FUTURE OF EUROPE IN PUBLIC LIBRARIES

Feb 2023 - Digital Camp at De Krook in Ghent

Oct 2023 - Democracy camp in Lisbon

Nov 2022 - Kick off meeting in Brussels

May 2023 - Sustainability LAB at the Next Library Festival in Aarhus

The **Future of Europe in Public Libraries (FEPL)** project brings together four partners: Public Libraries 2030, Dokk1 Library, Lisbon Libraries Network, and De Krook Library Ghent.

Following a kick-off meeting in Brussels, the partners organised three thematic meetings throughout 2023 which focused on the topics of: **digital futures, sustainability, and democracy**. These themes were selected because we believe them to be central to European programme and priorities, but also to our changing societies.

We set ourselves the following goals:

- consider **what is currently happening** in public libraries across Europe
- explore some **common language** we can use
- identify some **leading trends** in each topic area
- formulate some **recommendations** towards policy makers
- consider how these areas overlap and **where we might go next**

LISBOA
CÂMARA MUNICIPAL

BLX
BIBLIOTECAS DE LISBOA

DE KROOK
BIBLIOTHEEK

AARHUS
PUBLIC
LIBRARIES

PUBLIC
LIBRARIES 2030
CONNECT. INNOVATE. ADVOCATE.

DIGITAL FUTURES

TRENDS

We explored these trends together:
Libraries evolve into **havens for peer-support** in a fast-moving digital society.
Libraries transform into places that foster open-minded yet critical citizens in digital society.
Libraries are hubs for **multiple perspectives** in digital society, including also the silent majority.
Not about the **tool** but the **ability to adapt.**

> Libraries can be "dream labs" for the future. Libraries are places where people are stimulated to be creative, and we need creativity to be ready for the future.

INSPIRATION

Libraries all over Europe are already playing a crucial role in tackling the digital future. Here are some examples that inspired us:

- Digital skills - DigitaalTalent@Vlaanderen
- Smiles (Young people fighting disinformation)
- Comon Ghent
- Muntpunt's Makerspace 'De Grid'
- Digital Education Action Plan (2023-2027)

COMMON LANGUAGE

The inspiration and trends gave us a common language:
The library is a place for **peer learning**
Libraries stress the value of **failure**
The library is a **trusted partner**
The library remains also a **place for disconnection**
The library can **raise awareness** on both opportunities and risks
Digital Justice

RECOMMENDATIONS

Libraries play a crucial role in tackling future digital challenges, with the EU holding significant influence in supporting digital innovation, AI, data literacy, and privacy issues within library settings. Key EU actions could involve:

- Establishing standards and policies to ensure consistent practices across member states, addressing technology awareness, legislation, privacy, and data management.
- Defining a basic digital skill set for librarians, enabling them to provide reliable information and assistance to users.
- Providing funding and support for libraries to take on new responsibilities, including training programs, workshops, and data literacy initiatives.
- Facilitating the sharing of portals and tools among libraries in different member states.
- Advocating for libraries as safe spaces for accessing reliable information and promoting digital literacy.
- Supporting collaboration and networking among EU libraries to foster partnerships, exchange ideas, and promote innovation in library services.

SUSTAINABILITY

TRENDS

We explored these trends together:

Libraries can create action and engage citizens: they can help turn the SDGs into **everyday goals**

Libraries can create collective action and hands-on activities beyond words

Libraries become **dream labs** for a more sustainable future.

Libraries become intersections between **culture and nature** and empathy between species.

Libraries as spaces for literature, storytelling and collective dreaming can **support collective imagination** of emerging sustainable ways of living.

Libraries extend the **design thinking approach into planetary design** and make it a shared methodology to work intentionally with empathy between people and other earthlings while respecting the planetary boundaries.

