A European library agenda for the post-Covid 19 age

[Work in Progress]

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Document prepared by the EBLIDA Secretariat

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Foreword

On 26 March 2020, the EBLIDA Executive Committee met in an extraordinary online meeting and asked the EBLIDA Secretariat to undertake a survey aimed at reviewing the state of libraries in the face of the Covid-19 crisis on the basis of a checklist including 19 items. This checklist is more than a tool designed to facilitate and categorise answers. It also aims to pave the way for a series of measures, practices and possible services that library associations and coordinating centres have initiated during the crisis and could pursue in one way or another in the post-Covid-19 age. We do not know whether things will revert to a business-as-usual mode once the pandemic is over. It is possible that many countries in the world will re-prioritise their agendas and revise their public policies, including cultural and educational policies. What we do know is that libraries will have a lot to learn from the Covid-19 lesson. As an organisation working in the European field, EBLIDA is closely monitoring these developments and will explore how libraries may align with new priorities in a proactive way.

Is the library's agenda, at European, national and local level, going to change in the aftermath of the Covid-19 crisis? EBLIDA full members were requested to describe the current situation of libraries in their countries. They were also asked to provide insights into the items on the thorny agenda addressed during the crisis and prepare, as far as possible, the European library programme in the post-Covid-19 age.

The Report "Preparing a European Library Agenda for the Post-Covid 19 age" is a work in progress and will go through a broad consultation process within the EBLIDA community. We ask our members to provide comments and further reflections based on their experience during and after the Covid-19 crisis. Their comments aim to answer the questions asked in paragraph 7 of the Report and amend the recommendations suggested in this Report. It is only at the end of this consultation process that the Report will be published and the set of recommendations for a European library agenda in the post-Covid 19 age will be finalised.

I would like to reiterate that the Report "Preparing a European Library Agenda in the Post-Covid-19 age" is the first in a series of reports to be released by the EBLIDA European Sustainability House. In the first half of 2020, EBLIDA will also release a paper on the European Structural and Investment Funds 2021-2027 as well as the first European Report on Sustainable Development Goals and their implementation in European libraries. The three combined reports will feed the update of the EBLIDA Matrix, now available on the EBLIDA website and an ambitious design of supporting libraries in their difficult journey through the post-Covid-19 age. An Interim Report of the "Questionnaire on Library Legislation and Policy in Europe" is also expected to be published soon.

I would like to thank Mr. Giuseppe Vitiello, EBLIDA Director, for the extensive review work he has carried out on the input received from EBLIDA Members on the occasion of the Survey.

Ton van Vlimmeren
President, EBLIDA

0. Executive summary

In response to the Call for Solidarity launched by the UN Secretary general, Mr António Guterres, on 19th March 2020, EBLIDA created a "Checklist for Library Associations and Libraries in the Face of Covid-19 Crisis". EBLIDA members responded to a survey based on the checklist and responses were provided by library associations from 17 European countries: Bulgaria, Cyprus, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Ireland, Italy, Latvia, Luxembourg, Netherlands, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Spain, Sweden and Switzerland. The survey aimed to showcase not only the effort made by libraries in Europe to mitigate the harmful effects of the Covid-19 outbreak on human beings, but also to point the way forward for libraries now entering the post-Covid-19 age. What will be the library activities based on contingent factors – which hopefully will not replicate – and library activities and trends that will become permanent in the post-Covid 19 age?

EBLIDA identifies five new normals for a European Library Agenda in the post-Covid-19 age:

1. Exponential social distancing: a well-connected two-meter library;
2. Technologies are mutating and shaping libraries in new ways;
3. Uncharted economic territory: review the library budget composition;
4. Library governance at central and local levels;
5. Do not forget he climate change opportunity and threat.

1. Exponential social distancing: a well-connected two-meter library;

During and after the Covid-19 crisis, there were strong derogations to the otherwise indivisible principle of universal access to library collections and services. When libraries deliver public information about their reduced or limited services, a reminder should clearly state that these derogations are limited in time and scope.

The new normal in library practices concerns access policies, personnel security, social distancing and sanitation of collections. Rules and regulations have been, and will be, driven by three factors: a) national health regulations; b) risk perception, which varies from one country to another; c) the size and the arrangement of library spaces.

The recommendations and guidelines for handling physical material in libraries recorded in this Report – including rules concerning the return of material on loan - are evolving. What seems to be around to stay is the fact that library spaces and offices are being re-designed in order to reduce the risk of creating crowds. This trend may have a long-term effect also on library architecture.

Re-designing library premises also leads to the re-organisation of library services. With a 2-meter, contactless-oriented society, there is a risk that the concept of a "complete self-service", unstaffed library may progress and, at the same time, there's a risk that further development of libraries as a "third" place, where citizens meet and exchange ideas and opinions, may decline.

During the Covid 19 crisis, home delivery services were often initiated with book packages to be picked up at the door. New services strictly related to the Covid emergence included:

- centralised access to Covid-19 related health information produced by governmental authorities,
- Covid-19 support service - 'Community Call' delivered via phone, text, email and through platforms;
- Use of social media to offer story time, through Facebook groups and YouTube profiles, or also for library exchange and (re-)use of digital products;
- advanced social services for the elderly and vulnerable on lockdown, such as phone calls, storytelling, also food delivery where necessary,
- the provision of face masks for healthcare workers through 3D printers.

Some of these services, like the provision of face masks, will hopefully be redundant very soon. In a contact-less society, automatic door opening, voice commands in elevators, homeworking, tele-libraries and online help desks will very likely be the new normal for libraries. The effects of social distancing can be offset by a transformative and adaptive library, able to fill social differences and bridge digital gaps. In order to do that, however, libraries need to monitor the movements taking place in their functional domains and exert full control over the data produced within their space and concerning their operations.

2. Technologies are mutating and shaping libraries in new ways

Libraries promoted access to online resources via their websites pointing to platforms of e-books, and e-media. Statistics concerning the use of digital platforms in March-April 2020 compared to the same period in the previous year show that the use of platforms - such as divibib and Overdrive in Germany, MLOL in Italy, etc. - has increased exponentially during the Covid-19 crisis, with an avalanche effect of library websites pointing to national digital platforms and a dense interchange between collections and connectedness.

It can be said that access to the library digital offers more than doubled in many cases. In some countries, the offer increased by from 1,000% to 1,500% in relation to statistics recorded before the outbreak of Covid-19. This boost should be measured not only in quantity, but also in the quality of the variety of digital resources including self-learning, content on demand, music, press, e-books. Some libraries closed to the public also tried to perform workshops, talk shows and lectures through live streaming. In academic and research libraries, access to digital resources has increased in a more moderate way for the very reason that university members – students, researchers, professors - have been using e-resources for years.

What will happen when the ban on physical access to libraries is lifted? Will this digital trend consolidate?

In order to overcome the contingent nature of the shift in demand for digital resources, a critical factor is the quality of the relationship between publishers and libraries and how prices for digital publications will level off in spite of the library's increasing demand. No changes have been detected in contractual conditions for the delivery of e-copies in public libraries; only the National Library of Latvia managed to come to an agreement with the Latvian Copyright and Communication Agency and the Latvian Authors' Association in relation to the offer of e-periodicals and e-books. In Sweden, the platform of e-periodicals is offered for free until 31st May.

Another key determinant of the spectacular increase in access to digital platforms has been distance-learning in schools and universities. Distance-learning has generated positive externalities in libraries during the Covid-19 crisis but their effects may not be long-lasting; after all, it is not taken for granted that school children will continue to use distance-learning in school intensively and that universities will drop taught classes in the post-Covid 19 age.

The consolidation of digital trends in libraries in the post-Covid-19 age can be seen in two complementary frames of reference: a strictly cultural perspective and a broader societal vision.

The strictly cultural perspective concerns music, performing arts and live performance. The Covid-19 has dealt a fatal blow to the organisations and enterprises operating in these fields. The ecosystem built around a concert or a theatre production may be amplified through the creation of post-production events which can be distributed in libraries at local level and help capture and retain the attention of the public. When they get a grip on live performances, ministries of culture and/or local cultural actors may contemplate the capillary distribution of library networks as an integral part of the live performance ecosystem and re-design the system of local aids, fiscal incentives, policy measures and other form of culture subsidies in a broader holistic perspective.

In a broader sense, and much closer to the implementation of the 2030 Agenda on Sustainable Development, a society pivoting around social distancing may end up creating negative requirements leading to social exclusion. European libraries will have to look at the scale, the scope, the learning objectives and the virtual dimension of their activities. The implementation of high tech and AI tools in libraries may be a strong incentive to re-modulate the European library agenda towards sustainable development. A critical factor for libraries aimed to shape technologies is also the control of the data produced within the library ecosphere. Access to data concerning movement of people, resources and equipment need to be transparent for policy-making and data-sharing purposes.

3. Uncharted economic territory: review the library budget composition

As a result of the pandemic, the global economy is projected to contract sharply in 2020. Administrators and politicians may play a key role in the post-Covid-19 age with real-terms cuts in library funding.

