how serious and dedicated the participating citizens solved their task. Especially as all the work took place on a voluntary basis without any pay and during evening hours.’**

Lisbeth Overgaard Nielsen, Chief of Partnerships and Communication  
Asmund Bertelsen, Democracy Developer

## LESSONS LEARNED

- It is important to create a safe atmosphere for the assembly sessions.
- Enough time is needed for the assessment of the information received.
- Citizens’ assemblies require a carefully designed implementation process.
- Citizens’ assemblies should not be used if follow-up of the outcomes are not planned by the policymakers



→  
Debate training for  
students  
© Aarhus Public Library

## MULTIPLLO, CAVRIAGO, ITALY: CO-PRODUCING THE LIBRARY’S STRATEGIC PLAN FOR 2030

### AT A GLANCE

The library and cultural centre Multiplo in Cavriago, Italy, developed a strategic 10-year plan for the 2020–2030 period, reflecting on local cultural policy, through a participatory process.



ROLE OF THE LIBRARY	METHOD	TOOLS
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Participates</li> <li>– Engages</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Co-creation</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Graphic design software</li> </ul>

↑  
Logo Multiplo 2030  
© Multiplo

### BACKGROUND

The Multiplo Cultural Centre is located in the small town of Cavriago, in the Province of Reggio Emilia. The municipal centre opened in 2011. Since its opening in 2011, the Multiplo centre has been contributing to the strengthening of community ties by being a library, a laboratory of creativity, a place for experimenting with artistic languages, making of content and experiences.

Ten years after its opening, Multiplo’s communities and partners were faced with a challenge. How could Multiplo develop a strategic plan to define Cavriago’s cultural policies through a participatory process?

The process that led to the development of Multiplo’s strategic plan 2030 aimed to facilitate understanding, dialogue and the search for solutions through continuous interaction between all actors, by employing different participatory approaches, such as workshops.

The participatory dimension of the process was intended to respond to an increasing demand for democracy and transparency, while also aiming at strengthening the relationships among community actors.

## CITIZEN ENGAGEMENT EXERCISE

The participatory process was developed in different phases during which various issues were discussed, such as establishing a shared direction for Multiplo as well as how to encourage and promote citizen participation.

Further discussion points included reflecting on local issues identified over the last 10 years and selecting ways and actions to bring new patrons to Multiplo.

Another topic of discussion focused on cultural actions in different spaces that may not be conventionally recognised as places of culture. This was proposed in order to increase the sense of community, connect projects and discuss building collaborations with other municipal offices.

In the workshops, different groups were called to engage in the process of collaboration: entrepreneurs, parents of children with disabilities, young people and students, as well as librarians.

## PROCESS

### Step 1

The first phase consisted of the co-planning and the preparation of the strategic cultural policies plan, which involved librarians and cultural workers from Multiplo, local councillors and civil servants of the municipality. During this phase, they identified crucial issues that would serve to guide the work and defined the contents of the future strategic plan using the template Business Model Canvas, which later became the most important working tool. The Business Model Canvas is a template visual map made up of several fields used to present in a work grid the essential issues to be addressed.

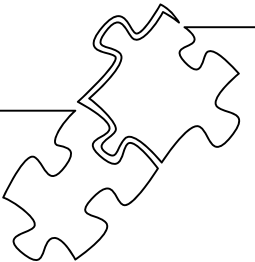
### Step 2

The second phase corresponded to reaching out to stakeholders, citizens, patrons, social and cultural associations, entrepreneurs, representatives of schools and the educating community, university students, young people and librarians of the Province of Reggio Emilia.

Seven workshops were organised involving opinion leaders, local entrepreneurs, a knitting group, parents of children with disabilities, led by librarians of the Province of Reggio Emilia, and a group of Italian art librarians.

### Step 3

One of the workshops with citizens and stakeholders took the form of a 'marathon of ideas' involving over 150 participants. This was an event that lasted a whole day, with six groups taking part:







←  
Workshop with citizens as part  
of the process in Cavriago  
© Multiplo

- teachers and parents of primary schools, teachers and parents of secondary schools and paediatricians;
- civil servants;
- young people and students;
- members of local associations;
- friends of Multiplo and library volunteers;
- opinion leaders and former city councillors.

The process was completed by gathering proposals and ideas. People could submit ideas by email, text message or WhatsApp (Meta Platforms, Inc, Menlo Park, CA, USA) message, sharing them on the organisations' social channels or fixing a sticky note on a poster in the hall of Multiplo.

## NEXT STEPS

A key element in this process was the partnership with 'Pares – participation, responsibility, sustainability' <sup>(12)</sup>. This cooperative of professionals was extremely important to the process, offering a methodological training course and coaching on carrying out the design process. After all the meetings, the Multiplo staff wrote a first draft of the strategic plan, which was structured following the 14 working fields that had been defined during the process. The plan contains possible actions for all 14 working fields (see below). Initially, the intention was to discuss the strategic plan with the municipal council in January 2022 and then present it to the citizens. However, due to the fourth wave of the coronavirus pandemic, the public debate was delayed.

<sup>(12)</sup> Marco Cau, local development agent, works on multidisciplinary and multi-actor projects to promote and enhance cities, territories, communities and organisations. Graziano Maino, consultant and trainer, works on innovation and collaboration processes in groups and between public and non-profit organisations. See <https://www.pares.it>

## LESSONS LEARNED

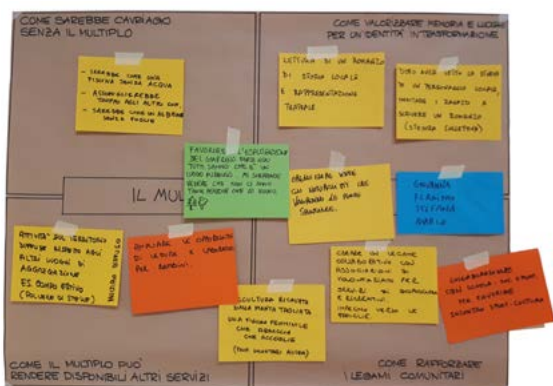
**First lesson:** Cavriago's community is passionate about participation. According to the Multiplo team, the most 'beautiful' meeting was the 'marathon of ideas'; in a single day they learned that an opportunity for participation – true, lively and in person – was very well received. This was the first popular initiative after a year and a half of the coronavirus pandemic.

**Second lesson:** Librarians have in their 'toolbox' the specific skills of their profession – including cataloguing and knowledge of editorial strategies and literary languages – but there is always room to improve relational (e.g., empathy) and more technical skills (e.g., facilitation, as it is important to facilitate the discussion and the listening).

**Third lesson:** collaboration with other services and public sectors must be continuously nurtured. During the workshops many colleagues and professionals from other sectors of the municipality or from other public services declared their willingness to collaborate; however, maintaining a spirit of cooperation and collaboration is challenging in daily work.

## POLICY OUTCOMES

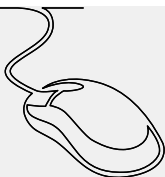
Based on the outcomes of the Multiplo process, the library staff formulated a strategic plan addressing 14 work fields. Each work field articulates an action point for the Multiplo and the cultural services of Cavriago. These include: internal and external collaboration with various levels of governance to undertake community building; ensuring library staff are engaged and motivated to carry out activities; communications, projects and events; resources; and a 10-year strategy for the Multiplo.



↑  
Workshop documentation  
© Multiplo

## TO KNOW MORE

<http://www.comune.cavriago.re.it/multiplo/>





The main objectives with the local communities were to:

- empower the different community agents as part of the library think tank;
- identify the needs of the community and gather fruitful ideas for the services of the future library;
- identify interests and needs of the community around the core subject of the future library (biodiversity, sustainability and nature-based solutions).

### CITIZEN ENGAGEMENT EXERCISE

The Biodivercities project offered the opportunity for the Lisbon Public Libraries Network to undertake, in collaboration with the Centre for Ecology, Evolution and Environmental Changes (C3C), Faculty of Sciences, University of Lisbon, several engagement activities allowing local communities to participate in the design phase of the new library.

The citizen engagement method that best answered the needs of the partners was the World Café. About 20 people were invited to participate: artists, members of local associations, users of the garden, residents, students, young activists, members of local radio, musicians, educators, members of the scientific community and members of environmental companies.

The citizen science tool used in this citizen engagement exercise is a free app that allows recording of landscape related memories in the park where the library is being built.



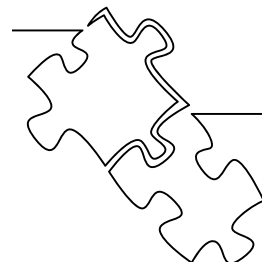
→ Meeting documentation with librarian and architects, BiodiverCities project Lisbon Libraries Network  
© Lisbon Libraries Network

## PROCESS

### Step 1

During the World Café session, four questions were presented to the participants, which were key to co-design the library functional programme.

1. What is a library dedicated to environmental sustainability?
2. What kind of resources and activities do you imagine in this library?
3. How can this library collaborate with other institutions?
4. What would take me (i.e. 'you') to this library?



### Step 2

After the World Café session, Lisbon Public Libraries Network staff proceeded to analyse and categorise the ideas developed by the participants through a spreadsheet and shared the results with all partners in the BiodiverCities project. The Lisbon Public Libraries Network invited an illustrator to create a visual map synthesising the ideas that resulted from each question (see the illustration on page 33). A workshop with 74 participants, followed. In this workshop, the results were presented, and the university's citizen science app tested <sup>(14)</sup>, followed.

The library's functional programme <sup>(15)</sup> was drawn up taking into account the results of the World Café session. The organisers recognised that there was a range of ideas that could be tested.

### Step 3

This testing phase was developed through a transnational partnership and within the framework of the citizen lab – *laboratorios ciudadanos* – a collaboration between the Ministry of Culture and Sport (Government of Spain), Medialab-Prado (Madrid, Spain) and *Iberbibliotecas*.

In partnership with the Department of Urban Hygiene, Lisbon City Council, and the Centre for Ecology, Evolution and Environmental Changes (C3C), Faculty of Sciences, University of Lisbon, the Lisbon Public Libraries Network launched a call to the community Peças de jardim (Garden pieces lab). People from the area surrounding Estrela Garden were invited to collaborate and to submit ideas to be prototyped. To evaluate the impact of this citizen lab, we used the Cívímetro tool.

<sup>(14)</sup> <https://play.google.com/store/apps/details?id=com.koncker.ecologicalmapping&hl=en&gl=US&pli=1>

<sup>(15)</sup> This corresponds to the regular activities of the library's programme, as well as the services that the library will provide. It includes: mapping of the territory, strategic objectives, spaces/infrastructure, the team's competence, the opening times, the activities and partnerships.

With the objective of developing prototypes, Lisbon Public Libraries Network brought groups together at a citizen lab that lasted 10 days during November 2021.

During the citizens lab, major ideas that emerged at the world café with other participants (i.e. other citizens that had not attend the world café), and test these ideas through prototyping. The participants were asked to build prototypes that could respond to those ideas, specifically, green structures that could be built and placed inside and outside the library, and that would symbolise or draw attention to specific dimensions such as: sustainability, reusage, recycling, caring for biodiversity, etc.

Seventeen projects were submitted, and the jury selected two – Literary Stations and Live Mandala – because both projects privileged an awareness of the different cycles of nature. Participants met each day to build together the 2 prototypes of the 2 selected projects.

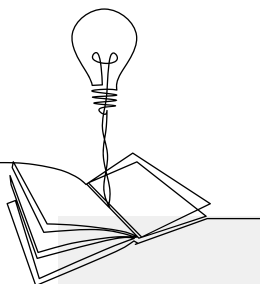
### LESSONS LEARNED

The workshop held by the academic partners of this project, was found to be less participatory than the World Café session. We recommend that future workshops of a more academic nature, are accompanied by both the citizen science experiment and use creative methods and storytelling, in order to leave space for open discussion and brainstorming.

The hospitality and openness associated with the library facilitated contact with other local initiatives.

The citizen lab format was found to be very useful because it allowed for the prototyping of creative projects and it encouraged people to have a long-term relationship with the library. This could have been even more enriching if the diversity of the group, especially in terms of gender and educational skills, had been greater, with related training or activities.

Next time, it should be better clarified that the citizen lab focuses on the process rather than the outcome, asking people to share and write daily contributions and insights.



