



Sense of Belonging

**39 initiatives that foster European
libraries as democratic spaces**

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**The
Europe
Challenge**

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There are 65,000 libraries across Europe. Just imagine if they were all connected. Libraries can connect the local with the European – I see them as a European Social Network.

André Wilkens
Director, European Cultural Foundation

A quiet revolution

As part of an ambitious initiative designed to explore how people can meet, live together and work in the Europe of today, the European Cultural Foundation launched the Europe Challenge in 2020 to support libraries and their communities.

The premise was simple: if we are to tackle some of the most urgent challenges facing Europe – from war to polarisation to cultural and economic crises – the people of Europe need to lead the way in solidarity.

To do that, people need safe spaces where they can come together and build understanding, leading to a stronger sense of solidarity. What better place to do that than libraries? As trusted democratic spaces with more than 100 million visitors per year in Europe alone, libraries provide deep-rooted connections to communities, municipalities and local governments. Libraries offer safe spaces for people across Europe to come together with their neighbours and fellow citizens to identify common problems and find solutions.

Imagining a better Europe

This is exactly what the Europe Challenge does: the programme is engaging a growing network of libraries – from cutting-edge public libraries on the waterfronts of our most exciting cities to pop up libraries in hard-to-reach rural settings. These libraries are coming together in challenge teams with citizens and communities with great ideas and innovative solutions for our future that can be shared with other Europeans and replicated across the continent and beyond. By connecting local communities and knowledge, the Europe Challenge is imagining a better Europe.

“We found that libraries can uniquely connect experience, imagination and public spaces,” says André Wilkens of the European Cultural Foundation (ECF). “And libraries do this in a diverse and inclusive way. Libraries are marvellous but often underrated public spaces. Libraries are a great European infrastructure – and they need to be nourished and connected.”

From beehives to virtual reality

Within these pages you can read more about the inspirational initiatives that emerged from the Europe Challenge. Seven libraries from across Europe took part in the pilot programme from May 2021 to May 2022 – working on a range of innovative solutions from installing urban beehives at a library near Barcelona to tapping into virtual reality to tackle digital inclusion in Amsterdam.

The second edition, which launched in May 2022, included 32 libraries and communities from 14 countries and 29 different urban and rural locations – from the Outer Hebrides of Scotland to one of the most easterly islands of Greece – representing schools, prisons, universities, volunteer libraries and special issue libraries.

One thing that stood out was that the challenges facing communities across Europe have so much in common – regardless of where they are based, their size, their language or their culture. Tackling social isolation. Helping to integrate newcomers into communities. Dealing with cultural and linguistic challenges. Equal rights and inclusion. Challenging fake news. And helping to build a more sustainable society. To name just a few...

“We have so many joint challenges in Europe,” says Marie Østergård, Library Director at Aarhus Public Libraries – one of the key partners in the Europe Challenge. “To have a network where we can co-create also across the libraries in Europe and co-challenge each other is really important.”

Gateway to a bigger world

For Chris Sigaloff, Head of Innovations for Amsterdam Public Library (OBA) – another key project partner – the Europe Challenge paves the way towards a different role for libraries in future to help them become more relevant and accessible.

“Libraries have always been a gateway to a bigger world – a gateway to knowledge, to empowerment and learning. That was traditionally done by books,” says Chris.

Now libraries need to look at how they appeal to younger and more culturally diverse users – creating buzzing spaces where people can come together to meet and talk, instead of sitting silently; spaces where people can work with their hands as well as their heads. A gateway to knowledge and learning that’s not just based on books.

“We need to look at what communities want and need,” says Chris. “We need to start by looking at how people actually want to engage and interact in society and see, as a library, how you can motivate and stimulate that. Libraries themselves should become more outward looking. It’s a kind of revolution of libraries that’s needed.”

We need “a European Erasmus moment for libraries”

ECF Director André Wilkens agrees: “I want people and policy makers in Europe to realise what a great treasure the libraries in Europe are and that they need investment and connection. I call upon all of us to create a European Erasmus moment for libraries.”

You can find out more about the Europe Challenge and future editions at www.theeuropechallenge.eu

In the meantime, enjoy reading the inspiring examples in this booklet and help us to spread the word about the vital role of libraries in our society. In times of multiple challenges, they can help us to navigate a better future for Europe.

Challenge Teams



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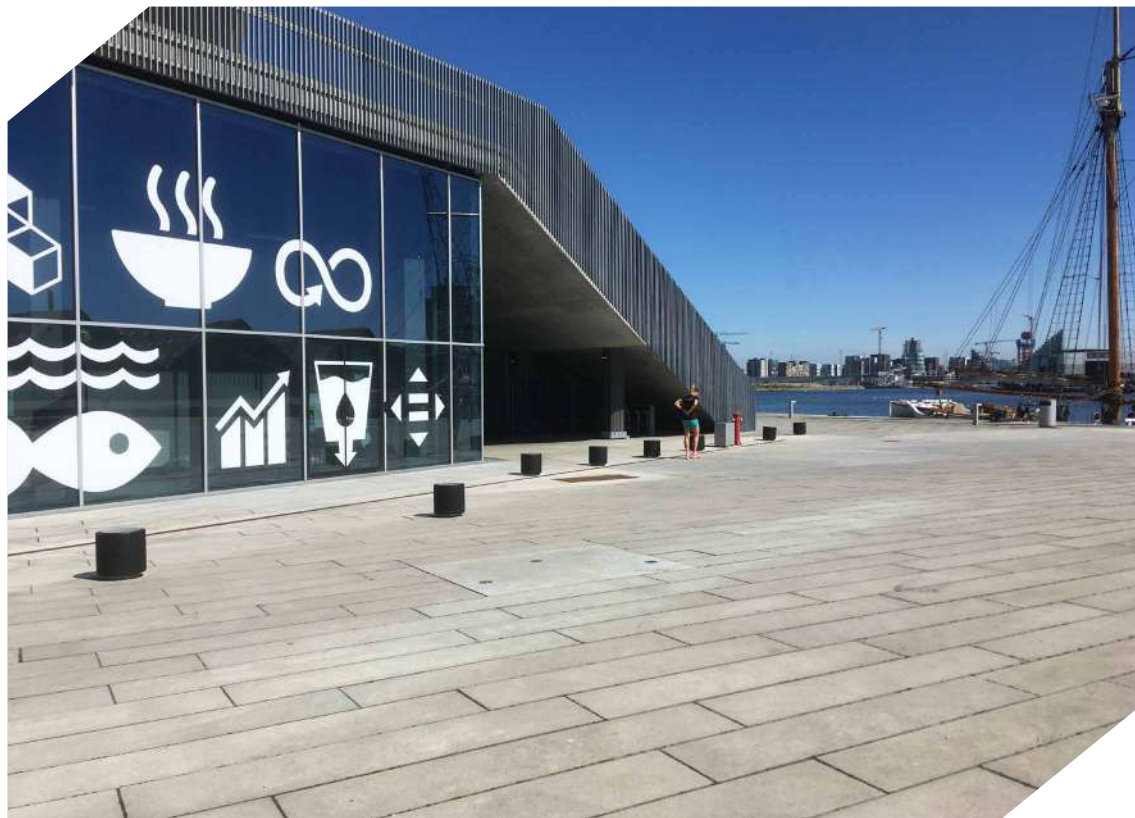
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The Europe Challenge is focusing on one of the most important challenges – democracy. In order to strengthen democracy across Europe, we need to work together.







DK

- # Social cohesion and wellbeing
- 📖 Dokk1 Aarhus Public Library
- 👥 Værestedet drop-in centre and local community
- 📍 Aarhus
- 🇩🇰 Denmark

Tales from the street

The challenge

Around the corner from the Dokk1 Public Library in the centre of Aarhus is Værestedet – a drop-in centre for people on the margins of society due to addiction, homelessness and social or mental health problems. The library team wanted to make their waterfront building more welcoming to their neighbours, so they came up with some innovative ideas.

The initiative

First, they hired an active member of the Værestedet community to work with an experienced librarian. Then, together, they planned and delivered a series of activities. This included setting up a reading corner at the drop-in centre, which also helped to promote events at Dokk1.

Tales from the Street emerged when the Værestedet community started coming together each week at the drop-in centre to write about their lives through free creative writing sessions. This gave them the opportunity to share their stories and

develop their voices as writers. Eventually the sessions moved to Dokk1.

The Værestedet community's talents were celebrated through an event showcasing their art, poetry and music.

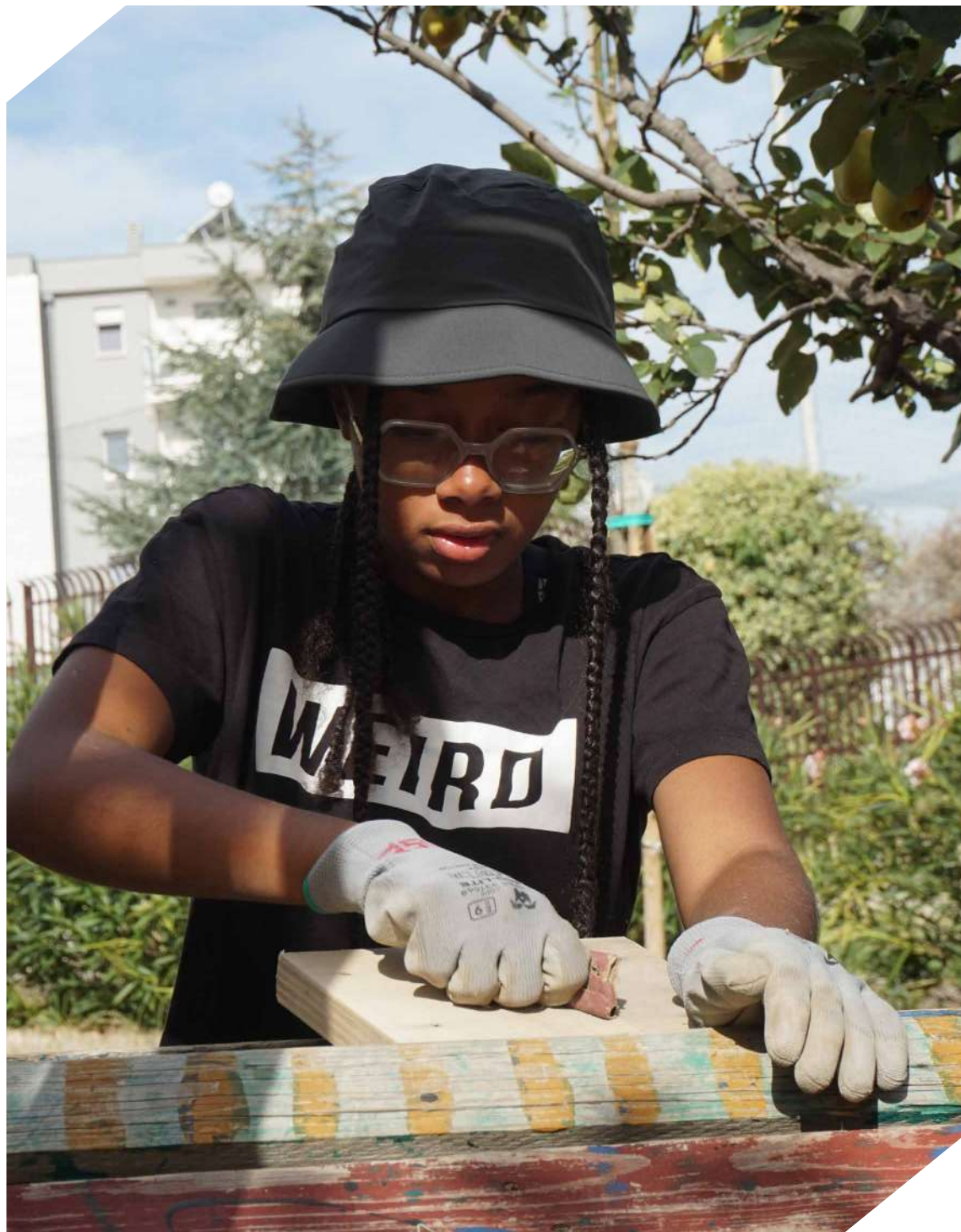
What's next?