INSPIRATION

Libraries all over Europe already started exploring how to become dream labs for a more sustainable future. Here are some examples that inspired us:

- Activities in libraries: Nature Connectedness, Seed Library, Plant Library, Repair Cafes, Sewing Workshops, Learning Communities, Climate Literature book clubs, Communities for a better health.
- Anythink: Nature Library
- P2PU: Learning communities and getting skills for how to cope
- Deichman Grünerløkka in Oslo
- Aarhus: The SDG Lab: Designing library based infrastructure to co-create a more sustainable future
- The European Green Deal

It's part of the libraires DNA to be circular!

Libraries are radical spaces for creating a more sustainable future. Economically, Socially and Environmentally.

COMMON LANGUAGE

The inspiration and trends gave us a common language:

Anthropocene
Planetary design
Resilience
Collective dreaming
Imagination and creativity
Future Literacy

RECOMMENDATIONS

Libraries hold a pivotal role in fostering citizen engagement and motivation to support circular economy and circular practice. They can ground the Sustainable Development Goals among citizens and they form an infrastructure across Europe that can help ignite the citizen's engagement in the green transition if they get some support:

- Libraries can serve as catalysts for a sustainable future, nurturing learning communities across generations, offering spaces for knowledge exchange, spaces for collective exploration and prototyping, inspiration and collective growth.
- The EU can leverage the extensive network of physical libraries in Europe, tapping into their potential to lay the groundwork for a more sustainable Europe. This could involve initiatives to enhance capacity through funding, certification programs, training, and empowering libraries to become hubs for sustainability. This can help support EU-strategies as for example Net Zero Cities.
- Libraries, with their focus on literature, storytelling, and collective imagination, offer fertile ground for envisioning and embracing sustainable lifestyles. By championing libraries as platforms for citizen involvement and habit change, the EU can create a transformative shift towards sustainability, encouraging collaborative learning and mutual inspiration.
- The EU should facilitate collaboration and networking among community groups and libraries already pioneering sustainable initiatives. By providing support and funding for these endeavors, the EU can facilitate the exchange of best practices, enabling wider adoption of sustainable living practices and fostering a culture of innovation and cooperation.

DEMOCRACY

TRENDS

We explored these trends together:

Libraries are spaces for **co-creation**: citizens, organisations, municipalities and businesses work together to drive green, digital and societal transformations with long-lasting results.

Libraries as spaces where we look for solutions together!

Libraries will keep on facing undemocratic voices: how to be **libraries for all**?

Public libraries not as neutral actors, but arenas for participation, debate and activism.

Librarians using their agency to support policy and institutional change towards social justice.

Libraries are a global democratic infrastructure.

Libraries can be vehicles for creating democratic confidence and participation.

"Libraries should ignite utopias, creative ideas for an equitable future, that can be actioned and made real by people themselves."

INSPIRATION

Libraries all over Europe already started exploring how to become a democratic infrastructure. Here are some examples that inspired us:

- Europe Challenge
- European Democracy Action Plan
- Rough Guide to Citizen Engagement in Public Libraries
- Democracy Fitness

COMMON LANGUAGE

The inspiration and trends gave us a common language:

Critical Librarianship
Post-Neutrality
Inside activism
Common good
Citizenship
Engagement/community