### DESIGN THINKING IN LIBRARIES

The design thinking method will become a standard approach for citizen involvement in public libraries in future citizen engagement activities. This rough guide showcases the relevance of this method, referring to the toolkit created as part of the Global Libraries programme at the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation.

Access the toolkit online:

[design thinking for libraries toolkit.](#)

## POLICY OUTCOMES

The results served as a basis to draft a profile for the coordinator of the future library, based on the expectations of the community. The BiodiverCities partners were also able to reach out to interested participants to be involved in their citizen engagement activities.

Communication around the participatory activities helped foster curiosity about the project at the local level. This also resulted in a more transparent and accessible planning process for the new library.

Several opportunities arose to continue the collaboration between partners and participants after the end of the project. These included a seed bank, a memory mapping and educational projects.



Meeting documentation with librarian and architects, BiodiverCities project Lisbon Libraries Network

© Lisbon Libraries Network

**‘The project with BiodiverCities has been such a gift. At the very moment we are talking about sustainability, we have a programme to help engaging citizens. The partnership with the University really helps the library to improve its content, especially regarding scientific communication.’**

Susana Silvestre, Head of Division, Lisbon Public Libraries Network



## TO KNOW MORE

[BiodiverCities Atlas: A participatory guide to building urban biodiverse futures](https://blx.cm-lisboa.pt/2021/10/laboratorio-de-cidadaos-para-a-futura-biblioteca-jardim-da-estrela/)

<https://blx.cm-lisboa.pt/2021/10/laboratorio-de-cidadaos-para-a-futura-biblioteca-jardim-da-estrela/>

<https://blx.cm-lisboa.pt/category/biblioteca-jardim-da-estrela/>

## NOVI SAD, SERBIA: CREATING NEW SPACES OF DIALOGUES



### AT A GLANCE

The citizen engagement activities consisted of two debates that addressed specific aspects of urban biodiversity, namely human health and pollinators, plus a literary and multimedia competition. The activities took place in two different library facilities.

↑  
BiodiverCities competition  
award ceremony  
© Novi Sad Central Library  
and National Green Roof  
Association, Serbia

#### ROLE OF THE LIBRARY

- Engages

#### METHOD

- Panel discussion, with speakers and a facilitator
- Online engagement
- Literary and multimedia competition

### BACKGROUND

The Novi Sad City Library in Serbia has around 30 branches across the city and surrounding suburbs and serves over 410 000 inhabitants. The library had a strategy to develop international contacts and competences, especially in the context of the 2022 European Capital of Culture. The process carried out was also part of the BiodiverCities project <sup>(16)</sup>. Therefore, it was an opportunity to reach out to new audiences and raise awareness among the public about the preservation of urban green spaces. The activities organised in collaboration with the library represented the first phase of the “Novi Sad – biodiverzitetSKI grad”.

With this initiative, the library aimed to contribute to the making of a positive attitude to local politics, counteracting a sense of ‘political hopelessness’ observed among some groups that use the library’s facilities. More specifically, the activities were aimed at creating spaces of dialogue between citizens, experts and institutions to exchange information, perspectives and

<sup>(16)</sup> <https://cop-demos.jrc.ec.europa.eu/citizen-engagement-projects/novi-sad-biodivercity>



concerns on local environmental issues. Two public workshop debates on urban biodiversity involving an expert panel and interested citizens, were organised as part of this project, one dedicated to the topic of health and another to the topic of pollinators (bees).

In addition, a literary and multimedia competition was held. The library worked closely with the leader of the BiodiverCities project. Partnerships were created with local environmental non-governmental organisations (NGOs), such as the National Green Roof Association Serbia (leading BiodiverCities in Novi Sad).. As the project dealt with matters that required also the mobilisation of scientific knowledge, it was important to work closely with experts in the relevant fields. In addition, other experts, local politicians, journalists and artists were invited to participate.



↑  
BiodiverCities walk  
© Novi Sad Central Library  
and National Green Roof  
Association, Serbia

## CITIZEN ENGAGEMENT EXERCISE

About 40 participants joined the two panel discussions. The in-person format greatly encouraged interaction..

The project leader facilitated the discussion, with all participants sitting in a big circle – spatially reflecting that the idea that everyone is equal – and with experts not differentiated from citizens. The activities were not carried out at the library or its branches, but rather at different sites across the city.

A total of 65 people took part in the competition, 21 of whom were awarded a prize. The award ceremony took place publicly in the Danube Park in the presence of a large audience and passers-by. The head of the jury was the well-known writer and photographer for *National Geographic* Uroš Petrović, which brought wider public attention.

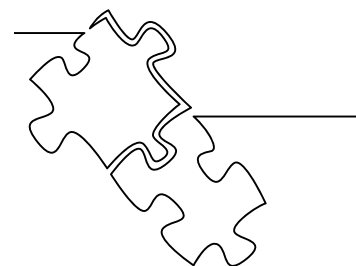
## PROCESS

### Step 1

For the panel discussions, a horizontal set-up was implemented.. People were positioned in a circle, a sticky-note map was used for visualising the discussion outcomes and ice-breaker questions were integrated to make everyone feel at ease. To stimulate inspiration, the library had also designed a logo.

### Step 2

This format helped to facilitate a direct and smooth exchange between the public, the experts and the policymakers present, and, based on the inputs gathered in the first phase, a visual map of the city was created . The remaining activities of the BiodiverCities project in Novi Sad built on the knowledge mobilised and results gathered from this experiment with the local library.



## LESSONS LEARNED

- The format was effective; further engagement activities with events in similar formats have been planned.
- The competition was especially effective in reaching new audiences and achieving a high level of visibility.
- The library perceived the scheduling of the event as a challenge. It was also noted as a challenge that, in Serbia generally, the culture of citizen engagement is not very strong.
- The library functioned as an open and free space, and mediator between the local communities and local decision-makers. This can be seen as a very valuable outcome of this project.

## POLICY OUTCOMES

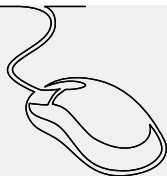
The library acted as the place that brought together different actors who do not usually find themselves in the same space. The activities helped bring public institutions closer to the people and find ways to allow citizens to contribute to design policy. The exercise fostered the creation of interdisciplinary and interinstitutional networks, which could be very helpful for future activities.

The library made use of the outcomes of the debates to draft a synopsis for each event, highlighting strengths and weaknesses of the local context and the approach taken towards biodiversity, calling for more awareness and collaboration between local NGOs. These documents were sent to local politicians.

Overall, the project aimed to encourage more cooperation between local NGOs and the municipal government on the situation bees in the city.

**‘The library was the place to convene actors and bring them together with citizens. This is something new for us. ... This has given a great model for the library – one of the best events we ever had in our library. We want to do more events like this in the future.’**

Bojana Grujić, Novi Sad City Library lead



## TO KNOW MORE

[BiodiverCities Atlas: A participatory guide to building urban biodiverse futures](#)

[Novi Sad – BiodiverCity](#)

[Novi Sad – BiodiverCity project \(May 15 – September 30, 2021\)](#)

## VALONGO, PORTUGAL: BUILDING *BIOTECAS* IN GREEN SPACES

### AT A GLANCE

Citizens were invited to take part in the installation of *biotecas* in public green spaces. *Biotecas* are public bookcases for the exchange of books. The activities were used as an opportunity to learn about the importance of urban biodiversity.



ROLE OF THE LIBRARY	METHOD	TOOLS
– Engages	– Co-creation	– Public walks – Hands-on activities in an outdoor setting

↑  
Bioteca, Valongo  
© Municipality of Valongo

### BACKGROUND

The rural municipality of Valongo is in the District of Porto in northern Portugal and has a population of around 93 000 inhabitants. In 2022 it was awarded with European Green Leaf Award. Valongo also participates in the European Commission’s Intelligent Cities Challenge <sup>(17)</sup>.

The municipal library has three branches and is keen to develop activities contributing to the overall commitment of the municipality to support citizen participation and turn public attention to environmental issues. By contributing to the BiodiverCities projec <sup>(18)</sup>, the library aimed to raise awareness about the urgent need to preserve local biodiversity and to create a sense of community around the project.

<sup>(17)</sup> The Intelligent Cities Challenge is a European Commission initiative that supports 136 cities in using cutting-edge technologies to lead an intelligent, green and socially responsible recovery ([Intelligent Cities Challenge](#)).

<sup>(18)</sup> <https://cop-demos.jrc.ec.europa.eu/citizen-engagement-projects/biodivercities-valongo>

## CITIZEN ENGAGEMENT EXERCISE

The library engaged with a group of 30 citizens in a few of interventions in public space:

- installation of pollinator beds/hotels for insects
- husking of acacia trees
- installation of the biotecas.

## PROCESS

### Step 1

The activities were promoted using the internet and by distributing flyers. A first walk was carried out to identify the needs of the chosen area. This activity was open to the whole community. Within the area that had been designated during the first walk, places were identified where action would be taken.

### Step 2

The biotecas, including the pollinator beds, were collectively assembled. A base structure was placed by technicians from the city council 2 days before the activity. The group was then directly involved in assembling the beds. The participants also took part in the husking of acacia trees.

### Step 3

The city council placed information panels at each of the sites to inform the community. After 2 days, around 80 % of the books had already been exchanged.

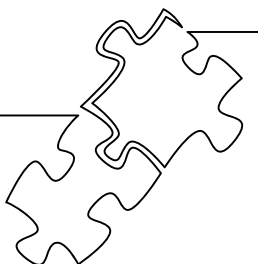
## LESSONS LEARNED

The library noted that it would be beneficial to expand the activities to involve even more groups from the Valonguense community through activities such as lectures or workshops. The library expressed a strong desire to deepen the new partnerships at local level and within the BiodiverCities project consortium that included the University of Alveiro and different departments of the Municipality of Valongo.

The library stated that its role as a place of knowledge has helped to reach out to participants. The partnerships between the academic and municipal institutions added scientific expertise and practical knowledge.

**'We appreciated the opportunity to really do something together – to see how we can truly act for a change.'**

Maria Bernardete e Pais, Valongo Municipal Library Director

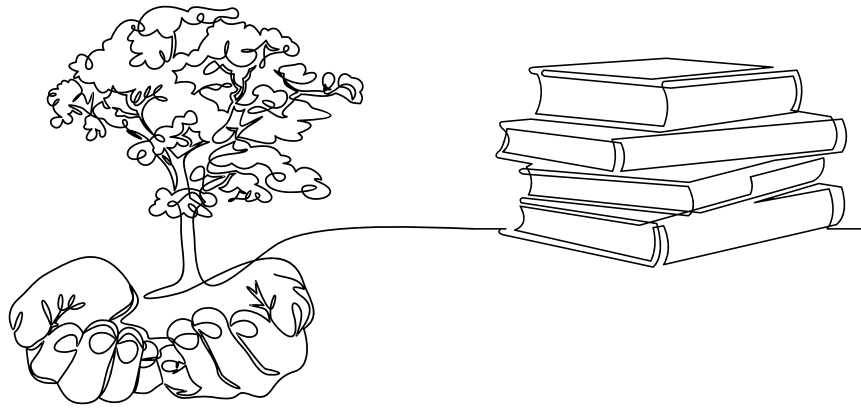


## POLICY OUTCOMES

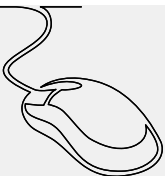
The biotecas have been very well adopted. Placing freely available books in the cities' green spaces has attracted considerable curiosity and generated a surprising effect.

The library intends to continue with engagement activities around biodiversity and is planning to organise formats allowing more in-depth exchange of knowledge.

The library plans to create 'seed libraries' <sup>(19)</sup> and involve the local agricultural community in this activity.



<sup>(19)</sup> In 'seed libraries' the library invites visitors to take plant seeds out of the library and to bring back new seeds (grains) from their own harvest.



## TO KNOW MORE

[BiodiverCities Atlas: A participatory guide to building urban biodiverse futures](#)

[Em Valongo há biotecas nos jardins, com plantas e livros para todos](#)

## DEMOCRACY AT THE LIBRARY IN FINLAND: A PROJECT BY SITRA



### AT A GLANCE

Sitra, a Finnish government-based foundation, initiated a project encouraging public libraries to become a wider part of civil society by providing a venue for dialogue between the public and various decision-makers.

