



Democracy, digitalisation and libraries

// Mikkel Christoffersen, EBLIDA director
Olomouc, Tuesday September 10th 2024



Mikkel

- EBLIDA director since February 1st 2024
- Seconded from The Digital Public Library of Denmark
- Chief negotiator for the public libraries' e-lending
- Former chair of NAPLE's e-lending working group
- Current EU commission expert on e-lending in TAIEX
- 10,5 years in Copenhagen Libraries
- 6 years in The Agency for Libraries under the Ministry for Culture: Open access, digitalisation etc.



EBLIDA

- European Bureau of Library, Information and Documentation Associations
- Incorporated in the Hague in 1992
- 129 members in 34 European countries
- Working for libraries at the European level; advocate, share knowledge and network
- www.eblida.org



EBLIDA **SAVE THE DATE** 7 - 9 APRIL 2025

Power and resilience: books and reading in the age of AI

33rd EBLIDA Council & Conference
Riga, Latvia

LATVIJAS NACIŅĀLĀ BIBLIOTĒKA

The poster features a dark blue background. At the top left is the EBLIDA logo. To its right, the text "SAVE THE DATE" is in large white letters, followed by "7 - 9 APRIL 2025" in smaller white letters. Below this, the theme "Power and resilience: books and reading in the age of AI" is written in orange. A central photograph shows a modern, white, angular building with a flagpole in front. To the right of the photo is a large orange circle containing the text "33rd EBLIDA Council & Conference Riga, Latvia" in white. At the bottom left, there is a logo for the Latvian National Library, and at the bottom right, the text "LATVIJAS NACIŅĀLĀ BIBLIOTĒKA" is written in white.



"Hi Alma!"





Agenda

- Introductions
- Democracy: An introduction for newbies
- What is the EU doing?
- So why digital?
- Three aspects of library work in the digital era
- Summing up
- Epilogue: ELAN



Democracy

- an introduction
for beginners



Libraries as hermit crabs

- Perhaps the internet hit libraries and traumatised them and they're still in shock 30+ years later
- The internet mean the loss of document and information monopoly
- And since then they been trying to find something else to do
- Especially around democracy, because democracy is a given anyway!

An old
thought I had





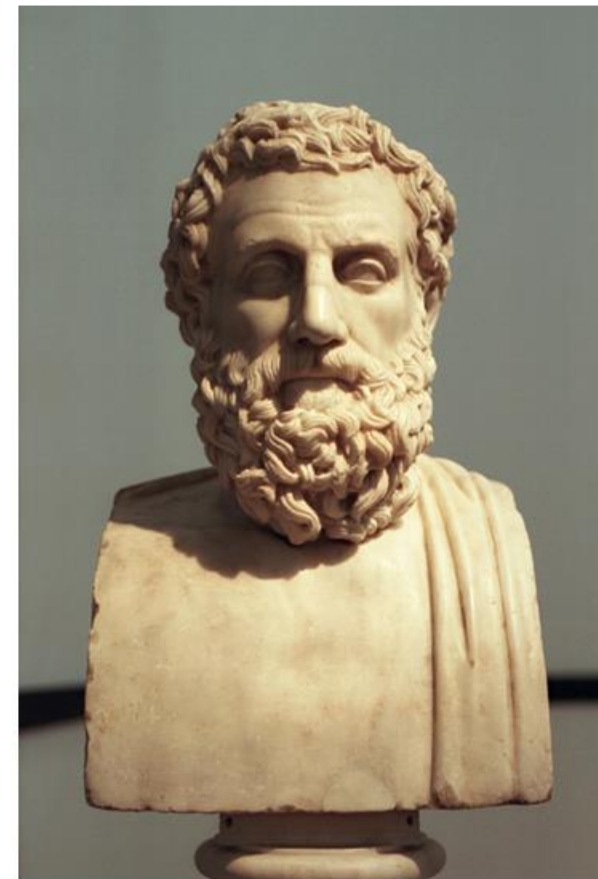
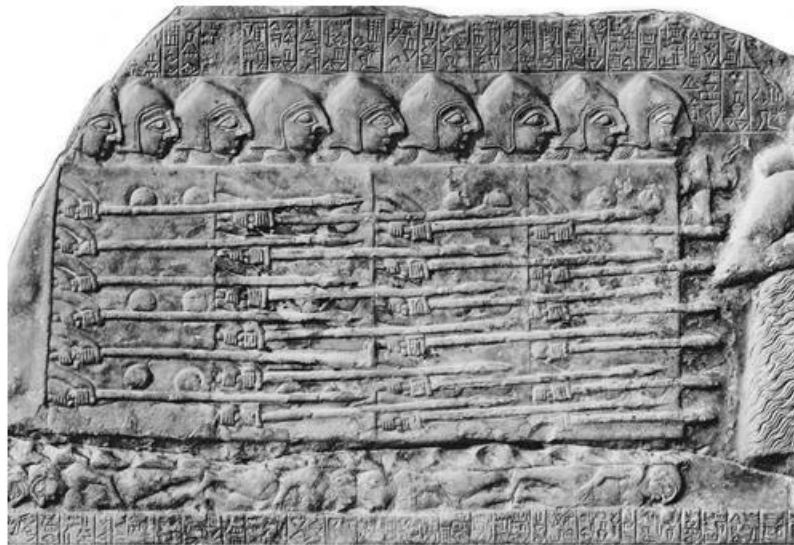
Starting over