Financial hardship will become obvious in 2021 and library budgets may suffer from two inherent features. The first is that public libraries' income is almost solely generated at local level by city or regional authorities – the same can be said for research libraries sourced almost exclusively by universities. The second is that many items in library budgets have an inelastic nature: building maintenance, personnel and resources allocated to operations, in particular to the purchase of digital resources, cannot easily be re-adjusted to meet new financial requirements.

Downsizing library operations may therefore end up with substantial budgetary cuts to the "social" library sector, to the "third place" library, and the library as meeting place – in other words, the library operating with and within the communities to which it refers – which has been in the last decades, one of the most stimulating developments in the public library sector.

The response may be found in the diversification of funding for libraries and the promotion of current library activities within a different framework: the European 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. The best financial instrument to fund SDG projects in libraries are the European Structural and Investment Funds (ESIF) 2021-2027.

4. Library governance at central and local levels

During the Covid-19 crisis library governance has been implemented through traditional activities on site, centralised activities promoted by library institutions, and a grassroots movement of professionals driven by passion and personal dedication.

During the Covid-19 crisis, institutional settings were reinforced through the implementation of web portals or centralised facilities with information distributed at national or regional level. Conversely, the informal setting – exchange of information and best practices in informal gatherings - has suffered from the cancellation or postponement of national library conferences.

In the extraordinary context of the Covid-19 crisis, however, library governance also sprouted from an uncoordinated and spontaneous movement of professionals willing to offer solutions to unfulfilled needs and to cooperate with external agencies. In this context, library associations took the lead. Access to digital services, too, requires a more centralised library governance in terms of copyright clearance, standardisation of technical requirements and coordination of management tasks, including statistics. At the same time, local and professional governance has also been a key determinant for the setting up of innovative services or the adaptation of existing ones.

These new forms of governance and the extension of library missions may prove to be useful if European libraries identify themselves as structural components of a cohesion policy and wish to access EU Structural and Investment Funds. If libraries wish not to disperse the experiences matured during the Covid-19 crisis,

if they wish to shape technologies in new ways and re-adjust the library budget composition, they may also need to review existing models of library governance.

5. Do not forget the climate change opportunity and threat

In 2020 many factories and service companies stopped production and delivery, car usage was reduced and carbon emission was reduced almost everywhere. At the end of the year, anomalous data due to the effect of the Covid-19 crisis will provide distorted reports about climate change, with statistics only focused on temporary trends. The implementation of the 2030 Agenda on Sustainable Development has to go on, despite and perhaps because of the Covid-19 crisis.

On 9 March 2020 the Technical Expert Group on Sustainable Finance established by the European Commission published a taxonomy regulation with criteria for screening economic activities that can make a substantial contribution to climate change mitigation or adaptation. The taxonomy regulation stipulates that a series of environmental objectives should be considered when evaluating how sustainable an economic activity is. If this taxonomy works for finance, it should also work for libraries.

In conclusion, the Report "Preparing a European library agenda for the post-Covid 19 age" is now being submitted to a broad consultation with EBLIDA Members, with questions for self-reflection and examples of Recommendations (see Paragraph 7). After the consultation, the Report will include a final set of Recommendations.

1. The impact of Covid-19 on libraries: the five new normals

Covid-19 has rapidly and globally spread all over the world in just a few weeks. The containment of the virus and efforts to reduce the loss of lives have had ultimate priority, but there is wide consensus among economists, politicians and policy-makers that Covid-19 is likely to cause an unprecedented world recession, the seriousness of which we haven't seen since the 2nd world war. To most people, experts and non-experts in the field, the economic risks and consequences of all kinds of epidemics are clear and tangible: the cost for healthcare systems, disruption and reduction in labour productivity, decreased trade and decline in travel and tourism, to name just a few.

At the time of writing this report, the United States and Europe are the hardest hit by Covid-19; and we can only hope that the virus will not infect the more deprived parts of the world having less robust or weak healthcare systems. On 19th March 2020, the UN Secretary-General, Mr António Guterres, launched a Call for Solidarity in "a moment that demands coordinated, decisive, and innovative policy action from the world's leading economies [in the recognition] that the poorest and most vulnerable — especially women — will be the hardest hit."[1] He urged States to act quickly to contain the economic fallout and to "focus on people – women, youth, low-wage workers, small and medium enterprises, the informal sector and on vulnerable groups who are already at risk." [2]. He also designated the Agenda 2030 for Sustainable Development as a common Framework for action.

In response to this appeal, EBLIDA created a "Checklist for Library Associations and Libraries in the Face of Covid-19 Crisis". The checklist aimed to showcase the effort made by libraries in Europe to compensate for the harmful effects of the Covid-19 outbreak on human beings. It also aimed to indicate a way forward for libraries now entering the post-Covid-19 Phase. The European Union is setting up a panoply of financial and operational instruments to get out of the current predicament. EU action, however, has to be complemented by the professional effort in a common and cohesive endeavour.

Libraries were locked down practically in all European countries although in different ways and with different means of implementation. Library services are being continuously re-designed during the Covid-19 phase and they may continue to be re-oriented in the next three-four months with new ways of working being experimented with. To mention a few: homeworking was heavily practiced during the crisis; to what extent will it become a new normal? Access to digital resources rose spectacularly; will this trend consolidate? And will new services set up in response to short-term requirements continue after the crisis?

A considerable amount of point and policy papers are estimating the political, economic, societal and cultural impact of the Covid-19 crisis, also in terms of changes in how humans relate to each other as well as personal connectedness. In the near future, more literature will deal with the long-term revolution in social and human interaction during and after the Covid-19 age. Among the many publications envisioning near and medium-term prospects, a study undertaken by the Regional Innovation Centre of United Nation Development Programme (UNDP) Asia-Pacific has drawn our attention, since it may well outline the effects of Covid-19 in European libraries.[3] The author of the study depicts the "new normals" which loom on the horizon in the short term and will have long-term effects on society. She also points to the post-Covid-19 extraordinary directions now transforming into current trends in today's life. These "new normals" are the following:

- Tech is mutating and shaping us in new ways;
- Governance is taking a new centre stage;
- Uncharted economic territory;

[1] Secretary-General Remarks on Covid-19: A Call for Solidarity 19 March 2020, https://www.un.org/sites/un2.un.org/files/sg_remarks_on_covid-19_english_19_march_2020.pdf.
[2] https://unsdg.un.org/sites/default/files/2020-03/SG-Report-Socio-Economic-Impact-of-Covid19.pdf.
[3] Prateeksha Singh. What are the "new normals" that COVID-19 might be pointing to?, https://medium.com/@undp.ric/what-are-the-new-normals-that-covid-19-might-be-pointing-to-d5abe71fa7b7

- Exponential social distancing and collective connectivity;
- The climate change opportunity and threat.

EBLIDA undertook a Survey aimed at reviewing the state of libraries in the face of the Covid-19 crisis on the basis of a Checklist including 19 questions. After having first been tested among the members of the Executive Committee, the Checklist was sent out to EBLIDA Full Members. This survey is based on the information provided by library associations from 17 European countries: Bulgaria, Cyprus, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Ireland, Italy, Latvia, Luxembourg, Netherlands, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Spain, Sweden and Switzerland. When no reference is indicated in the footnotes, information included in this report is generated from the responses to the survey.[4]

The above mentioned UNDP Asia-Pacific study has been used to frame the answers provided by EBLIDA Members to the Survey. With a different order of priorities and slight adaptations, these are the "five new normals" EBLIDA suggests for a European library agenda in the post-Covid-19 age:

1. Exponential social distancing: a well-connected two-meter library;
2. Technologies are mutating and shaping libraries in new ways;
3. Uncharted economic territory: review the library budget composition;
4. Library governance at central and local levels;
5. Do not forget the climate change opportunity and threat.

We are very grateful to EBLIDA Members for their prompt reaction, extremely useful suggestions and deep insights. The Report *"Preparing a European Library Agenda in the post-Covid 19 age"* is listing some of the best practices in libraries during the Covid-19 crisis. It also aims to detect the legacy left by library policies and trends during Covid-19 and to keep separate library activities based on contingent factors – which hopefully will not replicate – from library activities and trends that will become permanent in the post-Covid 19 age. We hope it will also clarify possible outcomes of the Covid-19 crisis and provide for the solutions which were received from, and are offered to, EBLIDA Members and European libraries as a whole.

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[4] Responses were published in four special issues of the EBLIDA Newsletter, on 3rd, 23rd , 25th April and 7 May, http://www.eblida.org/news/eblida-april-newsletter-special-issue.html. To be mentioned also a report drafted by the NAPLE Forum, https://www.culturaydeporte.gob.es/cultura/areas/bibliotecas/mc/napleweb/presentation.html and, at international level, IFLA information on Covid 19 (https://www.ifla.org/covid-19-and-libraries) and an IFLA advocacy agenda: https://blogs.ifla.org/lpa/2020/04/21/adovc8-now-and-next-part-2-what-might-a-library-advocacy-agenda-for-the-post-pandemic-world-look-like/.