RECOMMENDATIONS

With the action on libraries in the EU Workplan for Culture 2023 – 2026, the European member states recognise the role that libraries play in democratic life. The EU should build on this and take advantage of the fact that libraries are a global democratic infrastructure.
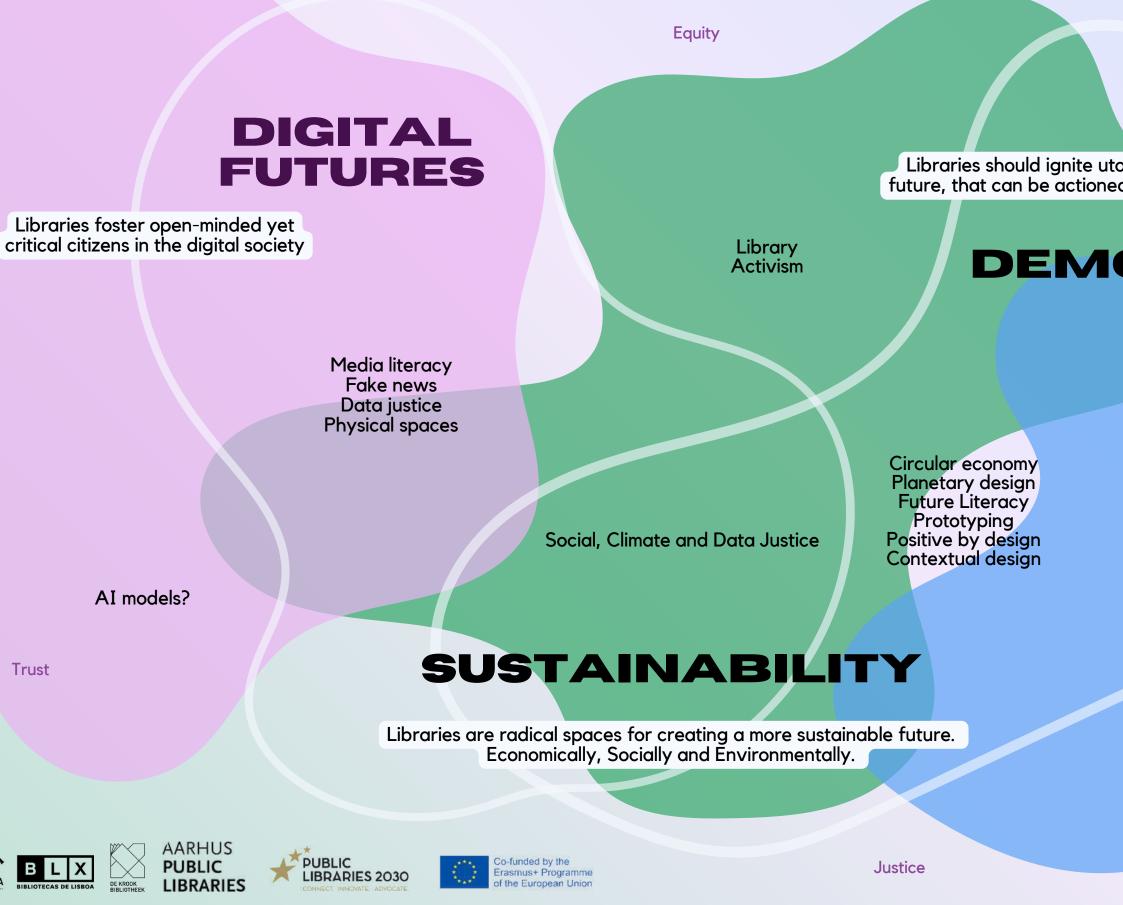
- The EU should initiate further research on participatory and citizen engagement activities in public libraries.
- Best practices and competence frameworks to foster democratic practices in libraries should be benchmarked and promoted through EU wide training and peer learning process.
- EU funding programs should include dedicated budget lines to support citizen engagement activities in public libraries, at local level and through EU collaboration and exchange.
- EU institutions should collaborate with public libraries to communicate about policy related topics with EU citizens.

Libraries are encouraged to:

- Identify and collaborate with strategically resistant and culturally significant community spaces.
- Consider the participation in EU wide democracy calls for libraries like Europe Challenge and participate in European networks of public libraries.
- Implement citizen-focused, bottom-up models of participation, and let practices like the Conference on the Future of Europe serve as inspiration.

FUTURE OF EUROPE IN PUBLIC LIBRARIES

EXPLORE / OBSERVE / QUESTION / COLLABORATE

Equity

Transparency

DIGITAL FUTURES

Libraries foster open-minded yet critical citizens in the digital society

Libraries should ignite utopias, creative ideas for an equitable future, that can be actioned and made real by people themselves.

Library Activism

DEMOCRACY

Media literacy
Fake news
Data justice
Physical spaces

Circular economy
Planetary design
Future Literacy
Prototyping
Positive by design
Contextual design

Social, Climate and Data Justice

AI models?

Trust

SUSTAINABILITY

Libraries are radical spaces for creating a more sustainable future.
Economically, Socially and Environmentally.

Justice