The challenge team's collaboration has reimaged the services a library provides and how to reach a wider group of people. Dokk1 colleagues emphasise the importance of listening to what people want to change and practising that by co-decision making and taking actions together.

The challenge team is now considering how to make this an open-ended process with other groups of people, making decisions together about how the library can work as a hub for democratic participation.

They said: "We have learned valuable lessons about how libraries can engage and work together with vulnerable and socially marginalised communities. Such lessons could be useful for other libraries across Europe."





IT

- # Active citizenship and participation
- 📖 Agorateca Community Library
- 👥 Local community and library users
- 📍 Altamura
- 🇮🇹 Italy

Library of things

The challenge

The Agorateca Community Library started life in 2019 in a disused building in a suburban district of Altamura in the Apulia region of Italy – an area at high risk of social and educational deprivation.

Working in collaboration with the local community, the challenge team wanted to explore how to support sustainable urban regeneration by encouraging local people to come together and share resources.

With the help of volunteers, they set up Biblioteca delle Cose ('Library of Things'), which inspires locals to get involved in an initiative that both saves money and demonstrates how materials can have a second life.

The initiative

Biblioteca delle Cose works like a classic book library: each of the 1,500 members can borrow an item for up to a month and return it when they have finished using it – whether for crafting, creativity, DIY or hobbies. Users can donate tools and materials and make them available for the community – helping to reduce waste and create a circular economy.

This not only encourages more sustainable living, it also attracts more people to the library – in turn creating a more cohesive, inclusive and supportive community and encouraging neighbours across generations to share practical skills with each other. As part of the initiative, the challenge team set up a database to share innovative techniques for reusing waste materials.

What's next?

The goal is to offer the service to the broader community and not just to people who are familiar with the library space. The challenge team collaborates with other communities in the area that are tackling similar challenges. They are keen to develop other similar initiatives elsewhere.

They work with research organisations and universities that study the recycling of materials to develop their materials database.

To make the project sustainable in the future, they offer advertising space to companies in the area that use innovative materials (such as green building).



NL

- # Social cohesion and wellbeing
- 📖 Openbare Bibliotheek Amsterdam (OBA)
- 👥 A community of VR enthusiasts
- 📍 Amsterdam
- 🇳🇱 The Netherlands

Library of the future: Virtual reality for all

The challenge

A community of virtual reality (VR) enthusiasts is working with Amsterdam's Public Library (OBA) – which includes the Amsterdam Central Library and 26 branch libraries – to understand how virtual reality can become part of a library experience and to tackle problems of digital inclusion.

The initiative

OBA started working with a small group of people interested in VR. This group quickly grew to include a wide range of people with different interests.

The community wanted to liberate VR technology for all the citizens of Amsterdam. Their thought was that this technology could be a significant tool for education, and to prevent loneliness. So the challenge was to offer VR to Amsterdam citizens and ask them what they would use it for in daily life. The community discussed using VR technology for diversity, for feminism, for

LGBTIQA+ rights and the inclusion of elderly people. They built a LGBTIQA+ museum with students from the Hogeschool van Amsterdam (HvA), some of whom incorporated it into their studies.

What's next?

Learning from the project will partly inform the development of OBA NEXT, a library of the future that will be developed in Amsterdam. While VR was the focus for the initial work, the challenge is now a model for ways of working with other communities that want to become involved with the library. As a result, one of OBA's branch libraries is hosting a VR community-driven evening every month, where people can share their ideas, connect and work together.

There is also interest in continuing to explore how VR can help with digital exclusion and give communities a way to conquer their fears and experience – sharing and learning in a totally new way.



GR

- # Social cohesion and wellbeing
- 📖 Athens Comics Library
- 👥 Refugee Week Greece
- 📍 Athens (and 4 libraries across Greece)
- 🇬🇷 Greece

Libraries on prescription

The challenge

In Greece, years of socio-economic crisis and austerity have caused high unemployment, increased homelessness and significant social pressures on vulnerable groups. Changing demographics across Greece are affecting the city's cultural mix and identity, with 20,000 migrants and refugees living within the municipality of Athens. The Covid-19 pandemic has also had a profound impact on the arts and cultural sector both in Athens and across Greece. The library and community sector has seen radical disruptions to many of its routines, funding sources and relationships. Physical distancing has shown how much we need and value connection, culture and libraries as places of sanctuary.

The initiative

Athens Comics Library is working together with Refugee Week Greece – a community initiative celebrating the contribution and creativity of people who have experienced migration – to unlock the therapeutic power of stories. A 'Library on Prescription' scheme – offering a range of psychosocial and creative

services to help provide safe spaces for people to connect and heal. Sharing stories and experiences with mental health and illness is an important way of reducing stigma, raising mental health awareness, and building a sense of community. Together, they have reached out to 45 libraries across Greece and selected four to design and deliver a programme of tailor-made creative activities for local communities facing mental health challenges – from Athens to Crete – to pilot the initiative with different groups, including young people, people with learning disabilities, elderly women in rural areas and prisoners.

What's next?

The dream is to create a toolkit for a 12-week Libraries on Prescription course for libraries across Greece and Europe to deliver the programme and a campaign to educate and advocate for mental health. With sufficient funding, the programme could have a long-lasting impact on the wellbeing of people across Greece, while also promoting the cultural sector. It could be implemented by the National Health System, as a cultural prescription scheme.



“Through the Europe Challenge, we want to solve the problem of social exclusion in our community. We want to counter fake news that portrays people in a certain way and instead engage with their life-stories and look at the world from their perspective.”

GR

- # Equal rights and inclusion
- 📖 Feminist Autonomous Centre's Feminist Library
- 👥 MiQ community
- 📍 Athens
- 🇬🇷 Greece

Challenging stereotypes, reclaiming public spaces

The challenge

In the early 2000s, the Athens neighbourhood Agios Panteleimonas was the focus of attention from the Greek far-right party, Golden Dawn. People from different backgrounds and identities used to be attacked on the streets, but today this has changed and the Feminist Autonomous Centre's Feminist Library is a key actor in reclaiming public space for all.

The initiative

The Feminist Library is working with MiQ and the local community to challenge stereotypes by designing a programme of oral histories and visual narration through a series of workshops and training. The project is called 'Anamesa/Ndërmjet', which in Greek and Albanian means 'In-Between': the community is involved in participatory research methods in order to create narratives about migration in Greece involving the community of migrants itself. Key to the project is giving local people the skills to carry out the project themselves. In particular, the team is working with a group of 20 second generation queer

migrants in order to retell a story of migration and the multiple borders that face people during their daily lives. The goal is to create different representation in order to counter fake news about these communities.

What's next?

Through acts of reclaiming public space, the challenge team is also creating safe spaces for exchange and putting the public square at the heart of a new public life. In the process, they hope to make public spaces safer for women, children and LGBTQI+ people – particularly those from minority and racialised groups.

The team is creating a book including oral histories together with portraits and images of participants that will tell the story of queer migration. The challenge team also will organise talks, conferences, and an exhibition around the topic of decolonising queer aesthetics.

They are in the process of raising funds to create a documentary that brings together participants and is centred around issues of queer migration in Europe.



GR

- # Equal rights and inclusion
- 📖 We Need Books
- 👥 Greek Forum of Migrants
- 📍 Athens
- 🇬🇷 Greece

Nurturing a multicultural community

The challenge

We Need Books is a multilingual library that opened its doors in 2019 in the multicultural neighbourhood of Kypseli in Athens. The library slowly became a well-known meeting place for local people. Even though it had regular, multilingual users, they were not forming a strong community. This is a challenge facing many libraries across Europe that are striving to serve a multicultural population. A smaller library with a limited number of users, We Need Books developed some innovative solutions.

The initiative

Working together with the Greek Forum of Migrants, the challenge team used a range of participatory methods to reach underserved communities. In particular, they wanted to include migrant representatives in decision-making for the library. From 'voluntary contributions' to formal participatory workshops, the library users were invited to take part in the library's daily life. Instead of simply being provided with a service, they became members of a strong community, where people help and take care of each other. The library became a

home, a place to grow, experiment, meet new friends and be themselves. The challenge team said: "We believe that, if more and more diverse people are involved in the 'shaping' of our library, more and more diverse people will benefit from it."

What's next?

It has become clear that participatory methods are a key element to fostering a multicultural community of library users. The initiative has been met with enthusiasm from users, with more visitors to the library, more members joining and more participants at events. The challenge team intends to keep applying these successful methods to find new ways for their multilingual community to keep growing and to grow stronger, with members taking care of each other in these challenging times. Their main goal for the future is to be able to share their solutions and ideas with other libraries in Europe and beyond. They want to find allies to work with towards creating innovative multicultural library services for all.