↑  
© Sitra 2022

#### ROLE OF THE LIBRARY

– Hosts and engages

#### METHOD

– Various, depending on the public library

#### TOOLS

– Online platforms and social media, e.g., Facebook Live (Meta Platforms, Inc.)

### BACKGROUND

The project involved six libraries in both urban and rural contexts (in Imatra, Inari, Mäntyharju, Oulu, Pietarsaari and Turku). The objective was to employ different methods to strengthen democratic practices through activities in public libraries. The experiments were launched, coordinated and funded by Sitra in 2020–2021. The project published a handbook for libraries based on the results of the pilot projects <sup>(20)</sup>. A second outcome of the project was the creation of a follow-up democracy grant of over one million euros to help libraries use the tools presented in the handbook.

<sup>(20)</sup> How to make libraries forums of democracy: Methods for libraries to promote democracy <https://www.sitra.fi/app/uploads/2023/01/how-to-make-libraries-forums-of-democracy.pdf>

## CITIZEN ENGAGEMENT EXERCISE

Trials were carried out in six libraries to test different forms of interaction and to enhance citizens' opportunities to influence and participate in decision-making. The trials looked for different forms of encounters and, based on the results, conceptualised models to turn libraries into forums of democracy in many different ways.

The ambition was that all processes could be replicated and implemented nationwide. For example, the library of Mäntyharju developed a concept particularly suitable for the libraries of small towns, based on remote connections that enable encounters between young people and politicians. In this case, young people could discuss directly with decision-makers via video. The goal was to encourage youth to participate and give them support and tools for promoting issues that interest them and being in dialogue with decision-makers.

## PROCESS

**Mäntyharju** ran a pilot scheme to scale up the concept to the Pieksämäki library. This includes practical guidance for youth advocacy together with schools.

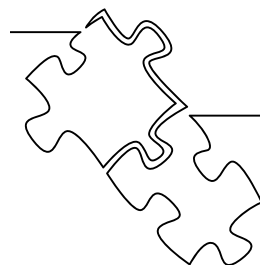
**Inari** developed stations called *'Tutustu ja vaikuta!'* ('Learn more and influence!'), where people have the opportunity to learn how to engage in local politics and policymaking.

In **Turku**, activities included workshops that trialled artistic practices as a means to bridge between young people and politics, from which they feel distant, to discuss societal topics and express views. The workshops were led by arts and workshop professionals and carried out in cooperation with students of Turku Vocational Institute, among others.

In **Pietarsaari**, the aim was to inform citizens on how they could influence both small and large political issues, and to find ways of bringing EU-scale topics closer to people. This included online sessions with a Finnish member of the European Parliament (MEP), explaining the European Green Deal.

The library also organised an EU-themed event called "EU arjessa" (The EU in daily life). The event combined a discussion with a related mini fair. The fair was organised in the library and showcased various projects and operators closely linked with the EU. In addition to the event, the library of Pietarsaari created an EU information application, which made it possible to learn more about the topic under three different sections: information about EU, a quiz and a stream of various EU-related Twitter accounts ("EU gossip").

In **Oulu**, the project included EU-themed online discussions entitled *'Gloaalisti Lokaaliin'* ('From Global to Local'), focussing on the implementation of the Green Deal locally in Oulu and career paths in the EU. The partners were Oulu University Library and the Council of Oulu Region. Other discussion events included *'Kansanvallan kahvit'* ('Democracy coffee') and *'Nyt saa sanoa!'* ('The floor is yours!') that were linked to the [Conference on the Future of Europe](#).



## LESSONS LEARNED

It is important for event organisers (in this case, libraries) to reserve enough time for the invitation process. It takes a long time to approach and contact people and find those who can take part of the process. The target group needs to be clear; organising something for ‘all the library users’ might not be nearly as effective as organising something for ‘students between the ages of 18 and 24 who use the library to study’, for example.

In Finland, libraries already do great work around the topic of democracy. The project tried to introduce some new tools and points of view to this practice, which proved to be welcomed.

## POLICY OUTCOMES

Finland allocated one million euros for libraries to continue their work on bringing democracy closer to citizens. A total of 38 libraries have since started their own democracy projects.

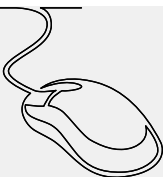
Libraries remain an important stakeholder group for Sitra and will be part of the foundation’s future projects. Sitra initiated a ‘democracy challenge for libraries’, where almost 90 librarians learned the timeout method for the moderation of public debates. <sup>(21)</sup>

**‘In Finland libraries have a special role and work as platforms to promote equality. It is written in the Finnish Law that libraries should enhance the freedom of speech and democracy by creating more space and opportunities for social dialogue – this is one of the main reasons why we wanted to start the collaboration with Finnish libraries. Also, Finnish libraries are open and free of charge for anyone to enter, making it a convenient space for democratic activities. It has been our great pleasure to work with these institutions and we hope to continue doing so in the future as well.’**

Nelli and Elina, project coordinators at Sitra

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<sup>(21)</sup> It is a way of facilitating a structured dialogue between two persons with precise timings for speaking and listening.



## TO KNOW MORE

[Libraries as forums of democracy – Sitra kansanvallan peruskorjaus](#) (Finnish version)

[How to make libraries forums of democracy: Methods for libraries to promote democracy](#)



## 3.

## INTERVIEWS WITH INNOVATORS

### BIBLIOTECA SAN GIORGIO, PISTOIA, ITALY

A CONVERSATION WITH **MARIA STELLA RASETTI**,  
DIRECTOR OF THE SAN GIORGIO LIBRARY

#### The library as a laboratory of citizen engagement

The San Giorgio Library is the public library of the municipality of Pistoia and the lead member of the Pistoia Library Network. It is the biggest public library in Tuscany and one of the major public libraries in Italy. Since 2007 the library has been located close to the historic centre of Pistoia, in an old industrial area currently undergoing a process of urban renewal.

#### Building a 'new grammar' for the library's role

The director, Maria Stella Rasetti, enthusiastically explains what makes the San Giorgio Library so special. The most interesting experience over the last decade has been the challenge of building 'a new grammar' for the library's role: a combination of a library and a place providing public services, created by citizens. The library evolved from the traditional model, in which a library is for citizens and provides services to its users. According to this 'old grammar', they are final users of content created by others.

In Pistoia, they tried to change the preposition from 'for' to 'of': a library of users or citizens, which is created by themselves.

#### Pistoia's public library: an example of successful adaptive reuse of a former industrial building

The creation process of the library's programme is shaped together with the librarians, whose role is changing. They act as if they were movie directors, the characters being libraries' visitors – a very different way to look at the job! According to Maria Stella Rasetti,



↑  
Maria Stella Rasetti,  
San Giorgio library  
© San Giorgio Library,  
Pistoia

librarians are facilitators of the relationships and actions happening in the library, but they are not the engine:

‘Thanks to the soft skills you have to improve as a librarian you are able to enlarge the forces of the library and not alone to build the library but to be able not only to listen to needs, but to be part of the community where needs are heard, and so you create answers naturally.’

For 12 years, Maria Stella and her team worked hard to build a new grammar for the library; now they are one of the most famous libraries in Italy for this reason!

### The library as a social lab and the importance of social fabrics

Maria Stella underlines that volunteers and citizens do not work at the library, but they do their job as active citizens, enlarging and enriching the programmes with their input. Hence, the library functions as a social lab. ‘Together with different people we create, every day, a new sense of community’, she states. The library users spend time in the library as if it was their home. According to Maria Stella, the quality of the place also plays an important role:

‘The beauty of the surrounding contributes to the quality of the actions happening in it. People respect a beautiful place and treat it well.’

Maria Stella links the success of her story to the very strong social fabrics of Pistoia. The city has a tradition of civic liveliness and activism that is in line with the library project. It seems natural for the library to be the first common place of community-building exchange in the city. The library also has plenty of space for different events and sharing moments for the community.

‘It is the only place where people can spend time without spending money, where you count as a citizen, not as a consumer.’

### The 'organic' lifelong learning network of the library

One particular initiative being developed by the library is its 'organic' lifelong learning network. Ten years ago, the library first began co-creation activities, inviting experts and professionals to devote their time to the library and offer their skills for free in small classes and events for lifelong learning. Numerous professionals, including lawyers, psychologists, finance experts, knitting experts, and others, joined the initiative. The library was able to create an ever-growing programme for lifelong learning – for free!

Today, it involves more than 230 volunteers and is the largest of its kind in the city. During the coronavirus pandemic, they switched to online formats.

Unlike other libraries, which have created a regular programme, Pistoia has found that its programme of activities grew organically, depending on the availability of the volunteers, and continues to change every year. It is not a regular programme involving payments, attendance and certificates, but it incorporates small groups in which the teacher is a peer member of the group. Peer-to-peer learning helps create little communities inside the wider community, and these little groups continue to live outside the library.

The library director is amazed to see how new friendships are formed; for example, new spaces for senior citizens have helped fight loneliness.

Maria Stella thinks that this system is increasingly precious, particularly in contrast to a classic library, where the focus lies on the lending out of a collection of books. However, the San Giorgio Library is still a library – they use the library as a tool for people! A key to success is that people can create a personalised project, meeting their individual conditions:

‘You have to create the right challenge at your own scale.’

## The library as a gateway to citizenship

Maria Stella describes the difficult period in 2016–2017, which saw the arrival of many migrants. Pistoia welcomed about 1500 migrants during this time. The library was the first place where they received an official card – the library card – and receiving this made them feel like new citizens. According to Maria Stella, this had a significant symbolic meaning.

‘The library is naturally a multicultural environment, where people can find books in several languages, and other resources with different layers of variety regarding ‘normality’ and ‘diversity’: from books for kids with special education needs to books for blind people, for people with limited eyesight, talking books, and other devices against inequality.

Every citizen must find in the library their own answers to the problem they are dealing with, and if they find it difficult to find what they need or to use some tools, it means that the library needs to improve.

Citizenship is the qualified condition for people able to live with all their rights and obligations inside a community, and the library is one of the main public places where inclusion does not mean to be all equal, but to be all diverse with equal chances.’

## The library connects the local authorities to the people

The library director is part of the mayor of Pistoia’s cabinet. This means that the library is part of how the local authorities communicate with citizens. As such, the library’s programmes fit into the city policy programmes, for example, when it comes to the topics of climate change or, more concretely, recycling and a circular economy. The library supports the efforts of the municipality to spread respect for nature from diverse perspective of social responsibility, promoting reuse as an ecological approach to safeguard the environment.

The library participates in local activities to educate about recycling and promotes the lending of objects such as tools as a contribution to circular economy waste reduction. (See more at [Raccolta differenziata della carta](#)).

The library helps to avoid wasting things, not only by lending books, but also by offering a wide range of objects and tools. People can also borrow artworks through the ‘library of things’.

The library can pick up on societal needs, for instance when it comes to the creation of jobs. The library can help people to change and acquire new skills:

‘Books, classes and meetings with experts as job hunters can help young people or people who lost their job to gain new and stronger expertise looking for a new job. Some experts help them to use the right perspectives, creating a new job from their passions and abilities, rather than finding it.’

Before the pandemic, Pistoia’s library hosted an annual meeting dedicated to all allies and volunteers, with the mayor offering a ‘thank you certificate’ to everybody. As of April 2022, the library has been able to reschedule a new alliance day (*fiesta degli alleati*), dedicated to those who helped the library running online programs during the pandemic.

‘These meetings are very inspiring because they help the local public administration (and the library is a public office inside the local government) to form a good relationship with people, to strike up a friendship, to develop a feeling of trust between public administration and people, against the common feelings of government as a potential enemy to defend against. So, our library can enhance trust, not only for itself, but for the local government too.’

## ZENTRAL- UND LANDESBIBLIOTHEK BERLIN, GERMANY

→  
Left, Judith Galka,  
Central Berlin Library  
© Mike Auerbach



Right, Lea Hartung,  
Central Berlin Library  
© Mike Auerbach



### A CONVERSATION WITH **JUDITH GALKA** AND **LEA HARTUNG** FROM THE DEPARTMENT FOR COMMUNITY PROJECTS

#### Community projects at the heart of the library

The Zentral- und Landesbibliothek Berlin (ZLB) is the largest public library in Germany. Two branches house 3.4 million media for use. The Foundation of the Zentral- und Landesbibliothek Berlin was created in 1995 from the merger of the Berliner Stadtbibliothek at Schlossplatz in east Berlin and the Amerika- Gedenkbibliothek at Hallesches Ufer in west Berlin. The ZLB is one of the most frequently visited cultural and educational institutions in Berlin.

