



Europe Needs its Libraries

Heritage and Knowledge for a Stronger EU

Europe is at a crossroads in its history. Too many of its citizens feel uncertain for its future, and have little knowledge of its past. Too many have been left behind by economic and technological change. To overcome, Europe must draw on its heritage, and make a strength out of its diversity. It must put all of its ideas and talents to work, leaving no-one behind. Libraries can help.

The European Year of Cultural Heritage offers a unique opportunity to celebrate the ideas and knowledge that shape us. Libraries are the guardians of Europe's documentary heritage, and the guarantors of access to it, from the oldest European book – a 7th century gospel held at the British Library – to the latest websites. Thanks in particular to digital libraries enabled by the Internet, it is possible to access this heritage, anywhere, for education, empowerment, or simply enjoyment.

Europe's governments and institutions must embed culture in the next Multiannual Financial Framework, ensuring that preservation and promotion of documentary cultural heritage, in analogue and digital form, is duly supported through both budgets and laws.

The power of information access more broadly – for research, for growth, for education, for health and wellbeing – is well recognised. It supports transparency, decision-making, and innovation. But for information to be a force for cohesion rather than division, it must be accessible for all.

Europe is on the verge of implementing the Marrakesh Treaty, which will help put an end to the market failures that leave people with print disabilities only able to access a fraction of published works. But there are other market failures. Those that lock away works which are not commercially available. Those that would restrict text and data mining of legally accessed materials to the richest. Those that make even minor, non-commercial uses of works for teaching subject to licensing. Those that have held back the growth of eLending because of an unwillingness to innovate. Those that would close down open access repositories by forcing them to follow the same rules as the biggest Internet platforms.

Europe must pass a copyright reform that is fit for the modern age, which supports the learners, creators and innovators of the future, not the market failures of the past. It must promote innovative, community-focused library services which enable all to benefit from access to information.

With equal possibility to access information must come equal possibility to use it. Learning cannot stop at the end of formal education, and the ability to use the Internet skilfully and critically, cannot be limited to some and not others. Both personal development, and democratic participation, depend on it.

Librarians, as information professionals, are trusted and skilled providers of these skills, with a clear mandate in many cases to serve those in their communities who need them most. They provide training to millions of adults every year, realising the potential of information to help people find work, develop skills, and engage in society. They are a vital part of any comprehensive life-long learning strategy.

Europe must recognise the potential of libraries as skills providers, notably concerning digital, media and information literacy, and ensure they participate fully and effectively in European social and regional development initiatives.

IFLA is the International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions. With 1400 members in 145 countries, it is the voice of the global library and information profession.

EBLIDA is the European Bureau of Library, Information and Documentation Associations is an independent umbrella organisation for library, information and archive organisations in Europe.

BLIA is the Bulgarian Library and Information Association, a non-governmental body of library and information specialists.