DE

- # Equal rights and inclusion
- 📖 Central and Regional Library Berlin
- 👥 Oyouun, Transcodiert & mehr_blick
- 📍 Berlin
- 🇩🇪 Germany

Queering the library

The challenge

Three challenge teams explored how Berlin's Central Library can transform their spaces, literature and perspectives so the city's queer communities feel genuinely safe, welcome and represented in their libraries.

Tim Leik, programme coordinator at the Central and Regional Library Berlin, said: "The project was about giving citizens the opportunity to shape public spaces. The starting point for us was that a populist climate and queer hostility are not German but international issues."

The initiative

Challenge team one, run by the Oyouun cultural centre, combed through the archives of various venues and institutions looking for material documenting events by and for queer and trans migrant communities. This research was a starting point to build a community based archive for queer culture. Challenge team two, run by the queer literature magazine Transcodiert ('Transcoded' in English), tested how it could map queer perspectives and narratives in the library

space and explored how to develop a safer space for queer communities at the library. Challenge team three, mehr_blick, worked on 'reading glasses' – a tool for children to wear so they could critically examine the perspectives and assumptions of the books they were reading.

What's next?

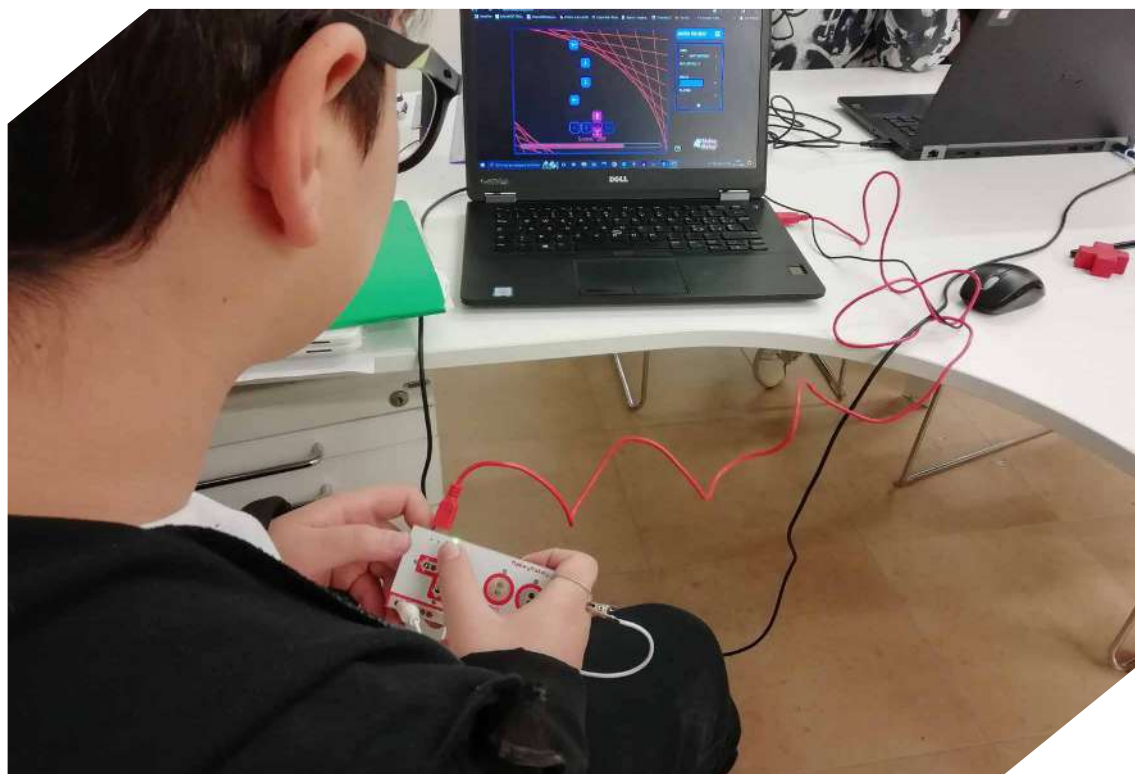
Each of the challenge teams' prototypes proved successful – and led to some profound learning for the library. In particular, the work challenged assumptions of how libraries can partner with organisations without falling into colonial practices, which seek to understand but end up appropriating learning, insight and practices from communities.

All three challenge teams plan to continue their work in alternative archiving and documentation, questioning the visibility of queer communities.

Queer librarian Debbie Wallace said: "Queering the library was a very inspiring project for us. We learned a lot, especially in the area of community work."

Throughout the Europe Challenge, we saw some real innovation as libraries and communities stepped forward and put their creative heads together.





IT

- # Active citizenship and participation
- 🏠 Multiplo Centro Culturale
- 👥 Accento Cooperativa
- 📍 Cavriago, Reggio Emilia
- 🇮🇹 Italy

Building digital skills to challenge fake news

The challenge

After the pandemic, more than 50% of children aged 6 to 10 years old had a digital device. In a European study, 80% of children aged 9 to 16 reported using a smartphone to go online daily. What do young people do when they are online?

The challenge identified by this community in Cavriago – a small town in northern Italy – was to help children develop a critical sense and to navigate the web safely. They wanted to give young people the tools and skills to understand how things work: how is the video you're watching made? How do video games work? How do you know if the news is true or false?

The initiative

Made up of local residents represented by Cooperativa Accento and Multiplo colleagues, the challenge team started to work with the local primary school on a project called 'School of lies'. They showed how fake news was made, where to find trustworthy sources, and, by trying to write fake news, began to demonstrate how to recognise it.

They also set up a digital laboratory in the centre of the library where they worked on video editing, coding, robotics, 3D modelling and printing to help children understand how things are made and how they work – through the active use of technology.

What's next?

As a next step, the challenge team wants to bring together a group of passionate people – a group of dreamers and makers ('The MultiMakers') – to share their time and knowledge. By expanding the digital laboratory, the equipment and the time available for this initiative, they hope to reach more children and involve them in this project.

They also want to develop partnerships at a European level to help share their solutions and their experiences, as well as learning from other initiatives to help inspire their own ideas and proposals for the community in future.



UK

- # Equal rights and inclusion
- 🏠 Storyhouse
- 👥 Cheshire, Halton and Warrington Race Equality Centre (CHAWREC)
- 📍 Chester
- 🇬🇧 UK

This house is your house

The challenge

Storyhouse in Chester is a library and charity that creates experiences, places and platforms to give communities the opportunity to tell their stories.

In partnership with Cheshire, Halton and Warrington Race Equality Centre (CHAWREC), this challenge team supports the hundreds of Ukrainian families and other refugees who have made Chester their home.

They wanted everyone to feel like the library is a safe and welcoming space for them – somewhere where they will feel a part of the community, as well as being able to access support, information and activities.

The initiative

The challenge team is developing resources including translated guides, dual language keyboards and books chosen by refugees as something they would like to see in their own language.

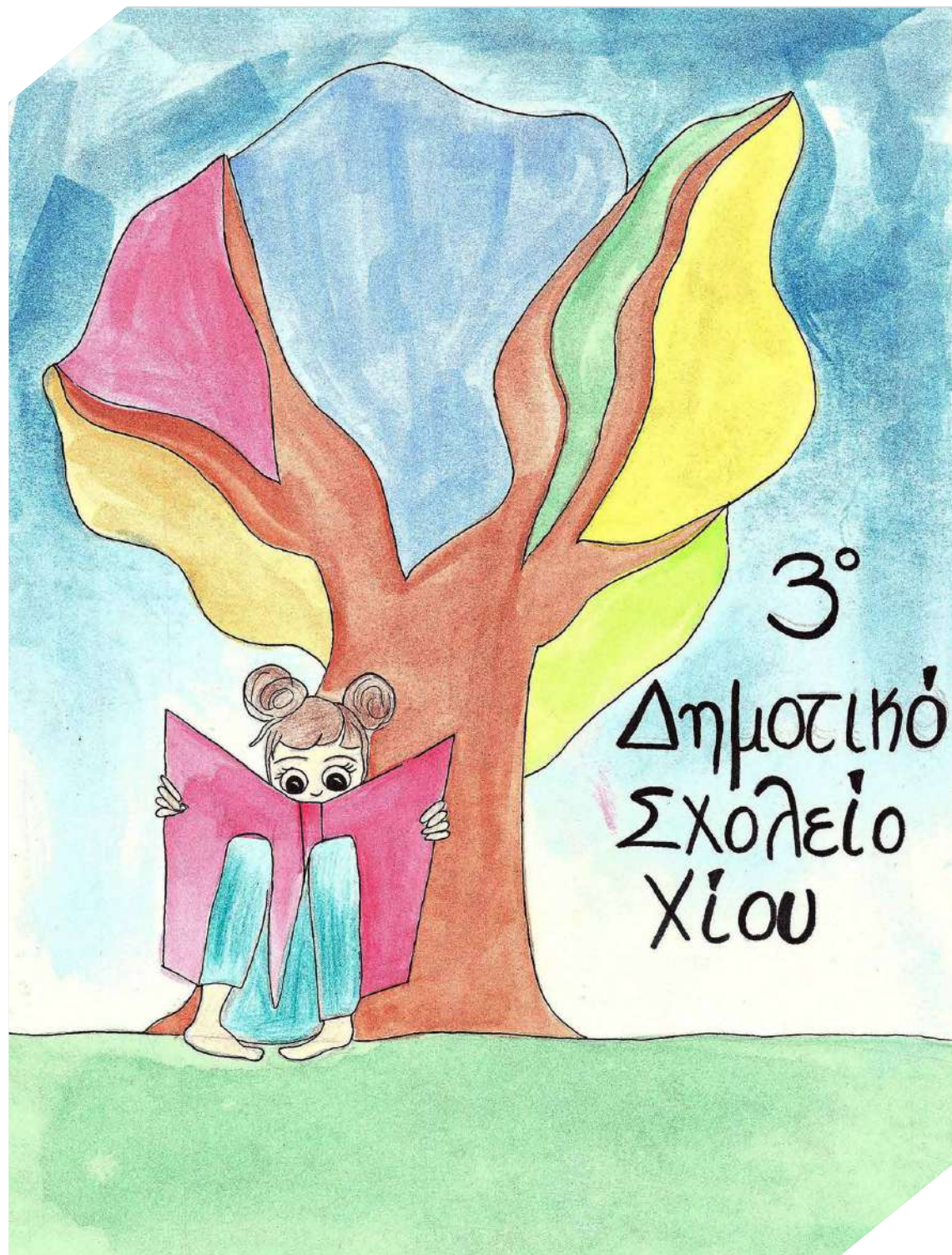
Information about the library service is translated into multiple languages to help people understand what services are on offer so they feel confident of a warm welcome if they walk through the door.

