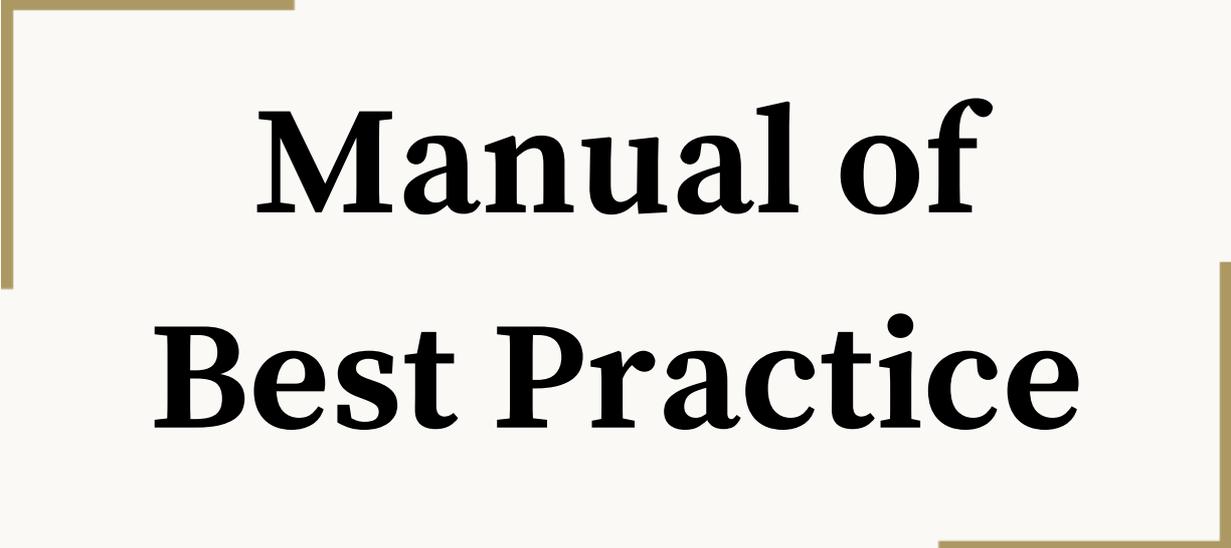




**NEWCOMER**

BUILDING A NETWORK OF  
COMMUNITY CENTERED  
LIBRARIANSHIP



# **Manual of Best Practice**

## Introduction

Started in 2020, the Building a Network of Community Centred Librarianship (NEWCOMER) project set out to support adult education in public libraries in the Netherlands, Germany, the Czech Republic, Denmark and Slovenia. Over the course of this project, library professionals involved in adult education activities in their libraries met and shared how they approached a variety of challenges in their communities. From supporting media literacy to learning circles to the integration of refugees, various initiatives surrounding adult education and lifelong learning were at the heart of this project's best practices.

Underpinning all the exchanges during the NEWCOMER project was the idea of community librarianship. This concept was initially developed in the Netherlands and was a driving force of this project. Would this be an idea that resonated with librarians outside of the Netherlands? How could this idea be expanded beyond the Netherlands? Could we define a European interpretation of community librarianship?

As we set out to answer these questions, we are reminded by none other than Professor R. David Lankes that best practice exchange is not merely about replication. Rather the focus should be on adaptation to community needs all while supporting cross-border exchange to construct a strong sector anchored in local librarianship but global skills exchange. The following best practices are intended to be a source of inspiration and a way to boost the professional development of library professionals involved in adult education.



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## Cubiss

In 2016 Cubiss asked several libraries in the Netherlands on which developments they wanted to focus on in the coming years. Many libraries said they wanted to develop the concept of the community librarian. David Lankes had visited the Netherlands the year before as a part of his 'Expect more' tour and his ideas about the concept of librarians building communities in their local environments had made an impression. Or at least they had made librarians think about how they could add another dimension to their local mission.



But what exactly is a community librarian? What do they do? What should their assets be? And how can they develop and learn from each other? We started out by interviewing managers and librarians about their ideas on the concept of the community librarian. And as expected there were many different ideas, opinions and directions. But most of all, there was a strong sense that we had to take all those different ideas and build something around that that could work.

There is no library school in The Netherlands any more. So if we wanted to train community librarians, if we wanted to create a mutual language and if we wanted to create a movement around the community librarian, something new had to be set up.