- Ancient Greek democracy began about 500 BC and ran for less than 200 years
- Voting was restricted to men, free men, and "real" Athenians
- Democracy was direct – not representational
- The first democratic institutions
- From "demos" – people- and "kratos" – power
- Demos has a connotation of "the masses" and kratos of "raw power" -> unchecked raw power of the masses
- Philosophers like Plato and Aristotle were not fans
- Demos also means "we who live right here"



We who live here

- The hoplites
- The phalanx
- ... and one who fought at Marathon – an extreme sense of people and place



People and folk and democracy

- Two understandings of "people"
 - An administrative unit (demography)
 - A cultural trait (folk music) opposed to elitarian or other places
- Democracy in the administrative sense is easy
 - Except there are many versions of it and in some of them (UK, USA) you can win the election with fewer votes than your opponent
- But in order to make informed decisions you need:
 - Finding information
 - Access to information
 - The ability to decode information
- In order to make wise decisions you need:
 - Empathy
 - Exposure to culture
 - The opportunity to debate


The library!

... and the duality of libraries; Information and culture

Democratic debate

- Freedom of expression and debate are essential parts of democracy: Either to persuade other people or to highlight all aspects of an issue
- The democratic debate must be open and safe
- Issues must be argued and placed in context of the common good
- Democracy dies from lies, censorship and fake debate
- Hal Koch: Theologian, 1946, Denmark: Democracy is a way of life!

Democracy is actually pretty rare! Your family is not a democracy and neither is your work place. It's a little island in a big, stormy sea!

A black and white speech bubble containing text.

Democracy is a not just a form of government, it's a way of life and a mindset that needs time to grow



Danish Youth council

- The Danish Youth council is an umbrella organisation for all youth organisations in Denmark and they do an annual democracy report
- Activity: Broad spectrum of possibilities
 - Do you participate in ...
 - Do you talk with ...
 - Do you join ...
- They distinguish between **trust** and **self-confidence**
 - Do you trust the democratic institutions incl. professions?
 - Do you feel confident to engage in democratic debate?
- They measure background variables & barriers
- In 2024, 53% have low democratic self-confidence
- Well-educated say time is an issue
- Poorly educated say a feeling of lacking knowledge



Aarhus division

Aarhus Libraries have used the DUF commission report and come up with five dimensions of democracy to work with:

- Safe spaces
- Inclusion
- Facilitation
- Literacy
- Exposure to culture

Where can libraries play a part?

A diagram consisting of five red arrows pointing from the text 'Where can libraries play a part?' on the right towards the five dimensions of democracy listed on the left. The arrows originate from a single point on the right and fan out to point at each of the five list items.



Is the library a neutral place?

- No! The library is built on the *radical* notion that information, knowledge and culture should be available to all!
- What about places where that would be *unlawful*?
- What about *opinions* that are unlawful?

Quiz: a real case from a Baltic state:

Hi, I need your advice

Mkay

Hello [redacted] Library,

I am writing to ask why books by

[redacted]
t/EN/

[redacted] which is currently subject to sanctions by the European Union, are in the library's collection.

Given that sanctions are often imposed for serious reasons, I wonder how this fits with the library's responsibility to provide an ethical and responsible selection of materials. I would like to understand the library's reasoning for holding works by an author who is subject to international sanctions.

Are there specific guidelines or policies that the library follows in such cases? How do you assess whether books by sanctioned

Redigeret

But the content of these books - we see there some "Russian thinking", but nothing like calling anyone to have a war or conquer ukraine

Mkay, so he has no financial gains from you having his book in circulation

Public lending rights?