The initiative is also working to break down other barriers that are harder to overcome – for example, by bringing the library to the community through audio books and visits. Their dream result is that, in addition to the many community groups who have already made Storyhouse their home, new groups will be started by new communities – a Ukrainian Book Club, Pashto Digital Buddies, Arabic Chatter and Natter!

What's next?

Developing partnerships is key for the initiative to continue and thrive. The team wants to build relationships with different communities to find out what they want and need from the library service and how they can make everyone feel welcome.

They also need to build trust between the library team and the communities they work with so that they can sustain and build on those relationships. Funding will also be crucial so that they can expand the resources for each new community they work with.



GR

- # Equal rights and inclusion
- 📖 School Library of the 3rd Primary School of Chios
- 👥 Parent Association of the 3rd Primary School of Chios
- 📍 Chios
- 🇬🇷 Greece

Creating a dynamic cultural knowledge hub

The challenge

The Greek island of Chios in the northeast Aegean Sea is one of the main entry points for refugees seeking a better life in Europe. The 3rd Primary School of Chios teaches pupils from diverse ethnic and religious backgrounds.

The library is used on a weekly basis by 70% of the school's students despite the fact that, since its inception in 2018, there has been minimal funding. The space is in need of a redesign and it still operates with the teachers performing librarian duties.

The initiative

The challenge team has brought the school library and Parents' Association together to develop new knowledge resources. Through class discussions and drawings, the challenge team started by gathering pupils' views about what the library should look like. Listening to opinions from students and teachers alike, the goal is to improve the library's infrastructure and resources. A network of volunteers has been mobilised to bring the work to life, helping to strengthen

dialogue by bringing the community together. As well as painting and maintenance work, new furniture and IT equipment has been bought, and scientific instruments are also on their way.

What's next?

The ambition is to transform the library into a dynamic culture and knowledge hub, initially for the whole student community and later for the wider local community too. Promoting unconditional inclusion and upholding cultural diversity in one of Europe's main entry and refugee reception points is an important objective for the challenge team.

They have also reached out to the Chios Music Festival, hoping that the library can become a space for music and other events, as well as networking with other library initiatives in Greece (such as 'Schools with open courtyards and open libraries') and programmes across Europe (such as Erasmus+).



IT

- # Circular economy and environment
- 📖 Biblioteca Comunale di Concesio
- 👥 Library users
- 📍 Concesio (Brescia)
- 🇮🇹 Italy

Repairing our planet together, one object at a time

The challenge

The Biblioteca Comunale di Concesio in Brescia, Northern Italy and the library's users want to address a need they see as a common challenge around the world: learning repair skills to help fight waste, pollution and over consumption.

In these times of climate and economic crisis, they fear we are losing the ability to examine, understand and repair the tools and things we use on a daily basis.

The initiative

Together with its users, Concesio's library is addressing this challenge by establishing a regular repair café, believed to be the first of its kind within a library.

Local library users can bring small household appliances that they repair together with volunteers every second Saturday of the month at free events organised and managed by the Kakapo.lab Association.

There are six main repair specialisms – ranging from small appliances, computers and

smart phones to wooden objects, toys and clothing items, as well as bicycles.

As well as saving around 600 kg of CO₂ emissions and 60 kg of landfill waste at every event, the plan is to share valuable skills and to create a community based on mutual support, with the library at the centre.

What's next?

The challenge team said: "The initiative reflects the way we see and experience the library: the home of knowledge, whether theoretical or practical, but also everyone's home, where everyone can meet and do well together."

The next step is to make the repair café an integral and permanent part of the library's offering for many years to come. The challenge team would also like to export their model to other libraries in the area as well, working together with like-minded partner organisations.



IT

- # Circular economy and environment
- 📖 Biblioteca "Luigi Einaudi" di Dogliani
- 👥 Cooperativa Caracol and the teenagers of Dogliani
- 📍 Dogliani
- 🇮🇹 Italy

A night at the library: engaging young people

The challenge

In the small town of Dogliani in rural Piedmont, in the north west of Italy, there are not many opportunities for young people. The Luigi Einaudi library has traditionally offered community services aimed at older people and it has been losing its younger patrons, particularly those aged 11 to 14.

The 175 early teens in Dogliani need free, social and cultural spaces where they can meet each other and find a space to share their interests, thoughts and develop their own proposals for cultural activities to help them stay connected to the town where they have grown up.

The initiative

Working with its community partner for youth engagement, Cooperativa Caracol and the Social Community Theatre Centre, the library is reaching out to local teenagers at the middle school to encourage them to co-design activities for themselves at the library. The aim is to change their perception of the library and help to make it feel like a welcoming place for them.

To launch the initiative, the challenge team organised a unique event for teenagers: 'A night in the library' – an opportunity for them to spend a night surrounded by 20,000 books and take part in cultural and social activities.

The aim is to then create a board of teenagers to involve them in the development of a communication strategy for the promotion of the library among their peers. Teenagers will be invited to co-create activities to be offered to peers as part of the library's future cultural programme.

What's next?

Continuity of the project is crucial to the success of the initiative. It is important for the challenge team to continue to engage with local teenagers and nurture the dialogue and collaboration with them by reinforcing the activities in the library.

New funding is also essential to help support the initiative. The challenge team is looking to develop new partnerships in the local region and new collaborations among local libraries and communities to expand the initiative.



IT

- # Equal rights and inclusion
- 📖 Biblioteca Canova Isolotto – Florence
- 👥 700 prisoners at Sollicciano Prison
- 📍 Florence
- 🇮🇹 Italy

Unlocking new opportunities for prisoners

The challenge

The small library in Sollicciano Prison in Florence is cut off from the outside world, with limited opening hours, but library colleagues have big ambitions to help prisoners develop the skills they need to reintegrate into society upon release from prison and to help them prepare for the future.

The initiative

Through this challenge team, the library is working with the local community to address some of the challenges faced by a culturally diverse prisoner population. They have connected with local volunteers and teachers outside the prison to develop a range of services, including Italian language learning, creative writing and reading. Authors have also been invited as part of a cultural programme.

The challenge team wants to make the prison library a point of reference for prisoners – helping with their social integration as well as emphasising the importance of reading as the basis of every skill for educational opportunities and active participation in local life.

The challenge team said: “The role of reading for people limited in their freedom is very important because, through the power of imagination, they can acquire more awareness about their problems and they can build a new world in which to experiment with new positive roles.”

What's next?

The public-private cooperation is a new alliance to support the prison to be more open to the re-education of prisoners and it has been highly successful.

The prisoners' workshops are still ongoing, thanks to the strategic involvement of the group of volunteers. In future, the challenge team hopes to create a publication with prisoners to showcase the writing and other skills they have learned.

Thanks to the Europe Challenge, they have been able to start a new international exchange and they have applied to the Horizon Programme with the aim of reflecting on the role and social impact of the library as a public space.

The initiative reflects the way we see and experience the library: the home of knowledge, whether theoretical or practical, but also everyone's home, where everyone can meet and do well together.





BE

- # Social cohesion and wellbeing
- 📖 De Krook Library
- 👥 Comon and local community
- 📍 Ghent
- 🇧🇪 Belgium

Co-creating healthcare solutions

The challenge

"How can we make healthcare more understandable for everyone in a super diverse city?" was the challenge that this initiative wanted to tackle. The process was led by Comon – a collective of scientists, technologists and creatives run in partnership with the City of Ghent, Ghent University, De Krook Library and imec research centre. The collective's objective is to make life better for people living in Ghent.

The initiative

Comon asked Ghent residents for their ideas on improving healthcare. They found that people from a diverse range of backgrounds wanted to make healthcare more understandable for everyone in the city. Patients, health experts, policy-makers and doctors all took part in a wide-ranging co-creation process to come up with ideas to address the challenge. In a five-day,

innovative process – a 'Make-a-thon' – students pushed forward with the ideas, turning them into prototypes.

The nine prototypes competed for prizes: Dolox, the first-placed device allows patients to track their pain levels, so it's easy to report on when they speak to doctors and nurses. 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 your consultations.

What's next?

The next steps will be to test the prototypes with more people in their own languages and an open call for consortia – with hospitals, doctors, patients, and businesses – to develop and test the prototypes. Comon will coach the consortia in the development of the prototype and offer them a budget for further development.



UK

- # Social cohesion and wellbeing
- 📖 City of Glasgow College Library Services
- 👥 Diversity & Inclusion Student team, Glasgow Zine Library, Ross Wilcock Media
- 📍 Glasgow
- 🏴󠁧󠁢󠁥󠁮󠁧󠁿 Scotland

Unleashing student creativity through zines

The challenge

The library team at the City of Glasgow College has been working with some of the college's 27,000 students to explore how they can build a safe and welcoming space together.

When the library first re-opened following the pandemic, students told staff that the library was a haven for them before many other support departments at the college had opened. The library team started providing small workshops in mindful journaling to help students express their thoughts and emotions following the pandemic.

The initiative

The library team wanted to move beyond their supportive role for students and explore how to develop an authentic conversation. They researched the value of zines and found potential in the zine ethos of freedom of thought, and a DIY attitude to publishing.

City Zine's mission is to encourage, collect and curate zines by students and staff members. They have developed a creative safe space where students are free to express their experiences and viewpoints and provide a welcoming environment for them to

experience the collection and read about others' views on life on a myriad of topics.

They have held sessions with a blind queer creative who has recently created their own poetry book and a young published author, as well as co-hosting sessions with the Glasgow Zine Library. These events enable the students to be inspired and have confidence in their own unique voices.

The Europe Challenge has made it possible to curate over 200 zines from students to host events and sessions that discuss zines and creativity, and to support students to share their stories.

What's next?

The challenge team wants to continue growing their zine collection and to become active members of the Glasgow zine community. They would love to increase their funding and support their students to attend the annual Glasgow Zine Fest as contributors.

They also have ambitions to extend the initiative to a European level as a broader platform for creative expression: "It would be amazing to create a Euro-zine that encapsulates the thoughts and feelings from students throughout Europe," they said.



“Our ultimate goal is to significantly reduce food waste across households, foster strong and sustainable communities, and raise awareness about the importance of resource conservation.”

