



## Libraries – cultural peaks for information and inspiration. An EBLIDA Position Paper

“The European Union is not just an economic process or a trading power, it is already widely – and accurately – perceived as an unprecedented and successful social and cultural project”. (European Agenda for Culture in a globalizing World)

Libraries throughout Europe play an important role in this ‘social and cultural project’. The potential of European libraries for the development of a European Union characterized by values like respect for diversity and intercultural dialogue, freedom of expression, human dignity, solidarity and tolerance has not yet been fully exploited.

During recent decades, libraries have changed from being administrative institutions driven by printed materials to attractive and lively city landmarks, where the whole range of printed and virtual information is offered, where user orientation is the primary service and where free access to information is the basic principle. The 90,000 libraries that exist throughout Europe provoke ideas and creativity in individuals, and provide a stimulating and safe place to work and study. Professional staff support those individuals by providing training and guidance in using and exploiting IT and information services. Public libraries, academic libraries and national libraries are all part of the multi-cultural society and contributors to cultural industry, creating services and products in their own right. They form a Europe-wide, and global, network, providing the potential to inspire directly and to offer support for other cultural partners. Libraries stand for democratic, cultural, educational and social development in Europe.

Citizens of Europe need:

1. a Europe-wide library policy building on the funding and investment already put into libraries and making effective use of the existing infrastructure,
2. support for improving the European network of libraries,
3. sustainable funding and policy support for libraries at the EU level (whether through a new Culture programme, or its equivalent), and
4. harmonized copyright exceptions across EU member states,

Enabling libraries to fulfil their important and varied roles:

- **Facilitate creativity and access to information.** Libraries’ role in encouraging creativity and as a gateway to information is enhanced by the unexpected cross-over partnerships that they open up. Libraries are found exactly where they are needed – close to all groups of citizens, in the city centres, in suburbs; and they are open for everybody.
- **Promote creativity in education.** Lifelong learning, informal learning, intercultural dialogue, community building, language learning, IT skills, knowledge based society, information society – for all these, libraries are key partners.
- **Promote cultural activities and products to diverse audiences.** Libraries offer a platform – both virtual and physical – from which to promote cultural activities and products to diverse audiences thereby helping integration of immigrants, sharing of culture and intercultural dialogue. Being non-commercial institutions, libraries guarantee neutral, professional, user-oriented access to information, for all European citizens, organizations and businesses.



## Libraries – cultural peaks for information and inspiration. An EBLIDA Position Paper

- **Promote regional development.** Libraries promote regional development in remote areas by supporting innovation, businesses and also family life. They can help to maintain a region's identity and language, and on the other hand open it up to the global network through information and training.
- **Ensure cultural diversity in Europe and worldwide.** Many years before the adoption of the UNESCO Convention on the Protection and Promotion of the Diversity of Cultural Expressions in 2005, libraries already played an important role in the local communities of Europe and acted as "bridges" in a global multi-cultural society.
- **Support capacity-building in the cultural sector.** Finding the right information about sources of funding, the EU working market and regulations, helping to develop managerial competences, and getting access to further training and information sources are all ways in which libraries can contribute to capacity building. A widespread network of libraries across Europe already guarantees access to this information and the physical spaces of libraries also offer a place to meet, to consult and study, to be guided through and to explore the rich and varied array of information available.
- **Support creativity through copyright exceptions.** Creativity depends on access to creative content: creators build on their predecessors' work, whether this is within the creative industry, within society at large, or within education or research. The web sets the standard for access to content: we expect to have the information we need at our computer. When people travel to or work in a different part of Europe, they expect to have access from their computer to the same resources as they did at home. The most serious obstacle for realizing this vision is the geographical and national limitations of copyright regulations.
- **Promote access to Europe's rich and diverse cultural heritage.** Libraries are building the European library: Europeana, which gives access to library collections of cultural heritage from across Europe.
- **An existing network with potential to support many EU priorities.** The benefits libraries bring to Europe would be better recognized if best practise could be identified and supported and the European library network were strengthened. Building on the funding and investment already put into libraries would make effective use of the existing infrastructure to support EU priorities.

-----  
This position paper was produced by the EBLIDA Expert Group on Culture and Information Society (EGCIS) for EBLIDA, the European Bureau of Library, Information and Documentation Associations. EBLIDA is an independent umbrella association of national library, information, documentation and archive associations and institutions in Europe and through its members represents 90,000 individual libraries in all EU member states and in other European countries.