2. Exponential social distancing: a well-connected two-meter library

2.1 Access policies, personnel security, social distancing and sanitation of collections

National health guidelines have limited the movement of people at international, national and sometimes also at city level, thus curtailing access to libraries. In the near future, these guidelines may be maintained to a lower degree with the result that measures concerning registered library users may be subject to limitations. Derogation to human rights in time of public emergency are envisaged under Article 15 of the European Convention of Human Rights only "to the extent strictly required by the exigencies of the situation" and with measures that should not be "disproportionate to the strict requirements of the situation".[5] In panels, boards and written notes, it is always worth recalling that restrictive measures must be limited in time and scope and cannot violate the otherwise indivisible principle of universal access to library collections and services inscribed in the 1994 IFLA/UNESCO Public Library Manifesto and the 2000 Council of Europe/EBLIDA Guidelines on Library Legislation and Policy in Europe.

Setting uniform rules concerning access policies, personnel security, social distancing and sanitation of collections is not an easy task. During and after the Covid-19 crisis, library practices have been, and will be, driven by three factors: a) national health regulations, which vary from one country to another within the general framework provided by the World Health Organisation; b) risk perception, which is different whether the library is based in Estonia, where half of all hospitalised Covid-19 patients were in the Saare island, or in Italy and Spain; c) the size and the arrangement of library spaces, which differ from one library premise to another.

In orienting library re-opening after the lockdown, all countries have already produced recommendations and guidelines for handling physical material in libraries; some of these guidelines – in Estonia, Germany (Public Library of Cologne), Ireland, Italy, Netherlands – are available in an EBLIDA Newsletter.[6] Interestingly enough, while these recommendations are in line on basic points - such as, for instance, procedures for book quarantine -, they differ on other points in relation to the perspective they apply. In the Netherlands, detailed instructions concern procedural rules for the different categories of people who access libraries. In Ireland and Italy more emphasis is put on the handling of physical collections. Procedural rules established in Germany by the Public Library of Cologne address organisational aspects.

An important issue concerns items returning to the library after lending. The suggested quarantine for books is normally set at 72 hours, but rules differ in Europe from state to state. In Germany, some library services are leaving book stock for 48 hours before sanitising and returning to the shelf. No definitive guidance has been given in Scotland on book quarantine but some library services are leaving book stock for 24 or 72 hours. In Sweden, all the municipalities decide locally how to handle returned books and there are no national guidelines about quarantine.[7]

In Estonia, where library lockdown was belated and the special category of state libraries stayed open with limitations, book circulation takes place with the following procedure: users choose books from catalogues, send their wishes to the library, librarians prepare book packages and leave them in special library rooms close to the library main entrance; in some cases, library use official postal services to deliver items. When books are returned, they are kept untouched for 72 hours and only afterwards are re-shelved.

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[5] European Court of Human Rights. Derogation in time of emergency (April 2020). https://www.echr.coe.int/Documents/FS_Derogation_ENG.pdf.
[6] http://www.eblida.org/news/april-newsletter-special-issue3.html.
[7] An extended and useful review is included in NAPLE Forum. The Public Libraries in Europe and COVID-19: Findings from NAPLE Members (April 2020), https://www.culturaydeporte.gob.es/dam/jcr:fce29ea1-1b83-479b-b674-a592b255f7e4/naple-narrative-report---european-library-services-during-covid19.pdf.

With the exceptions of several Nordic and Baltic countries, libraries have been locked down for weeks almost everywhere in Europe and librarians have been working from home. It is perhaps too early to assess the consequences of this work arrangement and how it is going to change professional working operations since this practice, whether it was newly introduced or was an extension of an already existing work routine, was adopted as a result of exceptional circumstances.

At the time of this report being released, library spaces and offices are being redesigned. In order to reduce the risk of creating crowds, the flow of people is redistributed through separate corridors. Library rooms are full of separations and well-spaced desks instead of crowded open spaces. Common areas like canteens and meeting rooms have fewer chairs and log information about the last time they were cleaned. Cleaning policies are frequently updated. In the longer term, in order to avoid touching handles and pressing buttons, all doors in libraries may open automatically and you might tell the elevator which floor you would like to go. Moreover, the architecture of library buildings may be revised in light of the need to modulate open access spaces and re-design them in case of an outbreak.

Re-designing library premises also leads to the re-organisation of library services. Social distancing and the 2-meter society has a strong impact on the concept of a "complete self-service" or unstaffed library and on the responsibility of a facility being used by patrons without direct human surveillance. They will also have long-term effects on the development of libraries as a third place, a community centre and a meeting place delivering workshops, lectures, debates, performances, presentations and courses. Restrictions of the number of people who can access in compliance with the 2-meter rule is potentially hampering library performances, thus narrowing the scope of their functions.

2.2 Tailored and well-advanced library services

Since library services could not be performed onsite, a home delivery service was often activated with book packages to be picked up at the door. Library services were fine-tuned to meet customers' needs under extreme circumstances. As a result, new services have been implemented; reviewing a few of them provides but a small grasp of how creativity has reigned and flourished amidst these trying circumstances.

With a view to combating fake news on Covid-19 and to providing a one-stop access to information, the most common service in European libraries has been the creation of platforms ensuring centralised access to Covid-19 related health information produced by governmental authorities, health institutes and the World Health Organisation. The Cyprus Association of Librarians and Information Specialists created its own webpage and so did all other library associations engaged in health information. The French Library Association released a padlet to gather Covid-related information and in Portugal, the library association channelled Covid-related information through a flipboard-based platform, which included official or newspaper sources and exposed fake news related to the subject. In Sweden the platform was created by the National Library. In Ireland, librarians have been heavily involved in a national Covid-19 support service - 'Community Call' delivered via phone, text and email which provides support ranging from a friendly voice to talk to, organising food, transport and medicine and signposting information together with online classes and other wellbeing supports. And in the Bibliothèques Municipales de Genève it has been possible to "borrow" a librarian online.

Social media was used to offer story time (in Germany, Netherlands, Norway, Spain) through Facebook groups and YouTube profiles, or also for library exchange and (re-)use of digital products (Bulgaria). Sometimes, stories were distributed through library websites, for instance in Switzerland, Germany and in many other countries; digital storytelling as a new library services is rather popular in Germany.

More advanced services concerned elderly people in lockdown, who were reached by telephone calls and storytelling. In some cases, for instance in Finland, libraries also delivered food when necessary. In the Netherlands, the library association has been negotiating with the association of local councils library guidelines aimed to support education for those kids who cannot access online teaching from home or who are in vulnerable home circumstances. Librarians are engaged in all kinds of different roles and tasks. They

deliver books to elderly people at home, they organise foodbanks in towns and collections for day care centres, they collaborate with schools taking care of the children of people working in vital services, they call elderly patrons to have a chat and check if they need reading materials.

2.3 Full integration into health policies: face-mask production and other initiatives

Practically all libraries and/or library associations created pages providing links to official public health information of relevance for libraries (e.g. lifespan of the virus on paper and plastic, quarantining books and other media). In some European libraries, activities were even further integrated into national health policies.

Social distancing is not only a practice; it is also a symbolic concept and a good metaphor to assess the relationship between libraries and their users: the more people are distant from each other, the more a library is distant from its users. This did not happen at the Martynas Mažvydas National Library of Lithuania. An impressive and well-targeted library service was triggered during the Covid-19 crisis in cooperation with over 50 public libraries of Lithuania and the involvement of the Robotics School. The National Library of Lithuania helped produce 3D printed face masks for healthcare workers in response to the growing demand for protective equipment. 3D printed face masks were supplied to healthcare workers, but also to volunteers and representatives of other professions working in high-risk areas. Fifty-eight 3D devices were purchased for the major public libraries of Lithuania in 2019, but no one at that time had a clue that they would be used in the fight against Covid-19.[8] The National Library of Lithuania also offered new library computers to school children and teachers during the quarantine. Some 35,000 tablets and portable computers allocated to libraries are now transferred temporarily to children of socially sensitive families and then returned to libraries at the end of the quarantine.[9]

To a lesser extent, the same initiative was developed in Portugal, where two libraries were involved in the production of face masks through 3D printers, and in France. In Ireland, libraries have been tightly integrated into national health policies during the Covid-19 crisis. Some of the many initiatives developed by Irish libraries consisted of donating equipment to hospitals, producing 3-D printed face shields for Irish public health colleagues, providing online lectures and interactive workshops in collaboration with mental health services, delivering care boxes with reading material to vulnerable members of the community, producing oral history and online projects archiving the present. In Ireland, librarians have been taking on new roles to support the national response which includes contact tracing of confirmed Covid cases. Community support helplines have been set up across Ireland to meet the needs of vulnerable and isolated persons. All these services are being staffed and, in many cases, managed by librarians. The Irish government has recognised the increasing demands on librarians and libraries; in a state of the nation address on St Patrick's Day, the Irish Prime minister, Leo Varadkar, specifically mentioned librarians together with the news that additional funding for e-books would be allocated due to unprecedented demands.