The ZLB sees itself as an 'activating centre' in Berlin's urban society and wants to act as a platform. It offers space for discussion and exchange and aims to enable citizens to develop an informed opinion. With their department for community projects, the ZLB supports urban society's willingness to experiment and provide open creative spaces. The ZLB invites the public to actively contribute to the making of the library programme.

Nine ZLB employees are working on community projects, and the overarching programme section occupies between 25 and 30 people.

Recent community projects of the ZLB include the following.

### RIFF reporter: journalist in residence

In 2018, in collaboration with an independent group of journalists from the fields of science, environment, culture, society and technology, the ZLB developed the project RIFF reporter: a journalist in residence. A journalist moved her desk to the public library to continue her work from there and to directly exchange with the libraries' visitors. After the residency, the journalist published her work and experiences and, with her, the library developed a variety of participatory programme events.

### Topic room: library finds city – city finds library

A so-called 'topic room' presented current urban planning and building projects involving local initiatives, interest groups and individual citizens. A specific focus lay on the planning of the new building intended for the library. The findings were used for the planning process and the development of the strategic library plan. The project was carried out across the two main library buildings, over 15 branches and a mobile unit.

Overall, more than 1 000 responses were collected and divided into different thematic clusters. The users increasingly see the library as a productive place that provides flexible workspaces and modern equipment as infrastructure. There is a clear desire to expand the role of the library as a centre for the community (or communities) and to cooperate with diverse actors from urban society, such as associations, initiatives and self-organised interest groups. The library should offer space and visibility for civically engaged people.

### #Queering the library (2021/22) – part of the Europe Challenge

The ZLB took part in the Europe Challenge for libraries, aiming to create public spaces and engage various groups in the democratic debate. Under the title 'Queering the public space – open call for participation #queeringthelibrary', people were invited to submit their project ideas.

Four projects were selected for co-funding and are currently being carried out.

1. 'Unheard and unseen' (*'Unerhört und ungesehen'*), a project by Oyouun – Kultur NeuDenken

This project involves the creation of one or several interactive, dialogue-based installations that focus on LGBT+ perspectives and the language used by LGBT+ people with a migrant background. (See more here: <https://oyoun.de/event/fugitive-archives-unerhoert-und-ungesehen>.)

2. 'Transcoded' (*'Transcodiert'*), a project by Biba Nass

Queer literature magazine *Transcodiert* is a publication that features LGBT+ literary works and a platform that permits trans and intersexual, non-binary, queer and questioning people to express themselves artistically. (See more here: <https://www.transcodiert.de>.)

3. 'What do you see that I do not see?' (*'Was siehst du, was ich nicht sehe?'*), a project by 'mehrblick'

This project involves the design of 'reading glasses'. These objects will be 'added' to books as an independent object and can then be utilised as an instrument for more multidimensional reading and learning that also includes LGBT perspectives.

4. Teilnehmer & Partner

This project was initiated by the European Cultural Foundation, in addition to the ZLB, and public libraries from six countries: Amsterdam Public Library, the Netherlands; Aarhus Public Library, Denmark; De Krook, Ghent, Belgium; Kranj City Library, Slovenia; Jordi Rubió i Balaguer Library, Spain; and Valmiera Public Library, Latvia.

## The library and its community projects

### What is your vision of the role of the library in the city and why do you engage with citizens?

The library is one of the purest institutions of the urban sharing economy. We think that the so-called sharing economy is essential to our society; sharing not only relates to the lending of books but also happens in peoples' minds and personalities. The library is a platform for sharing between human beings.

The library as a platform is key to our concept and vision. The library is not just a service; it is also that, but it is much more – it is a concept of a third space. It is the cities' living room – an open-minded space, and an open state of mind where people are willing to share.

People like to talk and exchange. This important human need is picked up by the library. We want to work on this willingness and provide the space for encounters.

Sometimes we also think of the library as the kitchen table of the city, a public space. In this sense, the library is also a trustworthy and safe place.

### How do you shape the library's activities?

Based on the assumptions mentioned before, the ZLB has, since 2013, created three strategic pillars guiding the development of its programmes and activities.

1. Media education, digital skills, reading and other skills.
2. 'Panorama' relating to life experiences, language and physical literacy.
3. Democracy education. This last pillar was developed in 2017.

All activities that are organised by the library, or in which the library participates, fit somehow into one or more of the pillars. This is not a linear process; we picked up ideas and initiatives that were already around us and the library. We realised that the urgent need to create

a platform in the sense of a physical and virtual space for encounter and exchange needed somebody to devote more time to it. This is very important! For an interdisciplinary approach you need time. Also, exchange and learning from colleagues is very important. One of the first little projects was the creation of a seed library.

### How do you develop and decide on the topics?

We align our topics with the three pillars of our programme strategy, and we ask the question 'What is the connection with the library?'. Often, we are approached by other organisations proposing a cooperation on specific themes.

This happened with the international project Mindscapes on mental health issues, for example, in which the New York Public Libraries network <sup>(22)</sup> is also involved. We are also trying to develop long-lasting and sustainable cooperation with partners and communities around the library.

### How do you reach out to urban communities and how do you identify target groups?

In our definition of plural urban communities, we refer to David Lankes' concept: it is a group coming together around a topic. It is about a bottom-up way to start somewhere using inductive methods. Groups start to claim positions and have ideas; from there, you can develop and work more strategically.

### How do you try to be inclusive and transparent in curating the programme? How do you guarantee diversity?

If we feel that a group is under-represented, we reach out actively and build new relations of trust. You need a lot of trust, especially with communities that are discriminated against.

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<sup>(22)</sup> <https://wellcome.org/what-we-do/our-work/mindscapes>

When we talk about urban communities, we talk about totally different groups. For our project in the frame of the Europe Challenge ‘queering the library’ it was difficult to contact the queer communities through their planned route of ‘gatekeepers’ who were already working with these groups. Thus, we challenged our own assumptions that this was the ‘correct’ route and changed our methods. We successfully reached a smaller number of people and built out from there, creating a spiralling effect of engagement. Working with communities and participation challenges the institutions, as it changes the established way of doing things.

**Could you tell us more about your strategy on partnerships with other organisations?**

Our network has grown along certain lines linked to the programme pillars but not strategically. Now we try to shape a more strategic growth of our network. As we are Berlin’s central library, we are not only focused on the neighbourhood level. We work also along affinities and collaborations that have proven to be fruitful.

**We can divide into two approaches. The first one relates to the communities on the neighbourhood level, the youth clubs and local initiatives.**

**The second one addresses more strategic partners, such as foundations or institutions working on themes we aim to deepen in our work.**

I think of *Technologie Stiftung* or Wikimedia. We also want to develop a more consistent relationship with external partners, especially in the field of democratic literacy. We reached out to the *Allianz Kulturstiftung* <sup>(23)</sup>; that is interesting for us.

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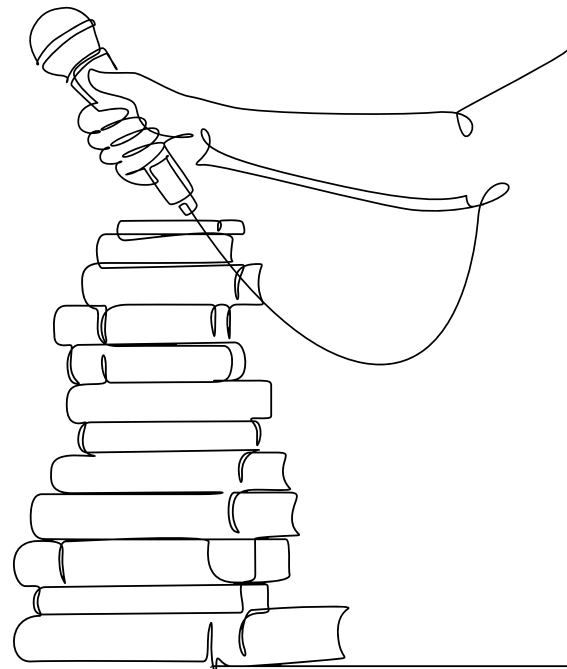
<sup>(23)</sup> The [Allianz Kulturstiftung](#) is a not-for-profit cultural foundation aiming to strengthen cohesion in Europe using the tools of art and culture. As a promoter of social change, the foundation is geared towards achieving impact and it operates independently. The head office is located in Berlin and the organisation plays an operational role and provides funding. The foundation is committed to translocal art and culture projects in Europe and the Mediterranean region.

**How do you define the new role of the librarian?  
What are the related skills?**

Again, we like to refer to David Lankes, who says: ‘the librarian steps back from the stage to be the guide on the side’ – we help and assist! And we connect! This is what librarians have always done: get requests and then make the connection, in a communitarian way.

**What is your interest in collaboration with local policymakers?**

We work closely with local politicians and administration. We take action to intervene on issues linked to urban development. The library is one of the **democratic education parties** in the city. The library itself is politically neutral, but it is not apolitical.





## MEDIALAB-PRADO, MADRID, SPAIN

### THE CITIZEN'S LABS METHODOLOGY: A CONVERSATION WITH MARCOS GARCÍA, CULTURAL MANAGER

Medialab-Prado is a cultural space and citizen lab in Madrid that was created by the city council in 2002 and has grown since then into a leading centre for citizen innovation. It follows a participatory approach, using collective intelligence methods (developed in their own lab since 2006) and fast prototyping approaches and spaces, such as 'fablabs', to use and co-create commons. The method has been replicated in a library context.

↑  
 Marcos García,  
 Medialab Prado  
 © Casa de América  
 (CC BY-NC-ND 2.0)

#### **Tell us about how the citizen labs experiences have affected public policies.**

The most important contribution to the public policy experience of the citizen labs is its own methodology, and the way in which public institutions are incorporating these methodologies to their way of functioning, changing from models based on transmission, that define traditional public policies, to models that generate spaces of production, self-organisation, experimentation and collaboration.

That's the biggest innovation. And note that I do not speak so much about participation, because the word 'participation' can take on different meanings, since there are several ways for participation that are not necessarily based on experimentation, collaboration or openness to the production or contribution of anyone, where certain levels of self-organisation are crucial. And another aspect is that, since citizen labs are spaces where proposals and projects take place, some of them have had an impact on public policies. For example, there have been specific programmes that have connected public workers and citizens called Madrid Escucha, where public servants collaborated with citizens to develop projects that sought to improve life together.

Another line of work on Medialab was ParticipaLab, in which there were many projects around participation. Some had to do with digital tools for deliberation and the presentation of citizen proposals and participatory budgets. For example, there were groups that worked around Consul<sup>(24)</sup>, which was the free software used for citizen participation in Madrid.

<sup>(24)</sup> <https://consulproject.org/en/>



Another project that emerged from Particpalab was the creation of a citizen observatory chosen by sortition, made up of a group of citizens chosen at random.

Another project is Autofabricantes <sup>(25)</sup>, in which they collaborate to create prototypes of hands or other body parts in the context of functional diversity, using 3D printers. And there is a university that has used this project as a subject of investigation, with the goal of generating a protocol that can validate and certificate this practice as a best practice so it can be implemented in public health institutions.

### **What about your experience of collaboration with libraries? How did you find it?**

In libraries, from what I could learn, there is already some experience in collaborative practices, although they are not at the forefront, but mostly in the background: specific activities that are not incorporated in the general model of action and have goals that are usually linked to projects for the promotion of reading.

In general, libraries have very good conditions to implement citizen laboratories, because librarians are usually good mediators, libraries are in contact with citizens, they are already social centres and they are highly valued by their communities, so they are perfect places to reflect on these other models of action connected to collaboration and experimentation. We just have to enhance this potential.

Librarians that wanted to participate in this kind of action enjoyed it a lot. It was a lot of work for them, but generally it created a big sense of satisfaction.

Just as reading groups take participants to cook, listen to music or walk through the settings of a novel, citizen labs in libraries start from the idea that carrying out

projects together can lead to reading related books with the projects that are being done.

### **I would like us to reflect on the scale of policymaking, with the help of libraries: decision-making regarding library services, decision-making regarding municipality plans and projects, etc.**

There is a shift in our sense of possibility regarding what we can and cannot do.