Klaipėda Challenge Team



Circular economy and environment
📍 Klaipėda City Municipality Immanuel Kant Public Library
👥 Klaipėda city community
📍 Klaipėda
🇱🇹 Lithuania

Tastier together – tackling food waste

The challenge

Around one third of the food produced around the world goes to waste – that’s 1.6 billion tons of food. Those are the shocking facts that this challenge team in Lithuania wanted to confront head on, while also tackling other pressing concerns such as the rising cost of living and social isolation.

The initiative

The Immanuel Kant Public Library in Klaipėda worked with the local community to bring people around the table for communal lunches and food club events to talk, learn, share food planning ideas and to consider how to live more sustainably and efficiently in the face of climate change and the cost-of-living crisis.

The initiative was given the name “It is tastier together” (“Kartu-skanu” in Lithuanian). For the challenge team, it was also important to incorporate a sense of belonging, well-being and togetherness, particularly in the aftermath of the Covid-19 pandemic and against the backdrop of the war in Ukraine. As well as holding popular community lunches, they organised engaging workshops, seminars and hands-on cooking

classes focused on sustainable recipes, meal planning and food storage techniques, which empowers individuals to make informed decisions and reduce waste in their households.

They also developed a web page involving simple weekly menu planning tips for householders as well as setting up a food sharing platform allowing people to share surplus food, which both fostered connections and reduced waste.

They said: “Step by step, tip by tip, we improve everyday habits on what to do with the excess food, how to save both environmentally and economically by just being smart and aware.”

What’s next?

The challenge team has ambitions to scale up the successful prototype for tackling food waste and bringing people together across Europe by seeking additional funding – helping people across the continent to live more sustainably.

They said: “Our dream idea is the continuity of our food club, designed to gather people, and seeing other teams in Europe scaling up with our social project concept.”



“Visible Library is another confirmation of the important role of the library in the life of every person, no matter what the circumstances are.”

Visible Library Challenge Team

UA

- # Equal rights and inclusion
- 📖 Lesia Ukrainka Public Library of Kyiv
- 👤 Young people on probation
- 📍 Kyiv
- 🇺🇦 Ukraine

Learning for life

Challenge

A collaboration between Lesia Ukrainka Public Library in Kyiv and young offenders, the challenge involves testing and developing support to prisoners and people on probation in Kyiv and across Ukraine to prepare them for life after prison.

The initiative

By organising meetings and sociocultural events, as well as training sessions and masterclasses, the challenge team is helping to overcome digital divides and improve levels of information literacy for people who've spent time behind bars – as well as supporting staff at the probation centre. While some of the meetings take place online via Zoom, probationers can also visit the public library in person and, while there, they are introduced to the work of different library departments and services.

Lesia Ukrainka Public Library offers the only free services available to everyone at a local

level in Kyiv to help close gaps in education and knowledge, to teach online skills and to offer support with job searches and employment. The Visible Library initiative has reached more than 1,200 people so far, both online and offline.

What's next?

Lesia Ukrainka Public Library is the first public library in Ukraine to work with prisoners, and challenge team members are keen to share their experiences with other libraries in Ukraine and beyond.

They are publishing a 107-page collection of poems written by prisoners to showcase their successful initiative.

Challenge team members said: “Visible Library is another confirmation of the important role of the library in the life of every person, no matter what the circumstances are.”





SI

- # Equal rights and inclusion
- 📖 Kranj City Library
- 👥 Local community
- 📍 Kranj
- 🇸🇮 Slovenia

Technophobia is not for women

The challenge

Under the banner 'Technophobia is not for Women', Kranj City Library's challenge team addressed the issues that stop women from pursuing careers in science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) subjects.

The initiative

Conscious of the lack of role models available to young women, the team held a 'Living Library' event where women working in STEM were invited to become 'living books'. Young women could learn from their experiences and draw inspiration from their achievements.

After seeing that LEGO® robotics workshops at the library often involved far more boys than girls, the challenge team also organised all-girl robotics sessions as well as all-female workshops for programming. The initiatives were a huge success. To broaden the learning campaign, the team launched a nationwide storytelling competition, and promoted this by sharing the

women's STEM video stories – often reflecting on the barriers they faced.

What's next?

Having had a great response from the community, business and educational institutes, the challenge team plans to continue this work.

The library received national media coverage for the initiative and a member of staff was put forward for an award for women. In the context of live learning, in a pandemic, Kranj really pushed itself to engage with the community in solutions building on female STEM learning, something that can be replicated across Europe.

Nina Svetelj from the library said: "At the library, we have many times realised that at some point we would need to engage more strongly with the local community and the Europe Challenge was the perfect opportunity to do just that. As a public space, the library is no longer just a place where you go to borrow books, it is essentially a place to promote active citizenship."



IT

- # Equal rights and inclusion
- 📖 Biblioteca Bernardini
- 👥 Tdf Mediterranea APS
- 📍 Lecce
- 🇮🇹 Italy

Fighting discrimination with books

The challenge

The Bernardini Library and TdF Mediterranea Association are located in Lecce, a city in southern Italy. Sadly, racial and gender discrimination remains relatively common in Italy, where more than a thousand cases of racial and xenophobic discrimination are recorded every year. This problem is particularly severe in southern Italy. The challenge team wanted to tackle racial and gender discrimination, to help make the world a better place for everyone.

The initiative

Working together with a group of young people, they started by raising awareness of LGBT+ and multicultural issues. They did this by creating new sections in Lecce's main library with diverse new books – as well as developing workshops with children. To launch the initiative, the challenge team put out a public call to people and associations that wanted to build the new library section together. They were inundated with responses! A group of young people who

work with the library and LGBT+ and multicultural associations also form an integral part of the initiative. Input from anyone who wants to be involved in the creative process in any way is warmly encouraged.

The challenge team said: "We hope that in the end there will be more sensitivity to some of the issues raised, especially among young people: change will come with the next generations!"

What's next?

The challenge team is keen to encourage other libraries and organisations across Europe to develop their own inclusive sections too. They are planning a series of meetings with writers whose books are being included in the new library section, as well as organising some laboratories for children with education experts. In order to reach a bigger audience, they have invited many partner organisations to research and plan meetings with them – and they are about to launch events on social media too.



“Intergenerational solidarity creates stronger and more resilient communities.”

Lisbon Challenge Team

PT

- # Active citizenship and participation
- 📖 Biblioteca da Penha de França – Rede de bibliotecas Municipais de Lisboa
- 👥 Fazer do Bairro a Nossa Casa (Making the Neighbourhood our Home)
- 📍 Lisbon
- 🇵🇹 Portugal

Gener-actions : intergenerational solidarity

The challenge

The community group Making the Neighbourhood Our Home was started in 2022 by a group of mothers, activists and researchers who wanted to reconnect the inhabitants of the Penha de França neighbourhood in Portugal's capital, Lisbon.

This neighbourhood is home to a mix of older inhabitants, who often have little support, and relatively new arrivals, including migrant families with young children, who often lack intergenerational connections. These groups are often treated as beneficiaries rather than active citizens.

The initiative

Working with the local library Biblioteca da Penha de França, Making the Neighbourhood Our Home is working alongside the local community to create initiatives that improve intergenerational solidarity. This partnership uses the library as a 'sanctuary' to build community. They have set up 'citizen labs': a space for working groups to be formed and a place where people can come together to discuss their ideas and decide about collective actions.

This process is supported by collaborating with daycare centres, local associations, cultural spaces, artists and by experimenting with different creative methods and cultural events. The working groups meet in the library to organise intergenerational creative interventions in public squares, in the library and in a local school.

What's next?

Instead of seeing community members of different ages as passive target groups, this initiative empowers community members so they can autonomously reclaim public space and advocate for their ideas through a horizontal, transparent and collaborative process – looking at what we can learn from older people and how we can care for each other collectively.

The challenge team believes this way of working could be a prototype for other initiatives: “Intergenerational solidarity creates stronger and more resilient communities, ensures the continuity between past, present and future and the basis for collective action.”



UK

- # Social cohesion and wellbeing
- 📖 Finchley Church End Library
- 👥 Community Network Group CIC Place
- 📍 London
- 🇬🇧 UK

Breaking down cultural barriers

Challenge

Community Network Group CIC (CNG) is a community-driven, non-profit organisation that helps disadvantaged migrants in Finchley in the north of London to participate fully in society. Following Brexit, Covid-19 and the resulting economic turmoil, CNG became aware that many people from migrant and European backgrounds were facing an increase in racism and xenophobia, resulting in social exclusion and loneliness.

Initiative

Working with Finchley Church End Library, CNG is bringing community leaders and decision makers together with people from non-UK backgrounds in the safe environment of the library to re-establish common values and cater for the social needs of a diverse community.

This initiative aims to break down barriers between communities by creating a bespoke programme of cultural and social activities to provide a platform where

people can engage with each other. The challenge team has organised a series of face-to-face and remote gatherings following various themes (including common history and culture, European arts, music, literature, immigration, welfare, mental health, financial issues and unemployment). They are also planning a series of workshops run by professionals who are keen to support the community. Through these initiatives, people can get engaged and learn from each other, reduce isolation and increase their mental and physical well-being.

What's next?

The challenge team said: "Our aim is to bring together people from different European backgrounds to maintain a mutual exchange of cultural values between them, which can result in harmonious relationships and dialogue. We hope to contribute to strengthening their ties with society and discuss major challenges to the development of society."



PL

- # Equal rights and inclusion
- 📖 Biblioteka Azyl
- 👥 Local LGBTQ+ community
- 📍 Lublin
- 🇵🇱 Poland

Queering Lublin

The challenge

Against the backdrop of shrinking spaces for civil society in Poland, the LGBTQ+ community in Lublin desperately needs safe places where they can come together and find books and other resources that are relevant to their lives.

The library Biblioteka Azyl has been providing a home for meetings with LGBTQ+ authors, a queer book club, open discussions and workshops. But the library and local community wanted to find new ways to encourage young queer people to find their voice – providing tools that would help them learn how to organise cultural events, spark new encounters and reach out to other communities facing oppression across Europe. 150 people attended the first Queering Lublin event.

The initiative

The core idea behind the initiative is to provide funds and other support to give local queer people the opportunity to share their art, ideas and other dreams through a mixture of organised and co-organised cultural events. Together they collect ideas for

events through social media and live meet ups, which they will then evaluate together with the community before deciding which ideas to bring to life.

What's next?

According to the challenge team, they have found a good structure for community engagement and now they want to further develop and test this model – working in close collaboration with the local community. They also want to work on becoming more visible.