We started out by doing three things – we asked some library directors to form a steering committee. Their task was to supervise the direction things were taking and to make sure that what we were doing and planning matched their aims and needs in their local societies.

The second thing we did was getting a professional training institute involved. We thought it was important to make the community librarian course an official, valued and credited course. We could do that by making it a post-HBO (higher education) course. We hired Avans+ to provide for this. They worked out part of the course and provided the trainer.

The third thing we did was getting David Lankes involved. He served as a long distance advisor, contributing ideas and making suggestions. We also thought it was important to have him involved because his initial ideas were key to get this started in the first place.

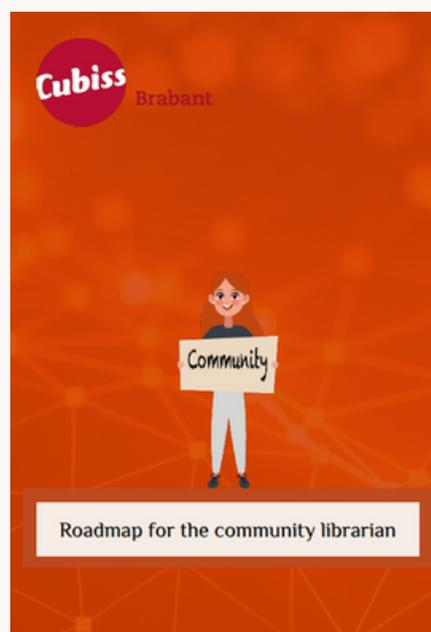
Setting up a course like this takes effort, time and it takes money. Funding came from the provincial funds of Cubiss. The National Library of the Netherlands supported the project with a financial contribution from the Innovation Fund. The transformation to the broad social library that is not just centred around books and reading is one of the main priorities of the Dutch library field. Librarians need different competences and new expertise. The National Library of the Netherlands sees the Community Librarian Course that Cubiss has developed as an important addition to this transformation.

Naturally there was a contribution fee from the participating libraries and students.

In the Spring of 2017 fifteen students started the official Community Librarian Course. The fifth edition of the Community Librarian Course started in January 2021.

Check [www.cubiss.nl/the-community-librarian](http://www.cubiss.nl/the-community-librarian) for two documentaries on the community librarian in The Netherlands, the professional profile for the community librarian and the roadmap for the community librarian.

We also would point you to the "Roadmap for the Community Librarian" to help you start your community librarianship experience!



## Czech National Library

In the spring months of 2022, the Czech Republic, among other countries, became a destination for Ukrainian refugees fleeing the war. During a short period of time, the Czech Republic registered over 300.000 refugees.



Libraries started to get involved immediately. Libraries once again showed their ability to react fast, cooperate and become partners of humanitarian organisations, municipal authorities, and local coordinators. A lot of libraries became places for humanitarian collections, some registering newly arriving from Ukraine and at the same time they prepared their own services and approach to the new group of citizens.

Experiences and activities of the [Municipal library in Vsetín](#), the [North Bohemian Research Library](#), and the [House of National Minorities](#) were presented.

### The North Bohemian Research Library

A special example of the swift response to the war was from the North Bohemian Research Library. Within a week of the start of war and of refugees coming into their area, they started to organise special services for the new Ukrainian community. To make sure their services were known by the community, they hired two Ukrainian women as librarians. Their two new co-workers helped them tailor their services to the rapidly growing Ukrainian community.

The approach of Czech libraries in this time as crisis can be categorised as follows:



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## Cooperation of libraries

- Libraries worked together to quickly build a shared platform of materials for working with Ukrainian children
- Library organisations organised regular weekly online meetings for librarians to coordinate their steps in establishing new services
- Regular online webinars were offered to librarians, featuring lectures of various experts on language, psychology, teachers, politicians to help understand

## Libraries as homes for communities

- Libraries built cooperations with centres for refugees KACPU
- Libraries built cooperations with schools
- Libraries worked together with the Centres for integration of foreigners

## Special services for Ukrainian refugees

- Libraries started to offer language courses for Ukrainians, children and adults (the possibility of obtaining financial support in the grant programme of the Ministry of Education, total EUR 8 mil.)
- Libraries organised children's adaptation groups for adaptation and socialisation of Ukrainian children (aged 3-15) in a new environment, learn the basics of Czech language – more than 100,000 Ukrainian children entered Czech schools (grant program of the Ministry of education, total EUR 48 mil.)
- Libraries offered free library cards to Ukrainian refugees
- Libraries offered workshops for children, youth and adults (crafts, painting, 3D printers etc.)
- Libraries organised clubs for mothers and pre-school children
- Libraries organised summer camps for Ukrainian children