A person is walking through their neighbourhood and suddenly notices something that should be improved. If there is a place in the community that allows this person to present this idea, share it with others, gather with neighbours (known or unknown others) and work to achieve this envisaged change, it's a new road that opens up. Suddenly the city becomes something modifiable and re-appropriable.

And it's the same for public workers, or librarians, that shift from a model of transmission, of programming activities, to a model of public policies that is based on caring, looking after people and ensuring that there are such places or infrastructures that allow processes of self-organisation and creation of common good.

So, to think about a kind of public policy model that develops the commons. I think that this is the fundamental point of the transformation, which happens through the alliance between the public administrations and the commons. I believe that it is necessary to differentiate between public policies that favour processes of self-organisation of the commons and limited forms of citizen participation that are often carried out with design thinking methodologies.

'How will we design the new guidelines for mobility?', for example, or, 'How will we design the new garbage collection workflow?', or even 'How will we build this library?'. These are somehow predicted or predictable questions, pre-scheduled in a sense.

<sup>(25)</sup> <https://autofabricantes.org/nosotros/comunidad/>

So, for example, participatory processes to design new libraries, from my point of view, usually give way to very traditional models of transmission. Maybe there is a rehearsal room, or some gaming spaces, or 3D printers, but they are not designed or reflected upon as infrastructures that can serve self-organisation.

### **And how do you propose we avoid these kinds of ‘blind spots’ or misleading participation?**

I would propose, as a starting point, to include the citizen laboratory as a permanent space of this new library. Because it is a way of permanently sustaining the question of what we want to do together as something that does not have a definitive answer. It is a way of always leaving open the question of what library we want. I, for one, am very critical of the statement that ‘the best participatory processes are those that are binding’, because if you force them to be binding, the framework of participation is shaped so the possibility of experimentation and failure decreases. If, on the contrary, you propose a process of experimentation where the error is allowed, or where you can conclude the final result is not to be implemented for numerous reasons (it is not feasible, it is not legal, etc.), you are truly allowing for transformation to occur: the transformation of a place, the transformation of the policies, the transformation of a community.

So, the possibility of rehearsing designs or things, even when we do not know if they will be made real – in truth, what the citizen labs introduce are elements that escape our control, assuming there is a lot of uncertainty each step of the way. This is the real strength of this methodology. The other participatory cycles or entrepreneurship cycles are based on control, from the first idea until the final product/result, and that constrains the experimentation, and this experimentation is precisely the basis of innovation, or else the outcome will be a repetition. This repetitive feeling is what we get, many times, with other

methodologies of formatted participation, the sensation that everything is repeating itself, always the same.

In citizen labs, the stomach pain we get from the uncertainties, at the beginning of a project, is the only thing that repeats itself. But the process is always different. Why? Because the projects are always different, the people are always different and there are always things going on that were not predicted.

### **Do you think a policymaker, and other stakeholders can handle these dream-like processes, full of entropy? Can they handle the possibility of concluding the process without producing a tangible object or design?**

I think that what allows a bigger impact is precisely the fact that we open up to uncertainty. The problem is that that sort of impact cannot be ensured in advance.

At the beginning we do not know if there will be people submitting projects, or people available to collaborate; we do not even know how we will make it work. So, each new citizen lab is a big question mark. But if we look back, every citizen lab that has been organised has created positive outcomes. There has been no citizen lab evaluated by us as a big disaster, even if some of them prompted disagreements or conflict situations. But what is built is an environment where the uncertainties are sustained by everyone – by the organisers, the participants, the management, etc. – and that helps build a safe and trustable space that resembles life itself, as something that cannot be fully controlled. Not long ago I saw a tweet from an American anthropologist that said that our personal relationships, family, neighbour relationships are all built from nets of mutual support. Why should we not imagine ways in which (civic) institutions can be built (as a all, or at least parts of it) by nets of mutual support?

The citizen lab systematises ways of cooperation between people who think differently, people who do not know each other, and ways to articulate this. Maybe

not every aspect of institutions should be like this, but we have to make space for some of this. I mean, what should not occur is, for example, education happening only inside a classroom, or production happening exclusively at work, or at home.

Rebecca Solnit talks about public love, about how mutual care situations are not only private, and how in disaster situations there are these manifestations of mutual support and solidarity that are forms of public love. Citizen labs are also engines for these manifestations. A bit like a carnival. So, going back to methodologies, I hope for the uprising of new models and methods of gathering people to experiment and make things together. But for now, the methodology consisting of a call for proposals followed by a call for collaborators is the one we are using to gather people. And also open and steady working groups, like, for example, Wikipedia groups, where people gather to edit Wikipedia articles, and new people can always enter.

What happens is that each of these steady groups ends up functioning as a citizen lab, generating its own experiments. They have a generative character, just like free software projects, projects of digital networks, and projects for the common good.

### Some theory references

Amador Fernández-Savater's *Habitar y gobernar – Inspiraciones para una nueva concepción política and La fuerza de los débiles*.

Marina Garcés, in *Escuela de Aprendices*, states that there are three things that kill imagination (and they can also kill innovation): austerity, evaluation and bureaucracy. In her work, she examines how power operates, and suggests that, in the past, control was exercised by someone who oppressed others, telling them what they could or could not do, through censorship, etc., but nowadays control systems rely on these three aspects: austerity, evaluation and bureaucracy.



## 4.

## A (ROUGH) TOOLKIT TO CITIZEN ENGAGEMENT IN PUBLIC LIBRARIES



### WHAT ROLE CAN PUBLIC LIBRARIES PLAY IN CITIZEN ENGAGEMENT PROCESSES?

As explored previously, the roles of public libraries in a citizen engagement process are varied. From an organiser to a mediator, from a coordinator to a participant, from a promoter to an evaluator, many roles are possible. We will share, based on our own experience and the learning acquired through producing this toolkit, some considerations on how to plan for such involvement. Therefore, the starting point is defining the role public libraries can play in a citizen engagement process.

- As for any public institution, it is crucial to present a proposal that highlights the foreseen social and cultural impact on the local community.
- Once this has been set out, the roles of all organisations involved (the municipality, public library, etc.) need to be defined so that everyone knows the expectations they will need to meet and what their role is in the process.

At this point, a reflection exercise on each of the involved organisations' power, and awareness of their power within the process, should be carried out, to ensure that citizens are at the centre of the process and not intimidated or instrumentalised by the organisations involved.



Public libraries may:

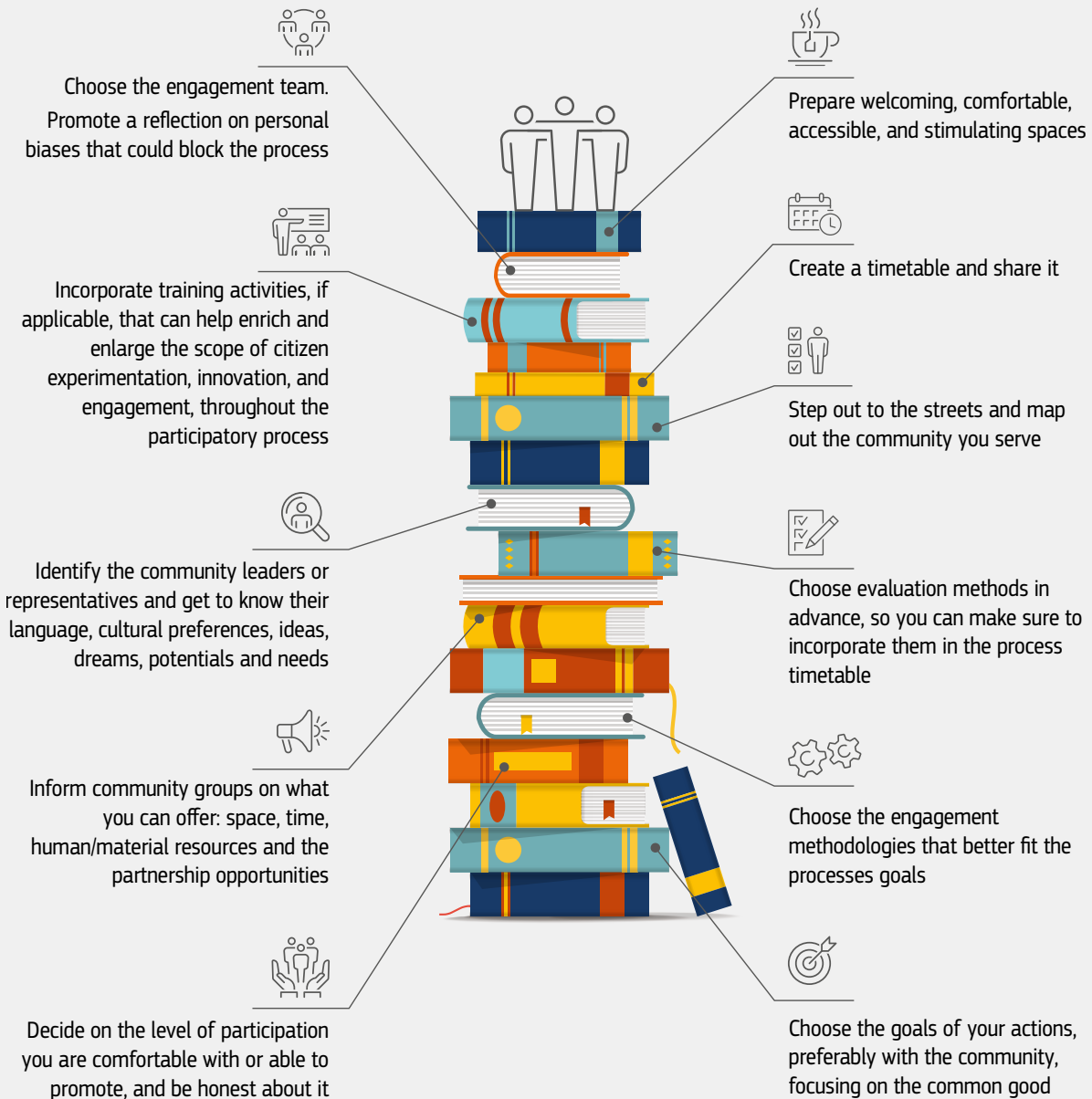
- Depending on their involvement, help ensure that processes happen in respectful ways for citizens. Participants need to feel safe and be able to participate at times that suit them (e.g. after their work hours or during weekends), so that they do not feel or are not excluded on those grounds.
- Help mapping out and defining the community that should be engaged during the participatory process. As part of this outreach, libraries may also be able to contribute to identifying partners and stakeholders that could take part in the process, as informants or other.
- Engage citizens. As libraries are close to the community they operate in, they can be partners for communication and can organise outreach initiatives that promote the engagement process and reach library users, library friends, neighbourhood associations, residents, local institutions, schools and formal or informal community groups.
- Help choose and implement participatory dynamics grounded on their experience, knowledge and skills in that matter - some of these methods were used in the case studies presented in this rough guide.

Learning and reflection must be part of the process in all its phases, from start to end, to ensure high-quality outputs and outcomes. For example, when Lisbon Public Libraries Network promoted a citizen lab to prototype sustainable structures for a new garden library, they learned that the people involved needed carpentry skills, which they did not have, requiring training of such skills. Consequently, a retired carpenter living in the community was invited to the laboratory to share his expertise.

Libraries and their partners should be able to predict and promote learning opportunities throughout the engagement processes, in all areas requiring knowledge building.

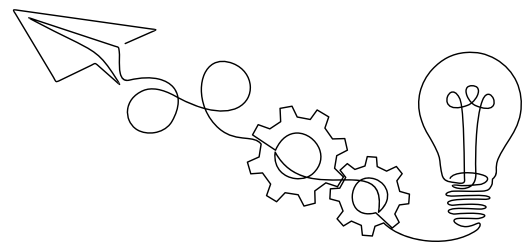
These considerations are the first step to start a citizen engagement process. Subsequently, tools and methodologies relevant to the citizen engagement initiative will need to be selected. The next section details how to carry out this selection process.

## KICK-STARTING A CITIZEN ENGAGEMENT PROCESS FOR YOUR LIBRARY



Before any citizen engagement activity, it is essential to think about the audience and partners to be involved in the process.