“The most important part of the process for us is to create relationships between Biblioteka Azyl and the local community that will flourish and expand beyond the Europe Challenge timelines,” they said. “Our dream is to continue creating opportunities for our community members, to feel like their various social and political predicaments are valued.”

The challenge team would also like to scale up in future by partnering with other initiatives – potentially co-creating and repeating the Queering Lublin initiative to connect libraries and communities across Europe.

We have so many joint challenges in Europe. To have a network where we can co-create also across the libraries in Europe and co-challenge each other is really important.





IT

- # Social cohesion and wellbeing
- 📖 Quarto Oggiaro Public Library and Gallarate Public Library
- 👥 Espinasse condominium library and Monte Amiata condominium library
- 📍 Milan
- 🇮🇹 Italy

The library escape

The challenge

The bustling city of Milan in northern Italy has 26 public libraries across the city, and a UNESCO designation as a Creative City of Literature. However, many communities in the more remote areas of Milan are not benefiting from social interactions, cultural events or engagement with their local libraries. The pandemic has further exacerbated a sense of polarisation and social isolation in these communities where large condominiums with thousands of residents are located.

The initiative

As a solution to this problem, the Milan public library system is working together with the network of Milan condominium libraries to expand a network of shared spaces where books and reading are available, as well as offering local people the chance to build civic literacy and to positively shape and share their needs and aspirations. The core idea is to bring together different generations of condominium inhabitants through a series of game-playing initiatives

– connecting them to each other, to the libraries in their buildings, to their wider communities and to public libraries in the area. Working together as a team, the groups are creating an 'escape room' concept based on the community served by the two condominium libraries.

What's next?

The 'dream' end result would be to bring a community together around the condominium libraries – a community that is more engaged in taking part in the library's life and that can catalyse new services and resources for other people living in the neighbourhood. In order for this dream to become a reality, the challenge team needs to develop partnerships to help spread the word about the site-specific escape rooms. They also need more funds to scale up their prototype to make sure the other 25 condominium libraries across Milan can benefit from gaming and creative events as a way to engage more residents.



IT

- # Social cohesion and wellbeing
- 📖 Bibliomediateca G. Racioppi Moliterno
- 👥 Patto Locale per la Lettura del Lagonegrese
- 📍 Moliterno, Basilicata Region
- 🇮🇹 Italy

Once there will be...

The challenge

Libraries in remote rural areas across Italy are disappearing – along with schools, post offices and banks. In the sparsely populated mountainous region of Basilicata in southern Italy, most public libraries exist only because a group of dedicated volunteers are keeping them alive.

Offering limited services, libraries become book deposits, rather than cultural spaces – meaning that residents in rural areas lose another vital service: access to knowledge for all in trusted and democratic safe spaces.

The initiative

The starting point of this initiative is stimulating the imagination and raising community awareness of the crucial role of libraries and professional librarians. They believe a functioning library needs a professional librarian. Their motto is: 'no libraries without librarians'. Their core idea was to develop a card game that would help to imagine a sustainable way for libraries to flourish in this region where around 70% of people have not read a book for pleasure in the past year. The

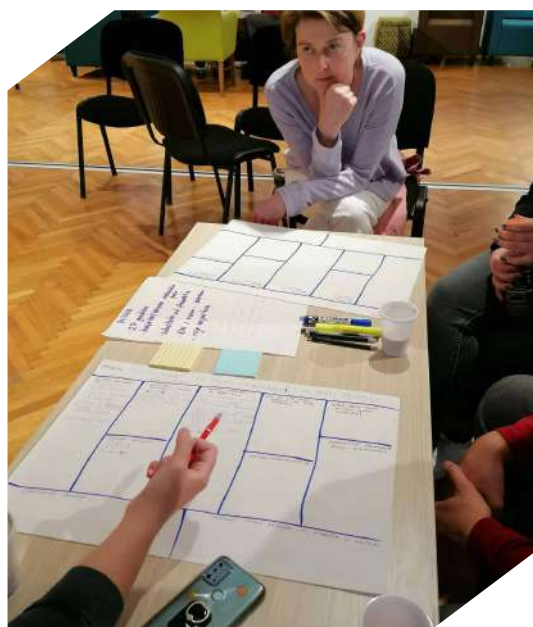
storytelling game transforms the player(s) into the mayor of an imaginary remote village who faces some difficult decisions.

The challenge team also held a series of in-person events with public authorities and a webinar to explore alternative governance models. Their vision is that communities across rural parts of Europe will be able to use the game to raise awareness of the crucial role of libraries, adapt the alternative governance model to their areas, and defend the right to access public libraries.

What's next?

The challenge team wants to promote the creation of a pan-European network of remote rural libraries to build and maintain relationships between people, associations, schools, municipalities and communities to help keep libraries alive.

They reflect: "We are determined to build on the momentum and find concrete solutions while continuing to develop our card game to help define these. We are confident that other rural areas of Europe will be able to benefit from our process and prototype."



RS

- # Active citizenship and participation
- 📖 Novi Sad City Library
- 👥 Kulturis Association
- 📍 Novi Sad
- 🇷🇸 Serbia

Accept the challenge

The challenge

Serbia's second largest city – Novi Sad – needs to increase low participation rates in democratic and institutional decision making. This challenge team believes that a bottom-up approach to solving society's most pressing issues starts by creating an open dialogue.

The initiative

Working with a local community partner, Kulturis Association, the Novi Sad City Library aims to turn public libraries into local community agoras – or public squares – where people can discuss important local issues and create change, helping to break down the polarisation between civil society and the public sector.

The challenge team is prototyping the model of an 'express citizen lab' in public libraries, which will act as a bridge between local community initiatives and cultural institutions. The uniqueness of the format is that everyone's opinion counts equally. Witnessing the direct impact their contribution is having on collective solutions empowers citizens and builds up democratic capacities. The ready-to-replicate model can be adapted and implemented in other environments.

The aim is to motivate and empower citizens, particularly those from disadvantaged groups, to take a more active role in the most pressing questions facing their local communities.

The community is very much involved as a co-creator of a prototype for the initiative. The 'challenge journey' started with a survey among the citizens of Novi Sad to prioritise the topics that they wanted to discuss in greater detail. They created two labs to help test and define their prototype: one dedicated to mental health issues and the other to ecological awareness among younger generations.

What's next?

The challenge team is eager to showcase their prototype among other public libraries and cultural institutions in Serbia, as well as among colleagues on a regional level. By welcoming new ambassadors for their idea and developing new partnerships, they would like to expand their network and mission so that it has a lasting effect on citizens' wellbeing, as well as on the democratic values of Serbian society.



SI

- # Equal rights and inclusion
- 📖 The Franc Ksaver Meško Library, Ormož
- 👥 Ormož Adult Education Centre
- 📍 Ormož (three municipalities)
- 🇸🇮 Slovenia

Breaking down cultural barriers for refugees

The challenge

The Franc Ksaver Meško Library in Ormož serves a region of Slovenia that has been affected by the migration of many thousands of people fleeing poverty and war, including Ukrainian mothers with children.

The library is working together with the Ormož Adult Education Centre to raise awareness and acceptance of new arrivals among the local community, to increase inclusion and reduce inequality and to encourage the involvement of refugees in the cultural and social life.

The initiative

The challenge team started out by establishing contact with local organisations that support refugees (including the Red Cross and local social workers and schools).

Together with these organisations, they consulted with Ukrainian women about what they needed or wanted to do in their free time and tailored activities accordingly: a Ukrainian get-to-know-you evening, creative workshops, bilingual fairy tale hours, a cooking workshop, literary evenings, exercise classes and a shadow puppet performance in Ukrainian.

Newcomers have also been able to attend Slovenian language courses at the adult education centre as well as using the library's computers and Wi-fi connection to keep in touch with family members and to study online.

Through these activities, the initiative has significantly improved refugees' integration into the local community and has encouraged cooperation between local organisations.

What's next?

Further activities for all ages are planned, in consultation with community representatives. The challenge team hopes to continue to encourage cultural integration even after the end of the project. They have gathered basic information with instructions about how to arrange temporary residence, which will be published online and distributed as printed copies at key locations in the local community for future new arrivals.

The hope is that this initiative will significantly improve the quality of life for Ukrainian refugees and that it can provide inspiration for other communities across Europe and beyond.

We need to look at what communities want and need. We need to start by looking at how people actually want to engage and interact in society and see, as a library, how you can motivate and stimulate that.





SP

- # Social cohesion and wellbeing
- 📖 Biblioteca Pública Municipal Miguel Arguisjuela
- 👥 Asociación Cultural Scatiana
- 📍 Paterna del Campo
- 🇪🇸 Spain

Cultural opportunities to challenge disinformation

The challenge

Paterna Del Campo in the province of Huelva in Andalucía in the south of Spain is a small rural town dominated by agriculture and with an ageing population. There is limited access to books, theatre and films for everyone living in the community, young and old.

The initiative

Working together with the local community, the local library – Biblioteca Pública Municipal Miguel Arguisjuela – wants to change this by developing activities, from storytelling to book clubs, that can provide cultural opportunities for the people of Paterna.

The challenge team consolidated two successful activities: a children's creative workshop touching on topics including climate change and racism; and a book club for adults dealing with topics ranging from immigration to feminism.

As a result, they created a reading point where people can exchange and donate books, which is accessible even when the library is closed. Additionally, based on the group's proposal, they created a green space inside the library that will serve as a creative area for younger users. The end

result is a significant transformation in the library's image and a more engaging experience for users.

What's next?

Their goal is to transform the traditional image of the library as a place that's just for books and turn it into a space for debate and reflection on the challenges of today's world – and to use this model to inspire other libraries across Europe too.

By working collaboratively with other organisations, the challenge team hopes to share knowledge and expertise to help develop more comprehensive programmes and services that meet the diverse needs of their community. They believe this approach will help them to achieve their goal of providing equitable access to cultural and educational resources for all – and to help challenge disinformation.

The challenge team said: "Many people only have the information that is given in the media such as television and the problem is that this information is not reliable. It is important for Europe that people in the rural world can have authentic and truthful information about these issues so that hate speech does not flourish."



“Our programme will have a positive impact on prisoners’ wellbeing, improving relationships with peers, families and when accessing other agencies and services upon release.”

Perth Challenge Team

UK

- # Equal rights and inclusion
- 📖 Perth Prison Library, Culture Perth & Kinross
- 👤 Prison community at HMP Perth (600-700 adult male prisoners)
- 📍 Perth
- 🇬🇧 Scotland, UK

Reading for recovery

The challenge

His Majesty's Prison in Perth houses a diverse group of people serving varying lengths of sentences.