## Books and other materials

- [Shared platform of materials](#) for working with Ukrainian children
- Printed materials for working with children, issues of [Czech library journals in Ukrainian](#)
- [Ukrainian version](#) of Bookstart, a project supporting children's reading skills
- Printed vocabulary, basic phrases, alphabet, leaflets in Cyrillic alphabet
- Welcoming packages
- Cooperation with the organisation House of national minorities and acquiring Ukrainian books from Ukraine for libraries
- Cooperation with the [Ukrainian Book Institute](#)

## Other special services

- Special keyboards with Cyrillic alphabet
- Communicative sets (headphones, microphones) for online calling to Ukraine

## Seniors Writing Wikipedia

This project is developed by Wikimedia Czech Republic and realised in cooperation with public libraries. Its mission is to transfer the knowledge from the older generation to younger people. Involving other age groups will contribute to more balanced content on Wikipedia that is freely available to anyone. Courses for seniors are organised in libraries that provide facilities such as equipped computer rooms, but also publicity and organisational support. Due to constant expansion of the courses, the volunteer lecturers were no longer able to cover all the demand. A training programme for librarians was created so that any library could provide a course independently making the project sustainable.



## Libraries as guides to the 21st century



According to various surveys, Czechs are often subject to misinformation and tend to distrust established media. Libraries as places of non-formal lifelong learning for all groups of people started to focus on media literacy education programs. In cooperation with Open Society Fund, Czech libraries prepared a series of workshops called Libraries as guides to the 21st century. It involves workshops for three target groups – children, seniors, and librarians. Workshops are designed differently for each target groups. For librarians, it is designed as a training course and after completing the course they should be able to provide further education in media literacy for public. A methodical handbook for media literacy education in libraries was created and is aimed at the generation aged 55 and above.

## Memory training courses for adult learners

Memory training courses in libraries are organised by certified librarians - memory trainers. They created a separate section within Association of Library and Information Professionals of the Czech Republic. The programmes organised for the public in libraries throughout the Czech Republic - memory training or brain jogging - are very popular. In 2022, they held over 1,200 events with nearly 14,000 participants. The aim of these courses is to strengthen the cognitive functions, preserve and develop functional literacy using the mnemonics in practice. The activity is designed for all age groups, but is particularly beneficial for seniors.



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## Culture Socialità Biblioteche Network Operativo (CSBNO)



### Lessons learned during the pandemic

From March to May 2020, by order of the Italian government, all libraries were closed. This closure was destructive for the service model of public libraries in Italy as it is centred on attracting the community to the library building.

Librarians started going out of libraries and took on a new approach in networking and collaborating with the community. The result of the pandemic has been a shifting focus from collection to community, accelerating digital services, and improving community participation.

CSBNO libraries have tried to stay connected with communities through creative approaches.

Approximately 40,000 phone calls were made to communities to promote online services and digital lending.

Partnerships were also initiated with local institutions and organisations, starting with schools and shops. New participatory services were fostered by collaborating online with schools.

Books checked out by library users were delivered to shops in their area for pick-up. It was a successful experiment which has become a new work practice.

The services went online with the digital library and the digital lending and the increase in the offer of e-learning courses.

During and after the lockdown, qualitative data on communities began to be collected. The transcripts of the interviews done by telephone were analysed by CSBNO in collaboration with the University of Parma using “sentiment analysis” method[1]. The aim and objective were to understand communities’ “opinion” towards digital library services. The results showed a preference for print books, but a positive view for the digital library and OPAC which show community interest in using digital services in the future.

[1] Tammaro A.M. et al. (2022) Building a sentiment analysis model for libraries: the CSBNO Consorzio approach: <<http://ceur-ws.org/Vol-3160/short6.pdf>>



## The Italian Community Librarian

### Community librarian profile

How does the library organisation change with the vision of the Community librarian? The profile of the Community librarian is new in Italy and there is little awareness of this role and how it can improve communities. CSBNO carried out a focus group in the Library of Pero, on March 23 2022, to explore the professional skills and attitudes perceived as requirements by CSBNO coordinators and librarians. The results are following:

- The Community Librarian has a role of “osmosis” between inside and outside the library.
- The Community Librarian is a facilitator and is not neutral: they work with the community - including forgotten subcommunities - with the aim of improving community life.
- The Community Librarian is proactive and agrees on some shared community values (such as the Italian Constitution, common democratic rules, etc.).
- The Community Librarian is a recognised member of the community and trusted by the community.
- The Community Librarian seeks to obtain a clear social and political mandate - beyond the cultural role - through partnerships and collaboration with stakeholders.
- The Community Librarian is a member of the community and is an active partner for initiatives with marginalised sub-communities
- The Community Librarian knows how to apply quantitative and qualitative research methods to collect data and understand needs and expectations of the community.
- The Community Librarian can make an inventory of the library assets (Empathy Map, Community Map, etc.).
- The Community Librarian uses the data to come up with proposals on how the community life could be improved.
- The Community Librarian can measure and evidence the impact libraries had on the community (as well as output data such as number of visits and opening hours)
- The Community Librarian advocates showing to policy makers with evidence-based results how to facilitate inclusion and active citizenship.



## Recruiting an Italian Community Librarian

CSBNO tried to select candidates similar to the users of the community they want to engage with and get participation from.

Every staff recruitment process is arranged to support a change in the organisation and combine the search with:

- affinities between present cultural organisation and candidates' approaches;
- differences in competencies and skills between present and future staff to enrich the company of new transformative competencies.

Affinities are focused on attitudes, they are quite stable over time since they guarantee continuity in corporate culture, while searching for differences may vary depending on the project and the work that the candidate will be joining. A combination of these two elements is required since:

- if recruitment exceeds in isomorphism it risks missing the target of organisational change;
- If recruitment exceeds searching for diversity it risks creating a mismatch with the ongoing process of working or requires high integration effort.

CSBNO uses some guiding questions:

### Affinity

- What are our values? How do we determine our service priorities?
- We need to explore some dichotomies and confusion in the community library vision: collection or community? Silence or conversations? Possession or access?
- What is our idea of collaborating with the community?
- Are we working for money or improving society and changing the world? For stability or innovation? Individual success or collective achievement?

### Difference

- What are our new targets? Shifting the focus of isomorphism from the present organisation to the future organisation, they are the newcomer of the community library.
- Where are we moving to work? Inside the library or outside? Within a traditional framework or innovative ways of digital and physical services?

By designing the aptitude profile of the community librarian, CSBNO has highlighted the following soft skills: listening; flexibility; empathy; curiosity; communication skills; active participation, collaboration and sharing; time planning; creativity; curate change.



Which selection strategy can be used to assess this attitudinal profile?

Different methods were examined: individual interview; role game, presenting a project, problem solving; simulation and practical case; using peer to peer evaluation of the candidate; checking references; observing while working.



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## Cologne Public Library

The Cologne Public Library took part in an Erasmus+ project called "Learning circles in libraries" which developed a way to implement learning circles in libraries from the Peer to Peer University (P2PU). Find out how you can start learning circles in your library.



### What are learning circles?

A learning circle is a free, lightly-facilitated study group of people who meet regularly for some time to learn something together. Learning circles bring together adults who want to acquire new knowledge and skills in a convenient way. Participants have the opportunity to take an online course that combines the flexibility of e-learning with the benefits of group meetings, discussions and sharing. Learning circles in libraries are coordinated and facilitated by trained staff and can take place online or on-site. The course duration with weekly meetings depends on the respective topic.

A learning circle typically has the following components:

- a facilitator - responsible for organising the learning circle, but not teaching. The group should work together to understand the material.
- a group of learners - ideally 4–12 for an engaging group dynamic
- a regular meeting space - in-person in the library or online
- recurring meetings – normally 90 minutes per week for 6 to 8 weeks
- dedicated topic and learning materials – most often an online course

Self-organisation, work-life balance, art history and handlettering are just a few examples of learning circles that have already taken place at Cologne City Library (Stadtbibliothek Köln). In Cologne, all library members can access LinkedIn Learning online courses free of charge at any time. Sometimes freely available MOOCs or even YouTube videos, that are suitable for self-learning, have been the basis for a learning circle.



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## How to organise a learning circle

A learning circle can be set up easily by anyone in any institution with the help of a toolkit. The concept has been developed by P2PU and adapted to the needs of European libraries in the Erasmus+ project “Learning circles in libraries”.

[Project website](#) of the Cologne Public Library

[Toolkit](#) (ENG version)

[Facilitator handbooks](#) and further information in English, Finnish, German, Polish, Portuguese and Romanian



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