Mask production and some of the mentioned initiatives will stop soon – and this is good news. These initiatives will not be forgotten; they will be considered the historical legacy of the Covid-19 crisis for future library emergencies. They show library resilience and their ability to promptly meet an acute demand for empathy expressed by their communities in case of need.

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[8] https://www.lnb.lt/en/news/5242-lithuanian-libraries-offer-support-to-healthcare-professionals. The purchase had been implemented within the framework of the project "Promoting Smart Use of Refurbished Public Internet Access Infrastructure Among Residents" (VIPT), financed within The EU Structural and Investment Funds 2014-2020.
[9] https://www.lnb.lt/en/news/5281-new-library-computers-in-aid-for-schoolchildren-and-teachers-during-the-quarantine.

Elements for a post-Covid-19 Agenda

Cities are hubs for ideas, commerce, culture, science, productivity, social development, and much more. And libraries are the hubs for city communities. Flexible libraries are able to monitor and stimulate the movement of people, resources, ideas, equipment and is able to shift from services to production, from analogue/extensive to digital/ intensive use of technologies, matching the needs of the diverse community a library aims to serve.

Automated door opening, voice commands in elevators, homeworking, tele-libraries and online help desks may be the new normals for libraries. The same will apply for the library automation system: searching the catalogue will be done by voice command. Many of these adjustments, however, are just accelerations of already existing trends in real estate, industrial relations, and office automation. Similarly, the concept of the library as a community resource, and not a book reservoir, has been steadily growing for years. What matters, however, is the direction rather than the function. During the Covid-19 crisis there has been a strong acceleration of all these trends with a considerable number of new digital services. It remains to be seen how much of an impact this trend will have on future library policies.

The effects of social distancing, in both physical and metaphorical sense, can be offset by a transformative and adaptive library able to fill social differences and bridge digital gaps. In order to do that, however, libraries need to monitor the movements taking place in their functional domains and exert full control on the data produced within their space and concerning their operations. In other words, libraries need to master data produced by technologies used in their operational arena or at least, when this is not possible because of privacy laws, this data should be shared with library policy-makers as much as possible. It is what we are going to see in the new normal.

3. Technologies are mutating and shaping libraries in new ways

Since people have been unable to access library buildings, instead, libraries tried to reach their users at home. This was done in two ways: partly by fine-tuning their home delivery services, mostly through a library offer based on digital services. Libraries promoted access to online resources via their websites pointing to platforms of e-books, and e-media. Comparative statistics concerning the use of digital platforms in March-April 2020 compared to the same period in the previous year show that the use of platforms - such as divibib and Overdrive in Germany, MLOL in Italy, etc. - has increased exponentially during the Covid-19 crisis with an avalanche effect of library websites pointing to national digital platforms and a dense interchange between collections and connectedness.

Access to digital resources vary across the different libraries. Universities and research institutes have been working in a distance-learning mode during the Covid-19 crisis. As a consequence, digital access from research libraries increased but its growth was moderate since university members – students, researchers, professors - have been using e-resources for years. Many libraries promoted Covid 19-related content made available by STM publishers and arranged remote access. In Cyprus, for instance, the use of e-resources in academic libraries increased by 15% in the period 24/3/2020 – 20/4/2020.

Access to digital resources rocketed instead in public libraries, as the following examples demonstrate:

- In Estonia, where there is no national e-book lending system, the Tallinn Central Library opened its e-lending system to the public at large and scored a 1,400 % increase in e-lending in the period between 13 March – 19 April 2020 compared to the same period in the previous year, with the number of registered users going from 373 in 2019 (March-April 2019) to almost 10,000 (same period, 2020). In Estonian state libraries, increases were less consistent, but still significant: 45 % in comparison to the same period;
- In Ireland, digital services provided by the public library sector and freely accessible to everyone witnessed a considerable rise in the week commencing 29 March compared to the week commencing 1st of March. Figures broken down by area show the following increases: an increase of 313% in new users of e-books and e-audiobooks service, of 467% and 227% in, respectively, e-learning courses and language courses being taken, 246% in usage of the online newspapers/e-magazines. As a result of this increase in demand, the Irish government has purchased an additional €200,000 worth of e-books;
- In France, a flash-enquiry carried out by the Ministry of Culture on a significant sample of libraries showed that the demand for digital resources boomed in 68% of the libraries included in the sample, with reported increases of 200 and 300 % in the number of connections (and also 1,500 % increase in a library for a video on demand service targeted at young people). In 79 % of departmental libraries (in small rural and municipality libraries) the growth of registered users was also reported to be significant;[10]
- In Italian libraries, e-book circulation increased by 104% from 24 February to 24 March (against an average annual increase of 20 %);[11]
- In Luxembourg, access to the collection of 620,000 e-books in German, English and French offered for free through a reader card by the National Library increased by 40 % in March and 78 % in April 2020;
- In Norway, all platforms providing access to digital services worked at full speed and new ones were being created for e-lending. In the biggest Norwegian county, Viken, from March, 12th to April, 15th e-lending increased by 139% also because a new platform was started;

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[10] https://www.culture.gouv.fr/Sites-thematiques/Livre-et-Lecture/Actualites/Enquete-l-impact-de-la-crise-sanitaire-Covid-19-sur-l-offre-numerique-des-bibliotheques-des-bibliotheques-territoriales.

[11] Lorenzo Baldacchini. Le biblioteche ai tempi del virus, http://aibnotizie.aib.it/le-biblioteche-ai-tempi-del-virus/.

- In Latvia, the total number of unique users of the periodicals portal has doubled while concurrent users are 5 times greater on average than before. As a whole, the Latvian national digital library has witnessed an increase of new users by 61 % (and 70 % in terms of sessions);
- And in Switzerland, the platform e-bibliomedia (run by Bibliomedia Switzerland), with literature in French and English, almost doubled its loans in April 2020.

All kinds of digital initiatives have experienced a boost. In Bulgaria, traditional meetings with poets and writers went online through social media – Facebook and Instagram (e.g. Poetry without Quarantine initiative, Sofia City Library and the International Children's Book Day – 2 April). Digital resources offered by French libraries include self-training, video on demand, music, press, e-books. In Sweden, many public libraries provide online services, such as free e-books and audiobooks in different languages. In the Netherlands, the Royal Library launched some weeks ago the "Library at Home" programme with 100 e-book titles for free to everyone. By law, the Dutch Online Library is only fully accessible for those who pay an annual membership fee of €42 or more, but many libraries reduced the fee. This created a big additional use of the Online Library; both local libraries and the Royal Library put in a lot of effort into helping everyone to access the service. Also in the Netherlands, some libraries held workshops, talk shows and lectures through live streaming even when closed to the public; they make the most out of technologies in order to maintain contact with, and find new ways of, reaching out to citizens.

In many respects the rise in access to digital resources in libraries is a positive direction in the long-term. It is an unintended development of the Covid-19 crisis which may accelerate the realisation of a "smarter" Europe through digitisation - one of the objectives of the European Structural and Investment Funds 2021-2027. The (quasi) total absence of services linked to the physical circulation of printed matters accounts for the shift in users' demand. What will happen when the ban on access libraries is lifted? Will the digital trend consolidate?

It is not taken for granted that digital growth will endure in an inertial way and even strengthen after the Covid-19 crisis. For the trend to continue, two factors have to be taken into account: a) the contingent nature of the shift in the demand of digital resources; b) the concurrent drive of positive externalities affecting libraries.

Apart from the persistence of the Covid-19 outbreak – a factor which is neither predictable nor desirable – , the key determinant of consolidated increased access to digital platforms is the quality of the relationship between publishers and libraries and how prices for digital publications will level off in spite of library's increasing demand. Some scientific publishers did make available scientific literature dedicated to the analysis of Covid-19 free of charge, but there has been no respite in the tense relations surrounding the management of STM digital resources in libraries. LIBER, the Association of European Research Libraries, and other organisations in Italy and France have called on publishers to facilitate access to works. In Poland, individual libraries were able to arrange agreements with individual publishers and distribute the digital copies of their books. E-copies is an issue which was deliberately taken out of the scope of the 2019 Copyright in the Digital Single Market (DSM) and therefore, no quick, ready-made solution is looming on the horizon.

During the Covid-19 crisis the National Library of Latvia managed to come to an agreement with AKKA/LAA (Copyright and Communication Consulting Agency/Latvian Authors' Association) – an unparalleled example in Europe. At the beginning, the agreement concerned the collection of e-periodicals (the digital versions of more than 1,400 newspapers and magazines published in Latvia from 1748 to date). AKKA/LAA agreed on a License Agreement providing public access to the periodicals portal at no cost for the National Library until the end of the state of emergency. The portal itself was upgraded in response to the AKKA/LAA's request to receive detailed statistics at the end of the emergency time.