- Identify the topic/issue/question around which to organise a participatory activity for a specific engagement process. If not at the start of the process, support the organisers in understanding if the issue they are proposing is relevant for the communities you serve.
- Clearly identify the community to work with, the different stakeholders related to that matter, and decide on which ones you want to bring to the table (and, for the ones you don't, explain why). The stakeholders can be public authorities and institutions, civil society organisations, cultural and social workers, artists, consultants, representatives of local administrations, etc.
  - › The ability to share power can expand the impact and commitment of the citizens involved in participatory settings. However, organisers (e.g. library staff or other individuals from organisations involved) should permanently assess their assumptions, judgments and biases to be mindful and able to guarantee an honest experience.
  - › If the participatory process is not created in collaboration with the community but by an outside organiser, participants can challenge the degree of communities representativeness in the process; and rightly so, since representativeness of ethnic and social diversity is a key aspect to make citizens included. This does not mean that you cannot promote a participatory process without previously engaging with a specific community. Should you proceed in that way be honest and transparent about it, and try to be flexible enough to incorporate changes throughout the process that can accommodate new perspectives given by the communities you subsequently engage with.
- Are you familiar with Arnstein's ladder of participation (Arnstein, 1969)? Identify the level of participation that you are interested in and that you can actually deliver. Do not use the terms 'citizen engagement' or 'citizen participation' when you mean consultation or information sharing. Favour empowerment of citizens and engage with co-production/co-creation approaches, which implies a recognition of collective cultural rights (Jakubowsky, 2016, quoted by Bonet and Négrier, 2018).
- Select which goals and methodologies you want to use and define what is in scope and what is out of scope. This will help clarify the process and align expectations from the outset.
- Ensure transparency by keeping a written register of the engagement sessions and sharing this with all participants. Citizen engagement always requires reporting about the process to different actors and recipients of the outcomes.
- Promote your engagement initiatives broadly and make sure that the citizens that have the most interests at stake, or are most affected by the issue of concern and the policies to govern them, know about the initiative, feel invited and are able to decide if they want to participate or not.
- Make sure you can implement a decision jointly reached, even if it is different from what you have predicted, or else the process will be at risk of becoming a charade.
- Make sure you can build on everyone's opinion at any stage of the process.



## Selecting methodologies, tools or practices

The case studies presented in this rough guide showcase a variety of tools and practices that have been chosen according to the objectives and contexts of the activities. Panel discussions, workshops, interviews and so many other tools and formats can be used in support to engage the communities. Objects such as books can be used as prompts to engage in conversations that can have an impact on communities. We recommend you explore the links below, in which you will find a wide range of engagement tools and methods that can be applied in a library. The selection of specific methods and the ways to apply them in a library context are described below.

Because your citizen engagement initiative will take its own shape and has its own objectives and specificities, we want to share with you a variety of methods and tools that could support the citizen engagement process. These are intended to inspire you and do not act as constraints on the tools you can use. You may find that combinations of these activities work best for your initiatives or that other choices may be needed. After all this is a rough guide!

### Inspiration from other toolboxes

#### **ACTION CATALOGUE – METHODS**

<http://actioncatalogue.eu/search>

Online decision support tool intended to enable researchers, policymakers and others wanting to conduct inclusive research to find the method best suited for their specific project.

#### **TOOLS FOR TAKING ACTION – STANFORD D.SCHOOL**

<https://dschool.stanford.edu/resources>

Collection of resources (activities, tools and how-tos) from the d.school at Stanford University.

#### **THE INNOVATOR'S TOOLBOX – BOARD OF INNOVATION**

<https://www.boardofinnovation.com/tools/>

Free tools collection, including for stakeholder mapping and social impact intention mapping.



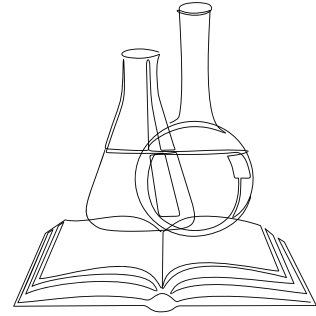
## LIVING LABS

In urban or other contexts, living labs are conceived as spaces or platforms of participation that generate collaborative learning communities and capture collective intelligence through experimentation with real users in real contexts. The focus is on process and experimentation value. Living labs can take various forms, from design labs to makerspaces, policy labs, social innovation labs or citizen labs, such as Medialab-Prado, Madrid.

Usually, living labs start with an invitation to the community to present ideas or projects of relevance to them and can be put in motion with the help of the institution that hosts the lab. In the case of libraries, citizen labs push librarians to improvise, experiment and reduce bureaucratic processes, making way for more adhocratic (see glossary) models of functioning.

Living labs can have different durations, from 20 days, as in many citizen labs, to a whole year or even longer, depending on the goal and resources.

As a public library, you may want to host a living lab for a multiplicity of reasons or goals. These could include collaborative translations of books, development of new data visualisation, community building, collectively redefining library policies and services, reformulating collection management through greater representation and inclusion, helping the inclusion process for newcomers to the community, and gathering of collective intelligence around any subject, from literature to citizenship to democracy.



### Did you now?

The JRC has 2 Living Labs, focusing on energy and mobility:

[https://joint-research-centre.ec.europa.eu/living-labs-jrc\\_en](https://joint-research-centre.ec.europa.eu/living-labs-jrc_en)

And a makerspace:

[https://knowledge4policy.ec.europa.eu/projects-activities/jrc-makerspace\\_en](https://knowledge4policy.ec.europa.eu/projects-activities/jrc-makerspace_en)

## HOW TO HOST A LIVING LAB IN THE LIBRARY (IN A NUTSHELL)

1. Set up a team with differentiated roles in the production, mediation, coordination, promotion and evaluation of the process; make sure this team has skills like empathy, flexibility, listening, improvising and problem-solving.
2. Draft a mission and values statement with the contribution of the team. Everyone needs to know why the library wants or needs to promote a living lab.
3. Map out a preliminary target group of stakeholders, partners and participants you consider important to involve, or you can simply launch an open invitation to anyone with the knowledge, talent or enthusiasm to develop a new idea. Whether the invitation is through a call for ideas/projects (as it usually is, in the case of citizen labs) or takes another form, be sure to use accessible language and clear messages.

4. Gather the ideas/projects and decide which ones are viable for the library to help produce in the context of a living lab. Consider spaces, team, resources, time frames, materials and budget, and inform the community that responded to the call, explaining your decision with utmost transparency.
5. Promote a second call for participation in the specific projects or ideas that have been selected in step 4.
6. Gather all the resources you need to facilitate the selected projects and to guarantee that participation is fruitful, safe and comfortable. In this phase, you can also consider inviting extra stakeholders or sponsors that can contribute in specific ways to the projects: professional specialists, policymakers, people from the local administration sector, community leaders or even people with particular skills or influence in the community. Make sure to discuss the decision of broadening the group with every participant, not only the library team.
7. Decide on the evaluation method and prepare for it in advance, designing and (if possible) testing forms, questionnaires, means of documenting the process, indicators for impact, etc. Make sure you discuss with the participants what they consider to be successful outcomes (do this prior to the lab, during the lab and after the lab). You might find brainstorming sessions useful for these preliminary phases.
8. Launch the lab, providing all the resources needed for pursuit of the intended outcomes, and adjust the calendar on day one, adapting to everyone. Living labs are mostly about the opportunity of experimenting, deciding/working collaboratively and creating relationships. Do not lose sight of these major goals. Be sure to provide everyone with resources, competences and skills that allow for active participation/experimentation in the project and in the future. The lab activities are often materialised by building a prototype of some sort, but this is not mandatory. Whatever the outcome, it should be generated through collaboration, shared and disseminated (with open access) and intended for the common good. Make sure that everyone agrees that, whatever they consider to be the value of the outcome, it is to be shared with open access and acknowledged as an outcome of a co-creation process. Share with everyone the motives that triggered the idea of hosting a living lab inside the library, and make sure that everyone is aware of the core values around collaboration in an inclusive and safe space. Throughout the duration of the lab, whatever that might be, promote hands-on learning experiences for the participants and the library team.
9. Register the progress of the lab, giving special attention to moments of friction, turning points, re-adjustments, reformulations, etc. Every moment that strikes you as a mistake is to be considered as a learning opportunity, so be sure to reflect, acknowledge and register the solutions found in collaborative ways to those mistakes.

10. Organise the closure of the lab, as a time not only for presentation of the outcomes of the activities but also to gather the thoughts of the participants regarding the whole experience. Try to collectively construct a narrative that can be presented to the library community and with institutions or groups that share the interest for collaborative processes and that have the same values.

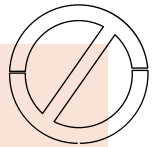
Promote continuity and rooting by facilitating connections between the participants and these other groups or institutions, and by sharing the collective narrative, with transparency and respect, using storytelling and visual thinking techniques combined with the products of the documenting of the lab (photos, videos, audio, quotations from interviews, etc.) as ways to illustrate that narrative and interpret the experiences.

#### BEAR IN MIND



- Because they build on diversity of roles, backgrounds, knowledge, etc., it is important to discuss the lab's purpose carefully and collectively, so that everyone is aligned. As the process progresses, be prepared to reformulate the subjects at hand, accommodating the findings and ideas that are generated along the way.
- Enhance the experimental potential.
- Be prepared to moderate, through open exchange, disagreements between participants.
- Promote everyone's empowerment and co-ownership of the outcome.

#### AVOID



- Avoid holding on to pre-defined solutions or results. Allow for improvisation and changes in the directions of the workflow.
- Avoid dismissing participants' questions or doubts. Make sure you find answers and solutions together.
- Avoid imposing bureaucratic procedures on the participants. Allow an adhocratic culture to settle throughout the lab.
- Avoid complex language in the texts of the call for participation or submissions. Build the texts with the community, making sure your communication is simple and accessible.

## DIALOGUE CAFÉ/WORLD CAFÉ

The dialogue café or World Café is a participatory methodology conducive to a creative process, developed in a chain of dialogue between participants, which generates a large flow of ideas to be processed.

It has great potential to promote exchange among a very large number of participants. Participants work in small groups, literally seating around different tables addressing a diversity of aspects related to the issue of concern.

In a relaxed and encouraging environment, participants share and deepen their opinions and ideas, to build a joint vision on the theme/problem addressed and propose innovative strategies.

This method of sharing is effective precisely because each group of participants takes a turn sitting at each of the tables in the café. Each table is dedicated to a specific issue and moderated by a facilitator. When a group discusses a particular issue, the facilitator promotes links between the ideas of the present group and the ideas of other groups that have already worked on the table. In this way, the process is informative, shared and participatory.

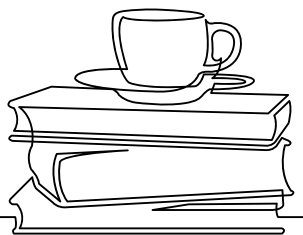
**‘Dialogue cafés help the library gain a deeper knowledge about the problems and expectations of people. This methodology is well suited to involve communities in the preparation of diagnoses, planning, action and evaluation of public policies and processes of active social intervention.’**

Susana Silvestre, Head of Division, Lisbon Public Libraries Network

### HOW TO HOST A DIALOGUE CAFÉ AT THE LIBRARY (IN A NUTSHELL)

As in a café, the participants are distributed among tables, forming small groups, with the objective of dialoguing about a given subject, under the guidance of the facilitator of the table. Participants move between tables (one table per round) in such a way as to ‘pollinate’ the ideas explored at the tables by previous groups. In doing so, it is possible to develop ideas in an intimate group and, at the same time, participate in a broad debate open to all participants.

Ideally, facilitators should have knowledge of the topic(s) under discussion, but, more importantly, they should have facilitation skills and be able to promote a comprehensive sharing of ideas.