Adverse mental health experiences and high levels of exposure to addiction and violence have often resulted in exclusion from traditional learning in early life. It is an urgent priority to offer prisoners access to resources and training to achieve their potential and has scope to impact beyond, to family and social connections.

The initiative

Together with Culture Perth and Kinross, a charitable trust managing libraries and Perth Museum and Art Gallery, the prison library is developing a Reading for Recovery initiative with prisoners to tackle some of the complex needs of the prison community. By providing resources and workshops from educators, facilitators and creatives, the challenge team is working together with prisoners to improve their wellbeing and help them to reintegrate into society. The goal is to tackle some of the inequalities and lack of literacy skills often stemming from negative experiences within early learning settings and exacerbated by economic disadvantage.

Drawing on direct feedback gathered from prisoners who use the library, the Recovery Hub Officer has built a popular Reading Group activity into the prison's weekly diary of activities. The initiative has featured regularly on the prison's radio and Reading Group members themselves are acting as advocates for the Reading Challenge, with new participants signing up daily. Each participant receives the gift of a dictionary.

What's next?

The challenge team is also planning to set up a Vocational Training Hub that will double as a venue for speakers, offering a completely unique library-coordinated community offer.

The powerful impact of taking part in a Reading Group or Reading Challenge needs to be guaranteed through the continued financing of staff time to host, steer and select as well as buy stock. Collaborative working between the current team and national/international prison librarian networks through sharing of good practice is becoming stronger, as the team takes time to celebrate each achievement by a member of the prison community.



BE

- # Active citizenship and participation
- 📍 ARhus
- 👥 Youngsters from 14 to 35 years old
- 📍 Roeselare
- 🇧🇪 Belgium

#HACK to attract young library users

The challenge

In 2019, ARhus – an open knowledge centre library in the Belgian city of Roeselare – rolled out a pilot project involving around 150 young people called #HACK.

#HACK aims to make the ARhus knowledge centre library more relevant to young people. This is a pressing issue because traditional libraries are often perceived as outdated and unappealing to younger generations. The potential beneficiaries of #HACK's efforts are all young people in the Roeselare area who want to share their knowledge and skills in various areas such as music, fashion, and other topics covered by the #HACK programmes.

The initiative

Through a programme of activities based on their own questions and needs, led by expert professionals and high-potential 'Local Heroes', they provide opportunities for other young people from underrepresented communities to learn and develop new skills, share knowledge and engage with their community.

Four or more community meetings have been taking place each week, led by the 12 talented 'Local Heroes' aged 16-24, with a range of diverse skills – from music producers to graphic designers.

What's next?

The challenge now is to consolidate #HACK and broaden its reach. The next phase involves the Local Heroes taking charge of shaping #HACK's future, with full participation in all aspects of decision-making, budget management and activity planning. A collaborative model will be created, not only to establish full participation but also to ensure the library is a place where young people feel represented and welcome.

The challenge team is learning from these experiences to build a democratic way to govern #HACK and to apply those insights on a broader scale to govern ARhus hand in hand with the communities of Roeselare. Their dream is a thriving ARhus library that serves as an example for other European organisations seeking to engage and empower young people.



IT

- # Social cohesion and wellbeing
- 📖 International Centre for the Study of the Preservation and Restoration of Cultural Property Library
- 👥 Istituto Comprensivo Regina Margherita (Comprehensive School Regina Margherita)
- 📍 Rome
- 🇮🇹 Italy

Heritage talks

The challenge

The International Centre for the Study of the Preservation and Restoration of Cultural Property in Rome (ICCROM) is dedicated to promoting the preservation of all cultural heritage – and its library is the leading conservation library of its kind.

Children exposed to a variety of texts and stories from different cultures and perspectives are more likely to be empathetic and open-minded, leading to better social relations and community cohesion.

The initiative

The ICCROM library has come together with the local school, Istituto Comprensivo Regina Margherita – which is home to children from many different backgrounds and cultures – to form the Reading for a better world challenge group. Together, the school and library want to explore how they can make the library more welcoming by opening up access to knowledge for children from diverse backgrounds – sparking their interest in cultural heritage.

The challenge team started by forming working groups to plan different activities. They invited authors to a series of lectures. Young library visitors were invited to play an active part in collection development and in heritage practice more generally. The children have been enthusiastic during the visits and their creative and fresh contributions contribute to an exercise of collective learning during the 'Heritage talks'.

What's next?

Now that the pilot phase has finished, the team believes it is crucial to ensure that the collaboration between the school and ICCROM continues. New funds will be needed to ensure a steadily growing collection of multilingual resources, as well as cooperation with partners in ICCROM Member States.

The challenge team said: "We believe that other academic libraries and research organisations should open to a young audience, including them in thinking on themes that are vital for building a better future."



SP

- # Circular economy and environment
- 📖 Jordi Rubió i Balaguer Library
- 👥 Local community
- 📍 Sant Boi de Llobregat
- 🇪🇸 Spain

Creating a buzz: bringing bees to libraries

The challenge

Located less than 15 kilometres from Barcelona's busy international airport, the Jordi Rubió i Balaguer Library wanted to focus on how libraries can help to bring nature to the city's urban spaces.

They came together with the local community as part of the challenge team to explore how beekeeping can help to protect the environment and urban biodiversity – and improve people's health and quality of life at the same time.

The name of the project is Apiteca, and its motto is "The buzz of the community".

The initiative

After a series of planning workshops, the challenge team – consisting of librarians, experts and members of the community – decided to install beehives in the library's courtyard as part of an exploration of different elements of the urban environment.

These installations inspired a series of other initiatives, including a feminist urban planning prototype to explore the city, by foot,

to analyse its problems from a different perspective.

They also set up a honey market, in partnership with local organisations including the food bank. And the sound of the bees inspired a collaboration with the local art centre.

What's next?

The challenge team is considering the next steps for the programme, thinking about how to improve the library and, by extension, the city and biodiversity.

They are planning a series of workshops and talks focused on different environmental, sociological and cultural topics. Plans are also afoot to expand into other public spaces, including the re-wilding of public parks to help support the pollination of wildflowers, as well as building bee service areas.

They would like to replicate their idea in other towns in the region and to encourage and inspire other local municipalities to be flexible in their eco-urban town planning.

We believe that all libraries in Europe have the fundamental task of creating moments of encounter between people who have experienced a breakdown of social relationships, especially young people.



UK

- # Circular economy and environment
- 📖 Stornoway Library (Western Isles Libraries)
- 👥 Western Isles-wide
- 📍 Isle of Lewis, Outer Hebrides (Western Isles)
- 🇬🇧 Scotland, UK

Cooking up green solutions

The challenge

The Western Isles – a group of islands off the west coast of Scotland – faces one of the worst fuel poverty problems in the UK. The combined challenges of an ageing population, low incomes, extreme weather and poor insulation – exacerbated by the cost-of-living crisis – mean that many islanders are struggling to pay their fuel bills.

It is predicted that shortly over half the population in the Western Isles (also known as the Outer Hebrides), will be living below the poverty line – with serious impacts on mental and physical wellbeing.

The Initiative

Western Isles Libraries and community group Na h-Eileanan Siar wanted to address this problem by working with islanders to explore potential solutions. They introduced an energy-free method of cooking that has been used in many countries around the world for decades – known as the WonderBag™, which is an energy-free slow cooker that uses two insulated bags to cook food over a number of hours.

To launch the project, the challenge team gifted a WonderBag™, a cooking pot, a ther-

mometer and a sample recipe book to a small group of 10 residents, all of different ages and different locations, as well as a local celebrity chef the Hebridean Baker. Each participant was asked to keep a video diary of their experiences as they tried out different recipes over a month.

What's next?

The plan is to use the videos to create a short film promoting the project and this will then be shared via social media, organisations and the press. This will be accompanied by a series of cooking demonstrations, to show how fun and easy using the bag is. The team will look to secure more funding to expand the initiative and make sure it becomes known throughout the islands – and beyond – as an innovative solution to combat rising food and energy costs while reducing the impacts of climate change. They have also talked to local shop owners who have suggested creating bags of ingredients for different WonderBag™ recipes, which would work out much cheaper for local families. The hope is that this will become an accepted cooking choice for Hebrideans going forward.



UA

- # Equal rights and inclusion
- 📖 Ternopil Regional Universal Scientific Library
- 👥 Ternopil Regional Branch of the Ukrainian Library Association
- 📍 Ternopil
- 🇺🇦 Ukraine

Breaking down language barriers

The challenge

Tens of thousands of Ukrainians fleeing the Russian invasion have found refuge in the Ternopil region in the west of Ukraine. For many of these people, learning a foreign language – in particular Polish – is vital, for education, employment and future opportunities. However, the infrastructure to support foreign language learning has been severely affected by the war.

The initiative

Ternopil Regional Universal Scientific Library is working together with the Ternopil branch of the Ukrainian Library Association to organise hybrid language classes – both offline and online – for people to learn Polish. These intensive classes, some of which are available via YouTube and Zoom, are aimed at different age groups and are available in different languages without charge to both refugees and local residents. Against a challenging backdrop of electricity blackouts and the threat of shelling, the open educational space is an effective tool to support residents of the Ternopil region

and people who have been displaced by the war – helping to develop their language and cultural skills, increase their cultural, linguistic and socio-psychological literacy and in turn leading to increased social activity and helping people to adapt to the new circumstances they find themselves in.

What's next?

The initiative aims to help refugees from Ukraine integrate into the European cultural and linguistic space – allowing them to use the acquired knowledge and skills in various spheres of life in any part of the globe.

The challenge team said: “By conducting free language courses, we will help Ukrainian citizens who are forced to seek refuge in other European countries to adapt to a foreign cultural environment. Knowledge of Polish as one of the EU’s official languages will open up the new opportunities for them to study, work and live, and it will help EU citizens to find a common language and understand the common roots of our European identity.”



LV

- # Social cohesion and wellbeing
- 📖 Vaidava Parish Library
- 👥 People from three villages
- 📍 Vaidava, Rencēni and Vecate villages
- 🇱🇻 Latvia

Libraries as therapy

The challenge

Three local libraries in Vaidava, Vecate and Rencēni from three different administrative rural territories of Valmiera municipality in Latvia are working together with the local community to empower them to address a huge increase in depression, fear and loneliness following the Covid-19 pandemic, which has been exacerbated by anxieties over the war in Ukraine.