A collection of digitised books - more than 10,000 works from the 17th century to the end of the 20th century, including some 2,500 authors- is being made available to users through a paid license until the end of the state of emergency. Without disclosing the details of the agreement, it can be said that additional

expenses for accessing e-books are covered by the Ministry of Culture and concern both the number of times the publications are accessed and the number of sessions. It is also important to mention that the e-books subject to the AKKA/LAA - National Library of Latvia agreement represent only a limited share of the portal and do not cover commercial works. After the agreement, the National Library of Latvia issued a statement in relation to works not included in the AKKA/LAA-NL Agreement and asked their authors whether they wished to be excluded from the portal. One month after they were notified, no author had asked to be removed from the portal. It is possible that some of the clauses normally limiting access to e-publications will be lifted after the emergency, but there is little hope that the pre-emergency AKKA/LAA-NL agreement will significantly change in the future.

Similarly, the National Library of Sweden and Bonus Copyright Access made a deal to open up Swedish newspapers as a free digital service during the Covid-19 emergence, until 31st May 2020. [12]

In addition to publisher-librarian relations, another key determinant of the spectacular rise in popularity of digital platforms has been distance-learning in schools and universities. Distance-learning has generated positive externalities in libraries during the Covid-19 crisis but their effects may be hampered by two factors. The first is the digital divide and the distinction between the have and the have-nots, in terms of access to broadband, to equipment, to digital literacy skills, to quality technical support, to online content designed to enable and encourage self-sufficiency, participation and collaboration. [12] The second is the short-term effects of distance learning during the Covid-19 crisis; after all, it is not taken for granted that school children will use distance learning in school intensively or that universities will drop taught classes in the post-Covid 19 age.

Elements for a post-Covid-19 Agenda

The Covid-19 pandemic is reshaping the global business environment. Some digital business opportunities emerged in response to short-term requirements. The critical factors which will determine the consolidation of digital trends in libraries in the post-Covid-19 age, in terms of access to platforms and professional interchange, can be seen in two complementary frames of reference: a strictly cultural perspective and a broader societal vision.

The strictly cultural perspective concerns those organisations and enterprises in the music, performing arts and live performance which are now going through perilous times. This cultural domain has seldom enjoyed a high return on investments and the Covid-19 may deal a fatal blow to its life expectancy in a 2-meter based society. There are strong opinions that its survival will not be ensured without consistent injections of Augmented Reality (AR) and Virtual Reality (VR), which should not be add-on elements to the performance, but rather their indispensable complement.[13] In other words, music, performing arts and live performance need to create post-production events in order to attract audiences and remain sustainable.

Libraries are natural non-commercial distribution channels for this new cultural content through their platforms. The ecosystem built around a concert or a theatre production may be amplified through post-production events, which can be distributed in libraries at local level in order to help capture and retain the attention of the public. When they get a grip on live performances, ministries of culture and/or local cultural agencies may contemplate including the capillary distribution of library networks as an integral part of the live performances ecosystem and re-design the system of local aids, fiscal incentives, policy measures and other form of culture subsidies in a broader holistic perspective.

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[12] https://www.kb.se/samverkan-och-utveckling/nytt-fran-kb/nyheter-samverkan-och-utveckling/2020-04-08-svens-ka-dags-tid-ning-ar-till-gang-li-ga-for-alla-under-coro-nakrisen.html
[13] Among the many articles on the crisis of the live performance sector:
https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2020/04/augmented-reality-covid-19-positive-use/,
https://www.theguardian.com/culture/2020/apr/08/art-virtual-reality-coronavirus-vr and
https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Impact_of_the_2019%E2%80%9320_coronavirus_pandemic_on_the_arts_and_cultural_heritage.

In a broader sense, and much closer to the implementation of the 2030 Agenda on Sustainable Development, a society pivoting around social distancing may end up creating negative requirements leading to social exclusion. The Covid-19 pandemic has highlighted a new digital divide in people's opportunities to access distance-learning and, in general, in the way conditions for digital inclusion may be realised. In order to fill digital gaps, and still fulfil the traditional role of furthering social inclusion, digital literacy, cultural integration, non-formal and informal learning, libraries will have to look at the scale, the scope, the learning objectives and the virtual dimension of their activities.

During and after the Covid-19 crisis, library practices scaled up from the analogue to the digital and from the digital to the analogue, very often combining the two in order to meet library traditional objectives. They also enlarged and diversified the scope of their action through health resources aggregated in portals, mask production, or call centres palliating anxieties and increasing people's self-confidence. Libraries will also have to deal with basic requirements concerning access to equipment and digital literacy skills.

Distance-learning objectives were pursued in alliance with educational establishments stretching as far as possible into the virtual dimension. The implementation of AI tools in libraries and the evolution of existing tools into AI solutions may be a strong incentive to re-modulate the European library agenda towards sustainable development. To give an example, one can imagine how impactful it might be for the elderly, the sick, the marginalised, under Covid-19 restrictions, to be able to search relevant information or the library catalogue by voice command and listening to or accessing the selected content through their smart device, or how helpful the use of robots in libraries might be in a contactless two-meter society.

Within this broader societal perspective, a critical factor for libraries to shape technologies is the control of the data produced within the library ecosphere. Among the many challenges libraries will have to face in post-Covid-19 times – personnel security, space redistribution, sanitation of collections, financial hardship, new models of governance – data control is a tricky issue because it is unperceived and largely underestimated.

Plenty of data will be revolving around libraries often generated by non-library users through high tech / Artificial Intelligence tools. This data will affect libraries and orient their decision-making processes but libraries will have little or no possibility to exert control over them and re-use for policy-making. Within the general rules concerning privacy, a community-driven library - i.e. the library as an open space, where people move around, resources are exchanged and there is cross-fertilisation of ideas – there is a need to access data for policy-making purposes and to share this data with other entities.

Scaling up library activities by expanding their scope, enhancing learning objectives by emphasising the virtual dimension, data control – all this requires money. It would be a mistake to scale down R&D investments in the future library's agendas: the challenge is to integrate traditional "core" library activities with sustainable development and investment in digital resources and high tech / AI tools. That is why we should turn now to the financial aspects of the post-Covid-19 age.

4. Uncharted economic territory: review the library budget composition

As a result of the pandemic, the global economy is projected to contract sharply by –3 % in 2020, much worse than during the 2008–09 financial crisis.[14] Overall, the Euro area is expected to contract by – 7.5 % and the main EU economies marked down –7.0 % (Germany), –7.2 % (France), –9.1 % (Italy), and –8.0 % (Spain). Contracted economies bring about a higher level of unemployment. More unemployment generates less state income tax collection. Reduced fiscal revenues will not enable states and local finances to respond to local spending; as a knock on effect, library budgets will inevitably be affected.

Library budgets were severely strained by the long-term effects of the 2008-2009 financial crisis. In some European countries, libraries have not yet reached pre-2008 financial levels. If librarians do not start taking action, administrators and politicians will play a key role in the post-Covid-19 age with their usual glossary of restructuring, core investments, financial cuts and pruning non-essential library branches.

According to the answers provided in the EBLIDA Survey, library expenditure was already earmarked for the financial year 2020; therefore, no dramatic cuts should be expected. Accounting internal to libraries and library associations may be partially affected since most of their promotional activities – conferences, seminars and other events of national appeal – were cancelled in France, Germany, Italy, Luxembourg, Netherlands, Portugal and Spain, to mention a few countries.

In the Netherlands, an additional problem lies in the contracts signed by users who have already paid for their library card who could sue the library for not having met agreed commitments. This may result in loss of special subsidies, reduced income from fines and programs, workshops, lectures, and the like. In this context, the library association has come to an agreement in cooperation with the Association of Local Councils on subsidies to be continued knowing that libraries are not able to deliver all of the agreed results in 2020.

Financial hardship, however, will become obvious in 2021. We have seen how concerns about the future of libraries are starting to emerge in the Netherlands and also, to a certain extent, in Denmark. Concerns may turn into serious worries if one looks at the sources of library income and the composition of a library budget.

According to a recent EBLIDA Survey on library legislation and policy, in 12 of 22 countries, 75% to 100% of the library's income is generated at local level by city or regional authorities. Ministries of culture have a bigger importance only in small countries with a share of 76% to 100% of library budgets. It is widely known that library expenditure is flexible only to a certain extent. The budget allocated to building maintenance and personnel is largely inelastic and resources allocated to operations, in particular to the purchase of digital resources, cannot easily be re-adjusted to meet new financial requirements. The cost of e- copies in public libraries is very often made on the basis of long-term arrangements which are difficult to re-negotiate.

Therefore, downsizing library operations may end up with substantial budgetary cuts to the "social" library sector – activities with a strong social mission and oriented at specialised groups of people, very often implemented in collaboration with the "third sector". The "social", "third place" library, the library as meeting place – in other words, the library operating with and within the communities it refers to – have had the most stimulating developments in the public library sector in the last two decades (and, to a certain extent, also in the realm of research libraries through the "third mission" chapter). If this scenario comes to pass, the only option aimed to compensate this trend is to review the composition of library budgets.