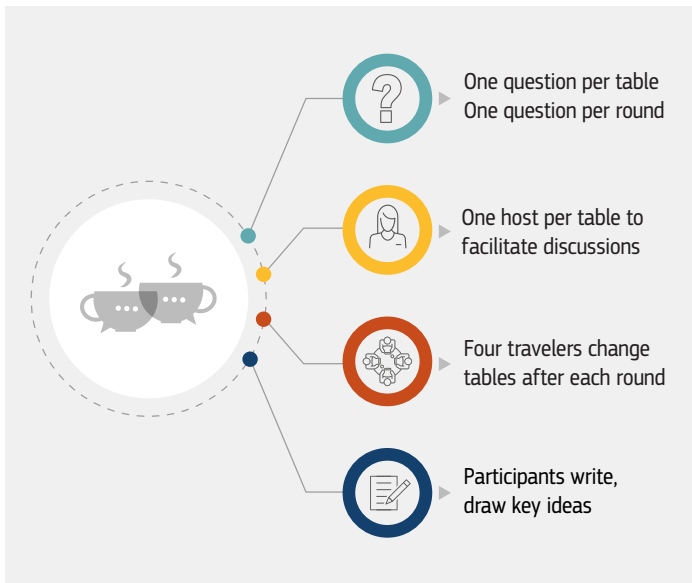
1. Start by identifying the host, facilitators and participants. Make sure the group of participants is representative of the diversity across the community and the perspectives on to the topic of concern.
2. Identify the questions to be dealt with by each facilitator and the methodology for collecting responses. Options for recording responses include writing on sticky notes or tablecloths and using a copywriter.
3. Launch the World Café session by welcoming the participants and presenting the broad theme and specific questions that will be discussed at each table. Make sure everyone understands the methodology. Divide the participants into small groups and start the rounds (one round per table/question).
4. Present and discuss the results by table/question. Express the shared ideas through a graphic panel.
5. After the session, send the participants a 'thank you' message that includes the main conclusions reached at the session and the graphic panel.

[Dialogue about law enforcement in marginalised communities](#)

[Dialogue about forgiveness in Dresden](#)

If you are looking for more inspiration, please visit

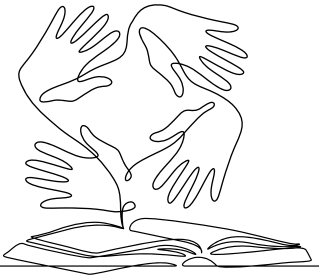
<https://theworldcafe.com/global-impact/stories/>.



**BEAR IN MIND**

- > Brainstorming is an important part of this process.
- > Encourage a judgement-free atmosphere in which everyone can share their ideas comfortably.
- > Think broadly; do not criticise.

## CITIZENS' ASSEMBLIES



Citizens' assemblies fall within the category of deliberative methods (see glossary). This method has been a subject of much interest among policy communities in Europe and elsewhere. Among the most known and successful examples are the Citizens' Assemblies in Ireland <sup>(26)</sup>. Given their deliberative 'nature', two aspects characterise citizens' assemblies.

1. **Random sampling** of participants according to socio-demographic criteria to guarantee **representation and equity**. The sample should reflect the composition of the population concerned.
2. As follow-up is mandatory for any deliberative process, citizens' assemblies require a **political mandate** and **institutional commitment** from the outset. Recommendations are generally the outcomes of such process, delivered at the assembly's end to public authorities. Institutions commit to follow up on each recommendation delivered, explaining its acceptance or rejection. Citizens' assemblies are best suited for divisive and complex issues, where judgement and weighing of options is mandatory.

A few other characteristics to consider are the following:

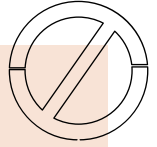
- Time is a defining element of citizens' assemblies and other deliberative formats as they generally include sessions of work across several weeks or months. This implies great effort and care in the organisation of the assembly, especially regarding when sessions are scheduled (e.g. weekends). To be truly inclusive, the assembly should be hosted at a time that allows the participation of as wide a scope of people as possible.
- Everyone should be given the same opportunity to participate and need to be compensated for their time. You might have to provide a token such as a voucher or offer childcare services during the session to allow parents to participate, for example.
- As in any process, one of the most important roles is that of the facilitator or facilitation team. These people will have the task to facilitate discussions and, for example, avoiding the monopolisation of the interventions by certain citizens or dominant groups, thereby ensuring that everyone is given the opportunity to make their voice heard.
- Citizens' assemblies are best suited for divisive and complex issues, where judgement and weighing of options is mandatory.

<sup>(26)</sup> <https://citizensassembly.ie/>

To learn more about this methodology, we recommend Medialab-Prado's '[Hybrid democracy – A manual for combining online participation and policy jury](#)', the [Council of Europe memorandum on deliberative methods](#) <sup>(27)</sup> and the OECD's *Innovative Citizen Participation and New Democratic Institutions* (2020).

If you are searching for some inspiration, you can check out this example in which a [citizens' assembly discussed artificial intelligence](#).

<sup>(27)</sup> Council of Europe resolution 480 and recommendation 472, 'Beyond elections – The use of deliberative methods in European municipalities and regions' (2022), [CG\(2022\)42-12final](#).



### AVOID

- Citizens' assemblies require by default anchorage in policymaking processes. Avoid selecting a citizens' assembly method, if that is not the case. Think about the goal and be really clear about your purpose.
- A deliberative process implies that the recommendations made by citizens need to be followed-up by public institutions. Avoid using this method if the process is not well anchored in the policymaking cycle or decision-making process.
- Avoid assuming that all participants are experts in the subject. The topics discussed in citizens' assemblies are complex, so it's important to use clear and accessible language, ensuring that conversations start from a solid foundation, and to involve experts in the field.



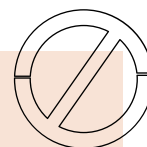
## DESIGN THINKING

This tool's major goal is the discovery of innovative solutions, through analysis of different perspectives in multidisciplinary teams, through five specific stages: empathy, problem definition, ideation, prototyping and testing. This method can be used with complementary tools such as storytelling, journey mapping and visual thinking.

### DESIGN THINKING IN THE LIBRARY

1. Defining the scope. Public libraries often have the desire or need for change. We must ask ourselves what we wish to change and use design thinking to develop new possibilities. Phrasing our work as 'how might we' questions put us in the mindset of arriving at impactful solutions and helps us generate as many ideas as possible along the way.
2. Empathy. Once the scope or theme we want to work on is defined, and before we define the problem, the empathy phase challenges the team to observe people or communities, putting themselves in their 'shoes'.
3. After observation, the participants are challenged to contact people outside the group, listening to them and trying to identify their needs, characteristics and potential. Careful preparation of an interview script is recommended, focusing on open questions. Data collected after observation and listening can be analysed, categorised and visually represented.
4. Definition of the problem. After analysing the results collected in the empathy phase, define the problem as a group, seeking to maintain focus on the identified needs and perspectives of the people and/or communities consulted.
5. Ideation. Using brainstorming techniques, the group should share several ideas for solving the defined problem. Brainstorming bad ideas can be useful in this phase of design thinking. Each idea can be shared using sticky notes or online boards.
6. Prototyping. At this stage a solution is planned based on the shared and systematised ideas in the previous phase, which will be synthesised in a script capable of transmitting the nature and purpose of the solution to be prototyped. The prototype can be built with materials such as cardboard, building blocks and miniature figures.
7. Testing. In this phase, the prototype is presented to people or communities, at a meeting or in another context, to obtain their feedback and determine the adequacy of the proposed solution.

For further details, we recommend the [design thinking for libraries toolkit](#), developed by public libraries in Aarhus (Denmark) and Chicago (USA), with funding from the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation.



#### AVOID

- Avoid that participants isolate from the group; encourage them to continuously ask for feedback and ask yourself for feedback. Working in groups is crucial for improving ideas and finding new possibilities.
- Avoid being idle; get your hands 'dirty'. Design thinking is all about getting hands-on, that is, building a prototype of the solution you envisaged.
- Avoid giving up when you feel under pressure. You are working in a team, not alone.



## FOCUS GROUP

A focus group is a qualitative research technique in which a group of participants (between 6 and 12 participants as a rule of thumb) gathers to explore a topic in a collective way, under the guidance of a facilitator, who will promote a respectful exchange of ideas, views, experiences and values. The aim is to explore ‘how people work out their thoughts and feelings about certain matters in a social context, that is to say with others and/or in certain places. This methodology creates room for contradictory views, values, expectations, resistances and problematics to emerge (Crang and Cook, 2007) and provides room for co-creating narratives and solutions’ (Quaglia and Guimarães Pereira, 2020, pp. 140–141). This method can be useful when the library wishes to delve into a specific issue from various angles, without fearing conflict from different opinions. It can also be used to help the library gather ideas from different stakeholders and partners on a specific subject, such as the future of library services, or to gather opinions on how to collectively solve a community issue.

The facilitator promotes the discussion and interaction between the participants by asking questions or proposing activities (according to a script prepared

in advance) and should be skilled in active listening, leadership, communication and observation and demonstrate patience and flexibility.

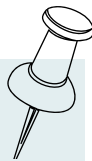
It is advisable that the facilitator is supported by a collaborator, who is in charge of taking notes and observing the group’s interactions. Alternatively, the session can be recorded with participants’ consent. The session should ideally not exceed two and a half hours.

### HOW TO HOST A FOCUS GROUP AT THE LIBRARY (IN A NUTSHELL)

1. Preparation. Definition of objectives, methodologies and the target audience; group composition; resources; session script.
2. Planning. Involvement of the participants; definition of the moderator, observer and facilitator; definition of the location and who will transcribe the information captured.
3. Running the focus group. Presentation of the team, objectives and methodology, reinforcing the idea that there is no need for consensus, for the goal is to the multiplicity of views and perspectives.

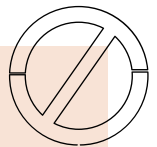
#### BEAR IN MIND

- › Focus group sessions are fundamentally reflective. If the themes that you want to explore require in-depth and active engagement or a hands-on approach, you should choose a method such as living labs or design thinking. If your aim is to influence a policy-making process, you could consider deliberative methods.



#### AVOID

- › Avoid forcing consensus at a focus group session, for that is not the goal. Embrace the multiplicity of opinions.
- › Avoid subjecting focus group participants to too many questions at a time. It is best to choose a short and clear list of questions, making sure that everyone relates to them.
- › Avoid paying attention exclusively to verbal expressions. The non-verbal language of participants can enrich your analysis.



## EVALUATION AND FOLLOW-UP OF PARTICIPATORY ACTIVITIES: SOME CONSIDERATIONS

A citizen engagement process should be evaluated throughout every phase, so that it can support thought-through decisions from the beginning.

Evaluation can mean evaluating the following.

1. The plan – the design of the process.
2. The process – how did it go? Who ‘judges’ the process and according to which criteria?
3. The outcomes – what was the outcome? What is the follow-up process?
4. The impact – what kind of change does it lead to?

It is important to evaluate the role of the library in the process, including the library’s unique qualities that have successfully supported the initiative, and areas for improvement. This way you can draw your own conclusions on how libraries can function as engines of community building and empowerment, their positioning as institutions contributing to civic life and their ability to reinforce community cohesion, care and commitment on different civic matters.

Evaluation is another activity that can be designed **with participants**. With citizens, you can define the very criteria to assess the process. The evaluation of the engagement process will be enriched if it is planned as a multidimensional and dynamic process, using techniques that can demonstrate the public and social impact of participation, and reflects also on each participant’s personal impact, which can be assessed through storytelling techniques that build on testimonies, cognitive maps, word clouds, etc.

The evaluation process can focus on elements such as the opportunities created, the outreach and activities and how these helped foster a culture of participation. For instance, you can choose to evaluate the extent to which your outreach strategy included all members of the community or if a group was overlooked by asking the participants if they felt that their community was widely represented. You can consider evaluating how your space was designed and what you could do to make it more welcoming, by recording participants’ comments on the lighting, the furniture, etc.

You can ask participants to convey their feelings and perspectives on various issues at both the beginning of the process and the end. This will allow you to assess if their initial thoughts and feelings changed. From those assessments you can try to understand what influenced those changes or lack of changes, and better prepare for future projects.

Questions such as ‘Did you feel like you had ample opportunity to speak?’, ‘Did you know how to intervene?’ or even ‘Did you feel everyone was given the same opportunities to participate?’ are important and can determine the level of inclusiveness and distributed management – a dimension that refers to decision-making based on the exchange of different viewpoints and consensus.

Last but not least, it is important to evaluate the **outcomes** of the process and any follow-up.