The initiative

The three libraries and their local communities are co-developing a wellbeing therapy programme to help empower local residents and improve their wellbeing. The challenge team has introduced an initiative that incorporates three different group therapies – art therapy, dance therapy and bibliotherapy – which are available to the three village communities involved in the challenge. Before launching their initiative, the library and local community started a discussion based around the question 'Why is a Library Needed'? They found that local residents perceived the library as a community centre and appreciated the activities offered by the libraries.

The residents of the three communities worked together with experts and shared their newly acquired skills. Through the initiative, they have improved their critical thinking, creativity and communication skills and have acquired empowerment techniques to help themselves and to share with others.

What's next?

The challenge team's ambition is to share their prototype to help establish a sustainable network of therapeutic libraries across Latvia and beyond.

They would like to attract more funding to expand the group therapies in their own region for a wider range of people of different ages and interests, as well as increasing the number of libraries involved. They would also like to popularise the therapeutic library concept to help attract more visitors to events and classes – and help to boost the profile of the library at both a local and wider level.

The challenge team said: "When the local village library challenge has become a Europe Challenge, it has turned into a really inspiring adventure."



SP

- # Social cohesion and wellbeing
- 📖 Biblioteca Eduardo Pérez de la Fanosa
- 👥 Busto Neighbourhood Association and other surrounding villages' assoc.
- 📍 Busto, Valdés, Asturias region
- 🇪🇸 Spain

Illustrated villages

Challenge

The tiny village of Busto in Asturias, on the rural north coast of Spain, is known for its lighthouse. With no shops, limited public transport and closed public spaces in the villages, Busto's ageing population is more isolated than ever, and youngsters are leaving the area at a rapid rate in search of better opportunities.

The initiative

The inspiration for this initiative came from a cultural hub developed around a newly created library in a disused school in Busto. Initiated by a group of four women who had the idea when they received a bag of donated books, Biblioteca Eduardo Pérez de la Fanosa opened its doors to the public in July 2021. It is one of only a handful of private libraries for public use in Spain and now has more than 7,000 books and 400 members.

A collaboration between the library and volunteers from the community, the challenge team wanted to deepen the community spirit unlocked by the library initiative through creating a safe space for social

interaction and debate about public spaces, immaterial legacy and social and natural environment.

The challenge team is building a Popular Memory Archive that goes beyond the preservation of testimonies and evidence from the past and sets its sights on planning for the future – helping to take action against threats to the local area, including rural depopulation. The aim is to revive pride in the past while also rebuilding hope for the future.

What's next?

Involvement in the Europe Challenge was the first step in the journey for this challenge team. The support, guidance and visibility has in turn attracted increased interest for the initiative from local authorities and from cultural organisations.

They have refurbished the school building where the library and project are based and have received a pledge of regular yearly funding. They hope to secure further funding to professionalise the team and create job opportunities in future.

We joined the Europe Challenge because we want to make a library that's open for everyone, including those living on the margins of society due to addiction, homelessness or social or mental health problems.





- # Active citizenship and participation
- 📖 Valmiera Library
- 👥 Local community
- 📍 Valmiera
- 🇱🇻 Latvia

Building bridges, finding new connections

The challenge

For residents in Valmiera, their new municipality meant bringing urban and rural communities together and this presented an obvious challenge: How could they come together equally to decide what they wanted for their region?

By using branch libraries across the municipality, challenge teams concentrated on developing different ideas that gave the communities more opportunity to explore their shared public spaces.

The initiative

Challenge teams each worked on prototypes. One team restored a local historic house and gardens to boost local pride, while another team created an interactive game using video stories about local people promoting local history.

Another challenge team reversed the power dynamics of event creation, by empowering those who are often seen as the 'beneficiaries' of a charitable event – in this case a community with special needs.

Another prototype headed up by the Valmiera Zonta Club brought to light an important, local artist through a series of events. This encouraged the local community to volunteer and discuss community participation.

What next?

Volunteering is seen to benefit the community in general and it is not widely practised in Latvia. The solution-building process gave the library staff a lot of knowledge, courage and experience of European exchange that strengthened the team and their library service – a perspective they are planning to build on.

“Libraries are becoming more open to people’s initiatives and thus more responsive to their needs. They are no longer a ready-made space where people come to; they are a place to get involved, to co-participate. The challenge helped us to look a bit further ahead, to make our dream library.”



BG

- # Equal rights and inclusion
- 🏠 Pencho Slaveykov Regional library
- 👥 Ukrainian refugees and other migrant or minority groups
- 📍 Varna
- 🇵🇹 Bulgaria

A creative hub for young refugees

The challenge

According to the Bulgarian State Agency for Refugees, nearly 1.2 million Ukrainians have entered Bulgaria since February 2022. Varna on the Black Sea Coast is one of the focal points of the refugee crisis. The Ukrainian community here – mainly made up of women and children – is temporary. Many refugees feel vulnerable, isolated and abandoned.

The initiative

Pencho Slaveykov Regional Library in Varna wanted to reimagine how to be a supportive and accessible centre for refugees – particularly for children and young people – by developing activities for art and culture. The challenge team set up a modern, multifunctional interactive hub where young people could present and share their artworks without any questions or conditions. Their initial idea was to create a physical space but now they have a different idea. They said: “Now we want more – we want to create an idea for a library that is always with you, because the library is where community [members] find support and come

together as a better society. The Library is where you are. You are the Library.”

They organised four workshops as well as study groups and meetings. Three more were planned for early 2023. The initiative aims to help refugees to integrate through art and cultures and to give them a chance to find a common language.

What's next?

The challenge team plans to keep going, to dream big, to learn quickly and to be adaptable when things don't go to plan. They are actively looking for supportive partnerships, advocacy and assistance from other groups and organisations, as well as funding to help continue their work.

They said: “Young people are shaping the European future. Their needs, desires and ideas are important. Their cultural and social integration is essential. For us, [it] is important to collect, shape and give voice to their visions. The good news is that – no matter where – young people have almost the same needs. And if we find the right key, it will be a solution for every European library.”



The actions will be done in 17 libraries including Library Torras i Bages as organiser. Libraries: Sant Quinti of Mediona; Sant Pere de Ribes (Manuel de Pedrolo); Sant Pere de Ribes (Josep Pla); Bib. Bus. El Castellot; Bib. Bus. Montau; Santa Margarida and Els Monjos; Sant Sadurni Cubelles; Sant Pere de Riudebitlles; Vilanova (Joan Oliva); Vilanova (Armand Cardona); Sant Marti Sarroca; Gelida; Sitges (Josep Roig); Sitges (Santiago Rusiñol).

SP

- # Active citizenship and participation
- 📖 Torras i Bages Public Library
- 👥 High school students and library users of the Penedes and Garraf area
- 📍 Vilafranca del Penedes
- 🇪🇸 Catalonia, Spain

Working together to challenge fake news

The challenge

For more than a decade, Torras i Bages Public Library has been working with the local community to help improve digital literacy in this rural region south-west of Barcelona with a high percentage of economic migrants.

The library staff noticed that many of their service users were struggling to identify trustworthy sources of online information – and to work out what was fake news or not. So they decided to tackle this problem by partnering with other local libraries, schools, education services, municipalities and the University of Barcelona to co-develop a programme that would improve digital skills for library users and students across the region.

The initiative

The challenge team designed a series of 16 professional workshops, as well as conferences and film screenings that involved schools, families, cultural associations and library users in different locations to improve understanding of the credibility and quality of both online and offline information.

By identifying how fake news is created and spread, the initiative wanted to challenge

the dissemination of misinformation in future. The goal is to encourage more informed opinions and debate within the community, by improving access to trusted information and curated knowledge – and by bringing a rich world of knowledge to the region to help expand horizons.

What's next?

There has already been significant interest in the initiative among teachers in the region, as well as from the Catalan police and social services. The challenge team is keen to make sure the initiative is replicable elsewhere – and there are plans afoot to create a documentary video from the footage taken at each session, which will be available online.

The challenge team will also measure the impact of the initiative on the community using statistical methods – evaluating how this kind of project can impact on maintaining well-informed debates and help democracy in communities across Spain and beyond.

They will adapt what they have learned for the next challenge, which they have already decided will focus on Artificial Intelligence and its interaction with information quality.



PL

- # Equal rights and inclusion
- 📖 Biblioteki bez granic (Libraries Without Borders)
- 👥 The readers' community
- 📍 Warsaw
- 🇵🇱 Poland

Libraries without borders

The challenge

Refugee facilities in Poland are overcrowded and depressing environments with limited access to cultural materials in different languages. Books provide a lifeline to many refugees, who may be facing a range of mental health challenges.

The initiative

Libraries Without Borders grew out of Grupa Granica, a conglomerate of grassroots activists and humanitarian organisations helping refugees at the Polish-Belarusian border, which included an initiative to collect book donations and distribute them to the detention centres for refugees coming into Poland.

The challenge team decided to collect and deliver books to people in the detention centres across Poland, and to migrant and refugee communities already living in Warsaw. Together with the community, they are also determined to offer a place for cultural and language exchange in Warsaw, as well as promoting the culture and literature of the countries of origin of people finding refuge in Poland.

Drawing on their local connections in Warsaw, they offer events that provide spaces for integration between the established local community in the city and new residents arriving from different countries. They have established regular meetings for skills and language exchange, and occasional larger community events, focused on sharing stories, recipes and cooking together, which provides a place to meet and strengthen neighbourhood bonds.

What's next?

The challenge team wants to make sure that everyone has access to books in their native language, as well as improving the opportunities for migrants and refugees living in Warsaw.

Working closely with the community, they plan to broaden the scope of their work: addressing specific needs of people in the detention centres and those already living outside, and providing books and educational materials in the Ukrainian language. They would like to continue supporting people in detention centres across Poland, and they are starting to think about establishing a bigger library in Warsaw in future too.

**Libraries are safe,
diverse, democratic
spaces. They are trusted
spaces. They are human
spaces in an age of
Artificial Intelligence.**



André Wilkens
Director, European Cultural Foundation

The Europe Challenge 2023

Libraries & communities
join forces to tackle urgent
challenges facing Europe

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From beehives in Barcelona to virtual reality adventures in Amsterdam, within the pages of this book you can read about 39 innovative initiatives created together by libraries and communities across Europe. *Sense of Belonging* is the story of the Europe Challenge, a programme launched by the European Cultural Foundation in 2020 to explore how libraries are working hand in hand with their communities to tackle some of society's most pressing challenges – from social isolation to climate change – and, together, imagine a better future for Europe.



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