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[14] International Monetary Fund. World Economic Outlook (april 2020), file://fs-srv-p100/users$/gvi010/Desktop/IMF.pdf.

Elements for a post-Covid-19 Agenda

When confronted with inevitable dilemmas in the post-Covid-19 age, the narrow scope of library budgets not only makes libraries vulnerable, it also increases the library's dependence on the objectives and imperatives of the authorities having earmarked the grants. Diversifying funding for libraries means to promote current activities within a different framework and to resort to financial support generated from other funders. The survey on library legislation and policy in Europe does not leave much room for hope: grants generated from ministries or departments other than cultural agencies very seldom exceed 25 % of library expenditure; grants from the private sector are practically non-existent; and the way European funding is distributed is largely unknown.

For years, public and research library policies have solely nestled within the framework of cultural and educational/research policies. The re-orientation of library activities towards a more "social" function - cultural integration and social inclusion, technological innovation and sustainable development - means to understand how libraries matter to their diverse communities. In this respect, the optimal conceptual framework for reviewing the composition of library budgets in relation to an extended concept of library, is the European 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. The best financial instrument to fund SDG projects in libraries are the European Structural and Investment Funds (ESIF) 2021-2027 - more than an alternative, the catalyst for a European library agenda in the post-Covid-19 age.

The use of ESI Funds is not unknown in libraries. The National Library of Lithuania used ESI Funds 2014-2020 as a trigger for the two library projects mentioned in this report: 3D printers used for digital literacy purposes and then converted for face mask production, and the transfer of library computers to school children and teachers during the quarantine. Bulgaria used ESI Funds for digital literacy projects undertaken in collaboration with Small and Medium Enterprises. The conceptual framework for ESIF investments in libraries should be scalable, serve regular as well as extraordinary purposes and work in ordinary as well as exceptional times (library computers used to equip libraries and, if the need arises, to engage individuals in distant-learning). In other words, it should be "structural".

Resorting to ESI Funds may require a different posture in library governance. It is what we are going to explore in the next new normal.

5. Library governance at central and local levels

During the Covid-19 crisis library governance has been implemented in three ways:

- Traditional activities on site in a restricted way in countries where libraries were accessible with limitations;
- Centralised activities promoted by library institutions (ministries / departments of culture, library associations, local management agencies, national libraries) replacing or complementing traditional library undertakings;
- A grassroots movement of professionals driven by passion and personal dedication who have aggregated information, adapted or tailored existing services, and promoted new initiatives.

Normally, library governance is implemented through institutional and informal settings. The first, in its different layers, gets sourced through formal financial acts, follows formal communication procedures and provides outcomes on the basis of the joint effort of traditional stakeholders operating in the library field. The second has a more informal nature and resorts to informal gatherings, serendipitous discoveries and the exchange of information and best practices. This informal library governance mainly, but not exclusively, culminates in the "liturgy" of library conferences at national level on a more or less regular basis.

During the Covid-19 crisis, we have seen the reinforcement of institutional settings, technically implemented under the form of web portals or centralised facilities with information distributed at national or regional level. Conversely, the informal setting has suffered from the cancellation or postponement of national library conferences. Resources and ideas left free were channelled into more spontaneous formations of new frames of reference and have been the cradle of new "liturgies" for exchanging experiences, pooling resources and encouraging best practices. In Sweden, the Facebook group "Libraries during Corona crises" includes some 3,000 members. In order to engage in and establish contact with librarians in isolation, for instance, Bibliosuisse staged open Zoom video-hours to fulfil their needs. Other library associations, like in Finland, organised webinars to support libraries and to facilitate the re-opening of libraries or further information about e-books and other digital media services.

In Ireland, Libraries Development, the national advisor and development agency for public libraries have provided a Covid-19 central portal which provides useful online resources for staff seeking health information, inspiration to create content for online cultural activities, practical operational information for libraries dealing Covid-19. Additional resources include links to videos and resources, continuing professional development opportunities, user guides, video tutorials, e-services provided by public libraries and e-training opportunities to over 500 courses and 200 languages.

In less populated countries, like Latvia, the Ministry of Culture, in co-operation with the National Library of Latvia, prepared the "recommendations for public libraries to provide services in emergency situations to limit the spread of the Covid-19 virus" consisting of several sections: dissemination of current information; information about remote library services; provision of on-site services; administrative issues. Academic, special and school libraries, too, were invited to use these recommendations in their work. The same Ministry of Culture launched the information campaign #Ēkultūra (#E-Culture), inviting the public to enjoy various cultural events online during the Covid-19 emergency situation, and to use available e-services in the field of culture without visiting the institutions on-site.

In the extraordinary context of the Covid-19 crisis, however, library governance also sprouted from an uncoordinated and spontaneous movement of professionals willing to offer solutions to unfulfilled needs and to cooperate with external agencies. In this context, library associations took the lead. In many countries, among which Poland and Italy, professional associations arranged the distribution of online training material for free during the crisis. In all countries, they attempted to regulate the uncontrolled spread of news about the virus with all kinds of information, from health to legal, from financial to technical

and educational, linked with access to professional resources. The concepts and practices set up by this spontaneous grassroots movement should be preserved and reinforced after the crisis and find a steady and sustained place in the post-Covid-19 agenda.

Elements for a post-Covid-19 Agenda

Exceptional circumstances may require new models of library governance and, at the same time, a reinforcement of existing ones. State policies have not always been relevant for public libraries which usually comply with local policies and fall within the remit of local authorities. During the Covid-19 crisis, the movement towards the centralisation of library activities has been compelling, in terms of health policies, the security of library personnel and other policies of general interest. Access to digital services, too, requires a more centralised library governance in terms of copyright clearance, standardisation of technical requirements and coordination of management tasks, including statistics.

At the same time, local and professional governance has also been a key determinant for the setting up of innovative services or the adaptation of the existing ones. These new forms of governance and the extension of the library missions may prove to be useful if European libraries identify themselves as structural components of a cohesion policy and wish to access EU Structural and Investment Funds.

Managing and implementing ESI Funds may be a highly complex and demanding task in terms of staff, overheads, and external costs for beneficiaries to comply with obligations resulting from those imposed by the ESIF regulations. In many cases, regulations of a national nature may add complexity and raise the administrative costs of a project. This is particularly true for small scale library projects which tend to be relatively more costly than financially larger programmes. Cooperative undertakings, very often featuring library activities, may imply a heavier administrative workload.

Part of the administrative complexity of ESIF lies in its decentralised delivery system. This means that programmes are managed at member state, regional and local level with a large number of relevant stakeholders involved in their implementation. Member states and regions are also responsible for setting up appropriate management and control systems to ensure that funds are used appropriately.

The process of accessing ESI Funds has recently been made much simpler for potential beneficiaries of EU financial support. The Cohesion Policy 2021-2027 implies 80 simplification measures which result in a reduced number of verifications and simplified reporting. The management of significant financial allocations to cultural projects – in Italy, almost half a billion Euro has been allocated for cultural heritage projects – and the complexity of reporting procedures has suggested solutions which may prove to be useful in implementing ESI-funded SDG projects in libraries. These solutions largely depend on the kind of partnership agreements made by the European Commission with each member state.

Several options may be envisaged. In one Dutch case, Utrecht public library resorted to the accounting services of a private company in order to manage the administrative burden of the project. In some Eastern European countries, the administration of ESI Funds is taken by national authorities (Ministries of Culture or Social Affairs, for instance), which act as ESIF beneficiaries and have management responsibilities. In other cases, a regional stakeholder sub-contracts the administration of the project to a local beneficiary which manages a wide range of local projects, including library projects. In Bulgaria, the Global Libraries Bulgaria Foundation has triggered and managed a number of ESI-funded projects. The Board of the Global Libraries Foundation includes actors at national and regional levels, as well as NGOs and library partners such as BLIA, the Bulgarian Library and Information Association.[15]

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[15] They are: Bulgarian Ministry of Culture, Ministry of Transport, Information Technology and Communications, National Association of Municipalities, "13 Centuries Bulgaria" National Endowment Fund, National Chitalishte Union and the Bulgarian Library and Information Association.

An extraordinary, and largely spontaneous, amount of human capital has been invested in the course of the Covid-19 crisis. If libraries wish not to disperse the largely spontaneous involvement of people, often on a voluntary basis, if they are keen to continue their effort in this unprecedented state of affairs in a well-connected two-meter society, in shaping technologies in new ways, and in re-adjusting the library budget composition, they may also need to review existing models of library governance.