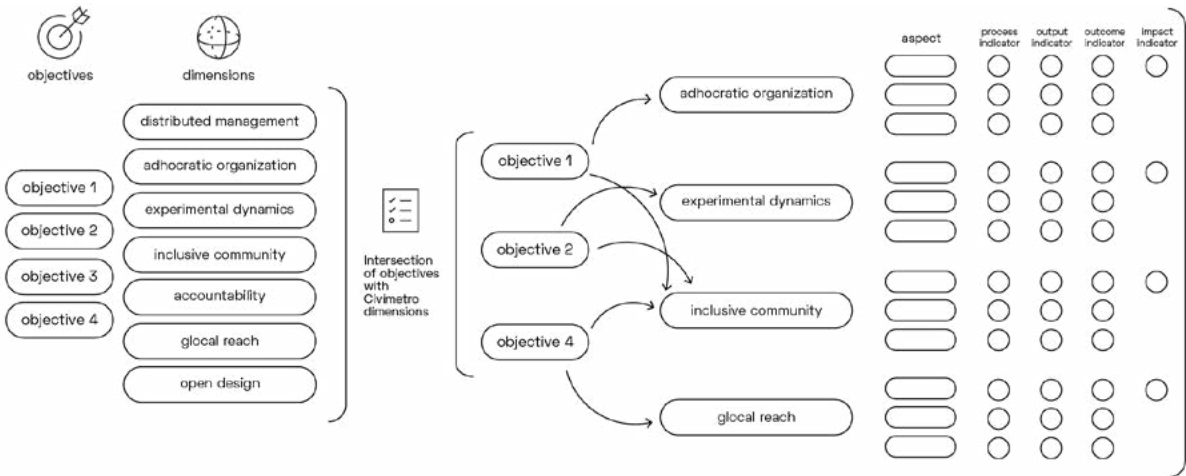
The level of influence of citizens on the engagement process itself, and how the expectations of the stakeholders were (or were not) met, can also be assessed through the analysis of the outcome of each project, the flexibility of the procedures and the directions that the project took during its course. The potential of unexpected turns and failures, understood as crucial points where the actors of a participatory

action found different and unpredicted ways forward, can be a focus of the evaluation, because they can represent the most memorable aspects as they can be most likely to drive citizens towards new, ground-breaking, original experiences.

We recommend avoiding models of impact evaluation driven by marketisation, instrumentalisation towards the fulfilment of non-transparent agendas and articulation of impact value in funding or economical frames.

Frameworks such as Civimetro may be helpful to get you started on shaping your evaluation process. Civimetro proposes a seven-step evaluation plan to guide civic innovation initiatives throughout the entire process, from defining objectives and indicators to their measurement and drawing conclusions <sup>(28)</sup>, and allows you to compare different initiatives, encouraging knowledge sharing.

<sup>(28)</sup> <https://civimetro.org/en/>



↑  
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## CHALLENGES AND ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

The path towards meaningful and impactful citizen engagement presents challenges across all phases, as well as ethics considerations that deserve to be reflected upon.

Some studies report a rise in the public and political interest about public participation and, simultaneously, continued marginalisation of the urban poor. Therefore, we must be able to reflect on the factors that can make a difference between meaningful participation and perfunctory processes.

Here are some of the challenges we gathered from the analysis of the case studies and the bibliography.

### CHALLENGES OF CITIZEN ENGAGEMENT ACTIVITIES IN PUBLIC LIBRARIES

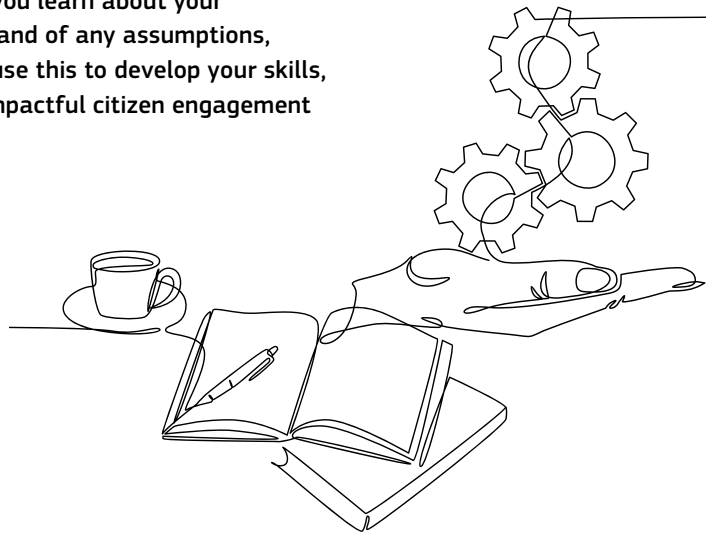
- › Redefine boundaries between public and professional environments
- › Trust the capacity of citizens for contributing to policymaking and managerial decisions
- › Avoid trapping citizens in institutionalised ways of thinking and acting, or work with hidden agendas from institutional promoters
- › Focus on the help you can provide to produce tangible benefits for communities through participation
- › Make sure that stakeholders and partners are honestly committed to involving and sharing power with all spheres of the community, including marginalised populations and minorities, in participation and decision-making
- › Map out communities with precision and respect, explicitly articulating 'who', and avoid all preconceived ideas about who they are
- › Remember that some categorisations may favour or perpetuate inequalities. If you do not define clearly what community you are referring to in an engagement process, the abstract meaning of the word 'community' may mean different things depending on who is speaking or listening. In addition, if you do not define the community you are working with, it will become impossible to discuss its specific problems, expectations and desires
- › Do not reduce the participation processes to bureaucratic procedures
- › Remember that silence does not mean agreement. In general, consider silence as a sign of dissent from a community member
- › Participation should not be yet another tool to exercise authority, but an instrument that can challenge the elite and expert authorities in a constructive way
- › Embrace conflict and disagreement as indication of honest participation. Processes that deny opposition and that are based only on politeness can depoliticise public participation
- › Avoid 'engagement-washing'.

## CONCLUDING REMARKS

Throughout this rough guide, we have presented concepts and rationales of citizen engagement processes, case studies and suggestions on starting your own citizen engagement process in a public library context. Our reflections included ethical considerations to keep in mind prior to and throughout your process. Despite the challenges, whether they are internal to your organisation, between stakeholders or in your community, these processes offer meaningful and impactful outcomes. These include creative approaches, new ways of thinking, innovation, learning, community-driven change, workforce development, a culture of participation and more! We believe we have shown that public libraries are well placed to facilitate citizen engagement processes, and that there is a huge potential to tap onto.

While each citizen engagement process and public library context may present its own unique set of questions and challenges, it is important to remember that these processes serve to address real-world issues, and build up active citizenship and a widespread culture of participation. Setbacks will be part of the process. It takes time and commitment to construct a culture of participation for all, changing the relationship between citizens and public institutions. As facilitators of such processes, it is important for public libraries to frame this not only as an exercise of citizen empowerment but also as a learning opportunity for themselves.

**Take note of what you can learn personally, of what you learn about your community, your colleagues and other organisations and of any assumptions, biases or expectations you may have held onto, and use this to develop your skills, experience and ability to facilitate meaningful and impactful citizen engagement processes for your community and your library!**



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## FURTHER RESOURCES

### **Living Labs**

[Guidelines for urban labs](#)

### **Citizens' assemblies**

[Hybrid democracy – A manual for combining online participation and policy jury](#)

[The Citizens' Assembly, Ireland](#)

[Citizens' Initiative Review](#)

[newDemocracy Foundation](#)

[Innovative citizen participation and new democratic institutions – Catching the deliberative wave](#)

[The difference between citizen engagement and participation](#)

[Design as democracy by Island Press](#)

### **Other toolkits for libraries**

[Design thinking for libraries toolkit](#)

[Engaging the public with research – A toolkit for higher education and library partnerships](#)

[How to make libraries forums of democracy: Methods for libraries to promote democracy](#)

[BiodiverCities Atlas: A participatory guide to building urban biodiverse futures](#)



## GLOSSARY (29)

### **Adhocracy**

The concept of adhocracy arose within the framework of organisation theory and is defined in opposition to bureaucracy. While bureaucracy refers to systems of organisation based on the division of tasks and structured hierarchies, adhocracy is a system of organisation focused on problem-solving or project development. Human, technical and material resources are deployed according to problem-solving needs. Thus, positions and tasks are not permanent, and organisational forms and procedures are malleable and adjustable to the objectives of the work. These characteristics of adhocracy, in addition to promoting cooperation between team members and facilitating critical analysis of ongoing work, foster individual creativity and innovation.

### **Citizen engagement**

Citizen engagement (sometimes also designated as community engagement) is an invited process of public participation where public institutions invite citizens to openly discuss matters of concern and care through purposefully organised exercises. Citizen engagement entails initiating and fostering citizens or specific communities participation by using all available local resources. To promote citizen engagement, it is essential to map out the relevant communities, to mobilise the relevant local actors, such as community leaders, local associations and other public and private entities, as well as to apply communication strategies and undertake consultation of the whole community.

### **Citizens' assembly**

is a model for implementing deliberative democracy processes that brings together a randomly selected group of citizens (typically between 50 and 250 individuals) representative of the population where the assembly takes place. This group discusses and makes recommendations on a particular issue or set of issues, typically over a period of several days, weeks or months.

### **Co-creation**

is about actively involving citizens in a respectful and equal way on a specific issue of concern, which recognises that citizens are resourceful and competent partners as well as

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(29) The definition of 'Citizens' assembly', 'Co-creation' and 'Material deliberation and co-creation' are taken from the Glossary of the BiodiverCities Atlas: A participatory guide to building urban biodiverse futures ([here](#)).

knowledge-holders. Co-creation has its roots and tradition in the design world, and often we speak about co-design, but it arises also from the world of participatory urban and land use planning. Co-creation aims at improving the inclusiveness and effectiveness of public policies and services. It makes it possible to bring what citizens need, are concerned with and care for into decision-making. As a process, co-creation involves the joint creation of outcomes and/or the making of shared decisions.

### **Communities**

Communities are understood from a sociological perspective. Common features of communities in sociology include territory, close and informal relationships, mutuality, common values and beliefs, organised interaction, a strong sense of belonging, and cultural similarity. Library communities can be understood using sociologist Ferdinand Tönnies' definition of community developed in *Gemeinschaft und Gesellschaft* (first published in 1887), wherein a community is an organic social group whose members are bound together by a sense of belonging created out of everyday contacts covering the whole range of human activities. Thus, library communities are often understood to be based on a sense of belonging; however, it is important to note that library communities are often bound to a territory as libraries serve local populations with varying demographics.

Another interesting definition of 'community' comes from Roberto Esposito's *Communitas. Origins and destiny of community* (first published in 1998). The philosopher argues that what characterises a community is not the sharing of a specific trait, be it a place or a characteristic. Rather, the making of a community implies a '*munus*', i.e., an act of giving and of losing something, as individuals, for a community to be.

### **Material deliberation and material co-creation**

is shorthand for processes of deliberation and citizen engagement that incorporate an awareness, openness or sensitivity to non-traditional modes of deliberative interaction. This includes, but is not confined to: the sonorous (music, singing, laughter, shrieks, noise); the discursive (gossip, storytelling, anecdote, polemic, drama); the material (objects, bodies, sites, places); the affective (hate, love, fear, attachment, nostalgia, intuition, pleasure) (Davies et al., 2012).

### **Public participation**

As a process, participation is an act of freedom that implies an individual decision to associate or unite for a collective action, to achieve certain goals and, simultaneously, to allow experimentation, learning and the incorporation of practices that prove beneficial and effective for the strengthening and development of everyone involved. Participation also implies mobilisation of a group or community for a particular purpose or cause. In this rough guide, participation is understood to be built on relationships of trust, equality, transparency, openness and respect.

**Representativeness**

is the quality of a smaller group of people representing a larger group, that is, acting on its behalf or in its place, which presupposes a process of qualification and recognition. In the context of the development of any participatory process in which it is impossible to involve the whole group or community with which one intends to work, it is important or even essential to achieve some form of representativeness. This means that, first, it is necessary to know and characterise, in detail, the group or community concerned, and then find a way to build its representation. This should, of course, achieve the highest recognition among those who make up the group or the community.

**Third place**

is a concept developed by sociologist Ray Oldenburg, who identifies 'third places' as public spaces that are 'neutral' (in the sense of being non-repulsive and so socially marked) and allow people to gather and interact. Oldenburg's definition includes eight characteristics of third places: neutral ground, leveller, conversation as the main activity, accessibility and accommodation, the regulars, a low profile, playful mood and a home away from home. The space of a third place can have commercial and non-commercial functions, emphasises the expectation of socialisation and offers of free space to patrons (Quandt and Kröger, 2013).

## BIOS

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