6. Do not forget the climate change opportunity and threat

Surprisingly enough, 2020 will be remembered as a good year for the climate. Many factories and service companies stopped production and delivery, car usage was reduced and carbon emission was reduced almost everywhere. At the end of the year, anomalous data due to the effect of the Covid-19 crisis will provide distorted reports about climate change, with statistics only focused on temporary trends. It would be a disaster added to a disaster if those who deny climate change manipulate statistics released in 2020 to reduce or mitigate the number and the quality of measures put in place to fight pollution and the perverse effects of the climate change. The implementation of the 2030 Agenda on sustainable development has to go on, despite and perhaps because of the Covid-19 crisis.

Elements for a post-Covid-19 Agenda

There will be a huge amount of extraordinary decisions facing library policy makers in the post-Covid- 19 age. Time will be too short for thoughtful and thorough implementation; actions may have to be taken in a reckless and impulsive manner. Recovery has two options: either restoring the past state of affairs in libraries, or evolving into the future. It is all too human to dream of the good old times; keeping in mind what the future will or should look like is the best option – and there is always a case for climate-friendly solutions.

On 9th March 2020 the Technical Expert Group on sustainable finance established by the European Commission published a taxonomy regulation with criteria for screening economic activities that can make a substantial contribution to climate change mitigation or adaptation.[16] The taxonomy regulation stipulates that the following environmental objectives should be considered when evaluating how sustainable an economic activity is:

- climate change mitigation and adaptation;
- sustainable use and protection of water and marine resources;
- transition to a circular economy, including waste prevention and increasing the uptake of secondary raw materials;
- pollution prevention and control; and
- protection and restoration of biodiversity and ecosystems.

If this taxonomy works for finance, it should also work for libraries.

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[16] https://ec.europa.eu/info/publications/sustainable-finance-teg-taxonomy_en.

7. Risks and challenges in the library's near future: Preparing a post-Covid-19 European Library Agenda (a work in progress)

Introduction

Libraries were locked down in practically all European countries although in different ways and modes of implementation. Their services were re-designed during the Covid-19 Phase and may be re-oriented in the next months with new policies, working methods, revised budgets, and different postures in library governance.

In response to the UN Secretary general's Appeal, EBLIDA created a "Checklist for library associations and libraries in the face of Covid-19 crisis". The Checklist aimed to showcase the effort made by libraries in Europe to compensate the harmful effects of the Covid-19 outbreak on the society and individuals. It also aimed to indicate a way forward for libraries now entering the post-Covid-19 Phase.

The five new normals for European Library Agenda in the post-Covid-19 age are the following:

1. Exponential social distancing: a well-connected two-meter library;
2. Technologies are mutating and shaping libraries in new ways;
3. Uncharted economic territory: review the library budget composition;
4. Library governance at central and local levels;
5. Do not forget he climate change opportunity and threat.

These new normals entail both risks and opportunities. Departure from traditional patterns creates uncertainties in library directions, resources and personnel. Nevertheless, changes are also a chance to make a new start, especially if these chances are used to reverse practices with no rationale under changed circumstances and allow for better and more satisfactory services to the communities that libraries serve.

Risks

Short- and long-terms prospects are not easy to forecast. Solutions to the Covid-19 pandemic are not around the corner and it is difficult to determine whether new library configurations resulting from the introduction of public health measures will preserve the appeal of libraries with the general public and the special communities they refer to. The risks entailed by this new library "atlas", to use Lankes' expression,[17] should not be underestimated: it will not be easy to run, or to re-invent, a library in a generalised two-meter society where events are forbidden, 75 % of chairs are removed, services to customers have to comply with social distancing rules and library's outreach is restricted in many ways. And why is it that if library activities are considered "essential", "vital", "key" for society, they can be locked down when confronted with the acid test of the Covid-19?

It should also be remembered that libraries have lost the monopoly on free access to information services. They are challenged on two fronts. On the one hand, information service providers, like Google, distribute free and universal access to content based on advertising revenues and have taken up some of the traditional services libraries used to provide. On the other hand, aggregators, like Netflix, ensure massive distribution of content at low subscription costs. It is not yet known how long the journey to the discovery of the Covid-19 vaccine will take. In the longer term, with so many restrictions and big tech companies becoming even more powerful in the aftermath of the Covid 19,[18] to what extent will libraries restore their past state of affairs after the Covid-19 crisis?

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[17] R. David Lankes. Atlas of new librarianship. MIT Press, 2011.

[18] See for instance, Kara Swisher, The immunity of Tech Giants, New York Times, 1 May 2020, https://www.nytimes.com/2020/05/01/opinion/tech-companies-coronavirus.html. Netflix stock up 14% in 2020 at $375 despite COVID-19; is it sustainable?, Forbes, 2 April 2020.

Challenges and questions for self-reflection

- How can libraries work alongside the new normals described in the report?
- Will, in the post-Covid 19 age, the configuration of library spaces be different?
- Will your library continue to apply some of the best practices implemented during the crisis?
- Will you implement some of the practices implemented in other countries and described in this report?

Examples of Recommendations

A post-Covid 19 European library agenda should:

1) Work along the five new normals described in the report;

1. Exponential social distancing: a well-connected 2-meter library

Risks

A good crisis should never be wasted. Libraries will take stock of the activities implemented during the Covid-19 crisis; after all, they may be useful for the next emergency. One of the main activities provided by library associations and by libraries in general has consisted of delivering accurate information on all aspects of the crisis, of providing context and guiding people in their reflections and opinions, and of combating false news based on disinformation and misinformation. Nevertheless, in the absence of detailed statistics and reporting, will the library effort in providing a good perception of the pandemic risk fade away? How deeply rooted is the conviction that the principle of universal access to library collections and services is indivisible and that limitation should be restricted in time and scope?

Challenges and questions for self-reflection

Would you consider the way your libraries have engaged in health information and activities in your country during the Covid-19 crisis to be a community obligation?
Would you use it for advocacy purposes, or to combat misinformation and disinformation?
Have you thought how important library services based on voice (community calls and audiobooks) and making (3D printers) have been in the provision of library services during the Covid-19 crisis? Can you expect new library developments going in directions different from eye-based services?
Are the past two-, three-, four-year library development plans still functioning?
Has Covid-19 taught you new ways of boosting movements of people, resources, ideas, and equipment?
Will your libraries be flexible enough to shift from services to production, from analogue/extensive to digital/ intensive use of technologies to match the needs of the diverse community they serve?
Are you taking measures to prevent that social distancing rules may reinforce social exclusion? How do you plan to maintain social distancing and yet, bring people together?
Will your libraries still be a meeting place in spite of, or because of, the application of social distancing rules and increased levels of connectedness (live streaming, post-debate events, reporting and blogs)?

Examples of Recommendations

A post-Covid 19 European library agenda should:

2) Take stock of the activities undertaken in the health (information) field in order to reinforce health-oriented library policies (for instance, in personal well-being);

3) Assess the importance of library services performed during the Covid-19 crisis based on voice (community calls and audiobooks) and making (3D printers), and see to what extent they can successfully complement visual-based only services (consultation of websites, and visual tools);

4) Revise and, if possibly enhance, library development plans on the basis of the flow-in/flow-out experience matured during the Covid-19 crisis and link this experience to movements of people, resources, ideas, and equipment;

5) Neutralise the effect of the two-meter society on social exclusion by pursuing hybrid methods (physical and technological combined) of reaching the vulnerable and left-behind;

6) Place combatting fake news at the centre stage of their mission, as it has been the case during the Covid-19 crisis.

2. Technologies are mutating and shaping libraries in new ways

A substantial part of the "Preparing a European Library Agenda for the post-Covid-19 age" Report is dedicated to digital services and technologies. Digital services have allowed libraries to stay alive seamlessly providing access-to-information services, as the rise of the number of accesses to digital resources in public libraries clearly illustrate.

Risks

There is no taken-for-granted carry-over effect on digitised library services originated by the Covid-19. The boost experienced by library digital services during the crisis may not continue in an inertial way; practices will oscillate and, at the end of the day, private service information providers may take the golden share out of the Covid-19 crisis.

A further risk is that libraries are unable to decouple connectivity and technology. It is not because libraries are more digital that they always master the technologies they use. The risk of identifying schools and universities as the unique reference frames for library digital services may also have a negative impact; after all, it is not taken for granted that school children will use distant learning in school intensively and that universities will drop taught classes in the post-Covid 19 age. Therefore, the challenge is how to consolidate the rise of digital services provided by libraries during the Covid-19 crisis.

Challenges and questions for self-reflection

Should your libraries use data and experiences matured up during the Covid-19 crisis to design new models of e-copy distribution in libraries?
To what extent can you replicate/ adapt pre-Covid 19 physical ways of cooperating with people in the digital environment? Can you create a new quality of connectedness through smart use of technologies?
Will your libraries more convincingly join national digitalisation and artificial intelligence plans in order to capture cutting edge experiences matured up during the Covid-19 crisis and transform them into lasting activities? Will your libraries scale up library practices from the analogue to the digital and from the digital to the analogue, and combining the two in order to meet library traditional objectives?
Music, performing arts and live performance are under threat in the post-Covid 19 age and may need to create post-production events in order to attract audiences and be sustainable. Do you think libraries can collaborate in the distribution cycle of post-production events? Will your libraries request and influence ministries of culture and/or local cultural agencies to re-design the system of local aids, fiscal incentives, policy measures and other form of subsidies to culture in a broader holistic perspective?
Will your libraries continue pursuing distant-learning objectives in alliance with educational establishments, stretching out as far as possible the virtual dimension?
Will your libraries exert control over data and metadata affecting library operations and re-use them for policy-making and decision-making processes?

Examples of Recommendations

A post-Covid 19 European library agenda should:

7) Reinforce its focus on e-copies (an activity deliberately removed from the EU Directive on Copyght in the Digital Single Market) and use data and experiences matured up during the Covid-19 crisis to design new models of e-copy distribution in libraries, taking into account the economies and policies pursued both by information service providers (free and universal access to content based on advertisement revenues) and aggregators (massive distribution of content at low subscription costs);

8) Reinforce digital literacy activities for targeted categories of people in close link with general policies aimed to fill the digital divide, foster digital intelligence in libraries and stimulate multiple use of technologies (for instance, 3D printers used for cultural, educational and health policies);

9) Be active partners in national digitalisation and artificial intelligence plans through cutting edge experiences which may scale up library practices from the analogue to the digital and from the digital to the analogue, and combining the two in order to meet library traditional objectives;

10) Pursue distance-learning objectives in alliance with educational establishments, stretching out as far as possible the virtual dimension, and capitalise on the library digital offer in order to become hotspots for young people.

11) In compliance with privacy regulations, exert control over data and metadata affecting library operations and re-use them for policy-making and decision-making processes, in particular when they concern movements of people and resources and related library outcomes;

12) Be active actors in the distribution cycle of the post-production events likely to be built around music, performing arts and live performance as a result of the lethal effects of the Covid-19 crisis in this domain, and therefore request ministries of culture and/or local cultural department/agencies to re-design the system of local aids, fiscal incentives, policy measures and other form of subsidies to culture in a broader holistic perspective.

3. Uncharted economic territory: review the library budget baseline

Complex economic scenarios are looming on the horizon and the happy end is not guaranteed in the short term.

Risks

Money allocated to libraries is at stake. If librarians do not act, a major role will be played by administrators and politicians and financial cuts can be easily expected.

The main risk is that library managers keep a narrow eye on resources and only rely on traditional sources of funding, which will most likely be not the same as in the previous budgetary year. If politicians and financial administrators play the main role, the possible outcome may be an appeal to return to library "core" activities . i.e. provide books on loan. If this comes true, the whole scaffolding built in the last decades on the concept of libraries as "third" and/or "meeting place" may get lost. And together with it, the movement towards the diverse community libraries refer to, their focus on sustainable development goals and even the acquis they have matured up during the Covid-19 crisis.

A further risk is that R&D will be put in the library backseat and the gap with information service providers will widen in terms of positions and impact on the society. Will this be library's future?

Challenges and questions for self-reflection

Are your libraries ready to review the composition of their library budgets?

Are your libraries ready to find alternative sources of funding (with ministries/departments other than culture, private sources, European funding), in order to compensate shortcomings in their future budgets?
Are your libraries well prepared to designate themselves as "structurally" essential to the development of your community?
Will your libraries be able to manage possible financial resources generated from the European Structural and Investment Funds (ESIF) 2021-2027, or other funds, in order to minimize the possible impact of the Covid-19 crisis in library activities?
Will your libraries be able to use R&D, artificial intelligence and technological projects in order to access European Structural and Investment Funds 2021-2027 or alternative sources of funding?

Examples of Recommendations

A post-Covid 19 European library agenda should:

13) Be ready to review the composition of their library budgets and to find alternative sources of funding (with ministries/departments other than culture, private sources, European funding), in order to compensate for shortcomings in library's future budgets;
14) Think of themselves as "structurally" essential to the development of a country and, in this way, manage possible financial resources generated from the European Structural and Investment Funds (ESIF) 2021-2027, in order to minimize the possible impact of the Covid-19 crisis in library activities;
15) Promote R&D, artificial intelligence and technological projects in order to access European Structural and Investment Funds 2021-2027 and/or alternative sources of funding.

4. *Library governance at central and local levels*

There have been official initiatives aimed to show the vitality of the library field during the Covid-19 crisis; many initiatives were also generated from a spontaneous and largely uncoordinated grassroots movement of people, often on a voluntary basis.

Risks

The major risk is that all creative endeavours aimed to meet citizens' needs may not be intercepted within the rigid framework of traditional administrative patterns. If this comes true, the grasp on the public may fade away once the Covid-19 emergence is over.

Another risk is that traditional ways of promoting the library's activities – through conferences or sponsored events – may have a dwindling effect on the capacity of library associations to branch into the realm of library policy-making, both at state level - now turned towards health priorities and economic recovery - at local level – where they can yield less influence on public authorities.

Challenges and questions for self-reflection

How do your libraries deal with accelerated movements of reinforced library governance at central level – for instance, in the management of digital resources - and of grassroots creativity at local level as described in this report?
Will your local libraries ally with local governments to find additional budgets for library services at national and European level?
How do your libraries link the development of the public library to sustainable development activities at local level?
Are your public libraries aware of how European Structural and Investment Funds (ESIF) 2021-2027 are managed at local level and design appropriate models of library governance?

Examples of Recommendations

A post-Covid 19 European library agenda should:

16) Request local governments to find additional budget for library services at national and European level on the basis of the experience matured by libraries during the Covid-19 crisis;
17) Link the development of the public library to sustainable development activities at local and national level;
18) Adopt flexible forms of governance in order to manage European Structural and Investment Funds (ESIF) 2021-2027 in an appropriate way.

5. *Do not forget the climate change opportunity and threat.*

Risk

There is a risk that the economic post-Covid-19 Agenda will delay or dilute the 2030 European Agenda for Sustainable Development by continuing to fund polluting and unsustainable activities (high carbon emission companies and health-damaging industries) to the detriment of good-for-society activities addressing vulnerable people and the left-behind. The European Union is now preparing plans worth several thousand billion euros to save the private sector. Should this money be allocated with no conditionality? And how can libraries re-balance this heavy economic agenda through their focus on sustainable development?

Challenges and questions for self-reflection

How can your libraries be champions of sustainable development policies in their actions?
Can your libraries apply the taxonomy regulation established by the European Commission, for instance, in library procurement policies?

Examples of Recommendations

A post-Covid 19 European library agenda should:

19) Encourage libraries to be champions of sustainable development policies in all their action;
20) Apply the taxonomy regulation established by the European Commission in all library operations; for instance, in library procurement policies.

Appendix. EBLIDA Checklist of library associations and libraries in the face of the Covid-19 crisis

The following questions can help you decide about strategic decisions your library association / library can take in a time when emergency locks down libraries. We invite other EBLIDA Members to send their answers to the checklist to the email address below. Should you have a question on a specific item, please ask: g.vitiello@kb.nl.

We will try to link you to a colleague in Europe who has been working on the topic highlighted in the text.

1. Does your (national) library association release regular website information, newsletters and/or updates on library posture in your country during the Covid-19 crisis?
2. Does information provided by your library association provide legal advice (or links to legal information) on the role, rights and duties of the library as an employer?
3. Do you provide any information or links about Covid-19 that are relevant for libraries (e.g. lifespan of the virus on paper and plastic)?
4. Is your library, or library association, participating in the general strategy of controlling the diffusion of Covid-19?
5. Is the Covid-19 crisis impacting on the financial position of your (national) library association (for instance, cancelled conferences)?
6. Does your association collect information on how the crisis impacts the financial position of the libraries?
7. Is your association negotiating with (local/national) government bodies for support to libraries in order to deal with financial effects and loss of results?
8. Is your association, the (national) library or other library coordination centre releasing regular information about the digital offer and library services to the general public?
9. Are digital services freely accessible to everyone? If not, is someone (association, national library) negotiating with relevant commercial partners and government to remove barriers as a crisis measure?
10. Have libraries organised specific hours/ helpdesks for the public to help them access the digital services?
11. Is there – especially in e-books- a more extensive and targeted offer for specific groups like elderly citizens isolated at home, young people and children?
12. Is there a (national) platform, list-server or otherwise where libraries can post their best practices of services during the Covid-19 crisis?
13. Is there a (national) platform, list-server or otherwise where libraries exchange and (re-)use digital products (e.g. Youtube movies with storytelling)?
14. Is there an exchange on physical services by libraries? On how libraries try to stay relevant for their patrons within the safety measures that have to be taken?
15. Is there an exchange on services by libraries to schools and education?
16. Is there an exchange of how library staff is working from home, doing (online) learning and training or delivering services?
17. Is there a (national) platform, list-server or otherwise for online learning and training possibilities for library staff?
18. Is there a (national) platform, list-server or otherwise for other tasks performed by library staff (e.g. helping (online) in the community information centre or giving telephone calls to isolated elderly patrons/citizens)?
19. Is there any proposal you would like to make at European level?