He hasn't asked any compensation from lending these books (we think that this would go under economical sanctions)

anyway, we have never taken an authors personality into an account when making decisions wether to buy a book or not (I think we would have 3 books in our collection then)

but we make choices

An actual Messenger Conversation: What would you answer?

Then you can A. Remove the books, because the author is sanctioned and you don't want to spread his thinking. B. Keep the book referring to freedom of expressions, that they express a Russian viewpoint without calling for war and that that is among other things what separates you from Russia; that you don't suppress other views even though you don't agree

As long as make an explicit, well thought out decision



**What is the EU
doing?**

★★★★★ Rate this publication

Culture and democracy, the evidence

How citizens' participation in cultural activities enhances civic engagement, democracy and social cohesion : lessons from international research

This report analyses the concrete link between democracy and culture. It maps out how citizens who participate in cultural activities are much more likely to engage in civic and democratic life. Inequalities persist throughout the EU when it comes to citizens' participation in cultural activities, with a clear knock-on impact on democratic participation. And this is just another reason why it is crucial that cultural activities are inclusive and affordable. Even more so as we see that investing in cultural participation can also support a range of other societal objectives – for example, in fields such as health, education and social inclusion. This report, and addressing the issues identified within it, is part of the work the European Commission is doing to strengthen democracy, to promote an inclusive and engaged society and to support the sustainability of the cultural sector. In the Work Plan for Culture 2023-2026, we put a specific focus on the link between culture and democracy, and we want to bring policy makers and stakeholders together to jointly work towards the concept of cultural citizenship in the EU. This report is part of the process.

^ View less

▼ How to cite

↓ Download and languages

YOU MAY ALSO LIKE

EU funding programmes 2021-2027 in culture, media, education, youth and sports
First lessons, challenges and future perspectives : citizens, equality, rights and values (CERV) : Strand 3 "Citizens'..

This study provides an analysis of Strand 3, "Citizens' engagement and participation", of the Citizens, Equality, Rights...

Published: 2023

How culture and the arts can promote intercultural dialogue in the context of the migratory and refugee crisis
Executive summary of report by working group of EU Member States experts on..

In the context of the migratory and refugee crisis, the ways culture and the arts can help to bring in...





Work Plan for Culture 2023-26

7.12.2022

EN

Official Journal of the European Union

C 466/1

I

(Resolutions, recommendations and opinions)

RESOLUTIONS

COUNCIL

COUNCIL RESOLUTION ON THE EU WORK PLAN FOR CULTURE 2023–2026

(2022/C 466/01)



THE COUNCIL OF THE EUROPEAN UNION,

ACKNOWLEDGING

- that culture is an infinite source of inspiration and innovation, a reflection of humanity and aesthetics, our shared language and heritage, and a fundamental part of our identities and communities;
- the role of culture as an integral element in sustainable development and positive societal transformation;
- the growing significance of EU values, including freedom of expression and creation;
- the contribution of the cultural and creative sectors to employment and the EU economy;
- the role of culture in the EU's external relations and cooperation with other international bodies, especially the Council of Europe and UNESCO;
- the Council's previous work plans for culture and the results achieved;

IN THE LIGHT OF

- the ongoing Russian war against Ukraine, an EU candidate country, which constitutes a flagrant violation of international law and an attack on human rights and fundamental EU values and principles, which threatens to destroy the rich cultural life and heritage of Ukraine, and which has triggered the largest displacement of citizens in Europe since the Second World War and an alarming energy crisis;
- the serious impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on society as a whole, on each individual and on many economic sectors, especially the cultural and creative sectors, many of which continue to suffer from its consequences;
- the accelerating pace of climate change, the loss of biodiversity and the consequent need to step up the sustainability transformation, which culture can expedite by awareness-raising, creativity and innovation;
- ongoing processes such as digitalisation and persistent challenges such as the specific working conditions of artists, creators and other cultural professionals;

Fase 1 & 2

- a) Artists and cultural professionals: empowering the cultural and creative sectors
- b) Culture for the people: enhancing cultural participation and the role of culture in society
- c) Culture for the planet: unleashing the power of culture
- d) Culture for co-creative partnerships: strengthening the cultural dimension of EU external relations

— **Building bridges: strengthen the multiple roles of libraries as gateways to and transmitters of cultural works, skills and European values**

Working methods: OMC group; workshops; conference.

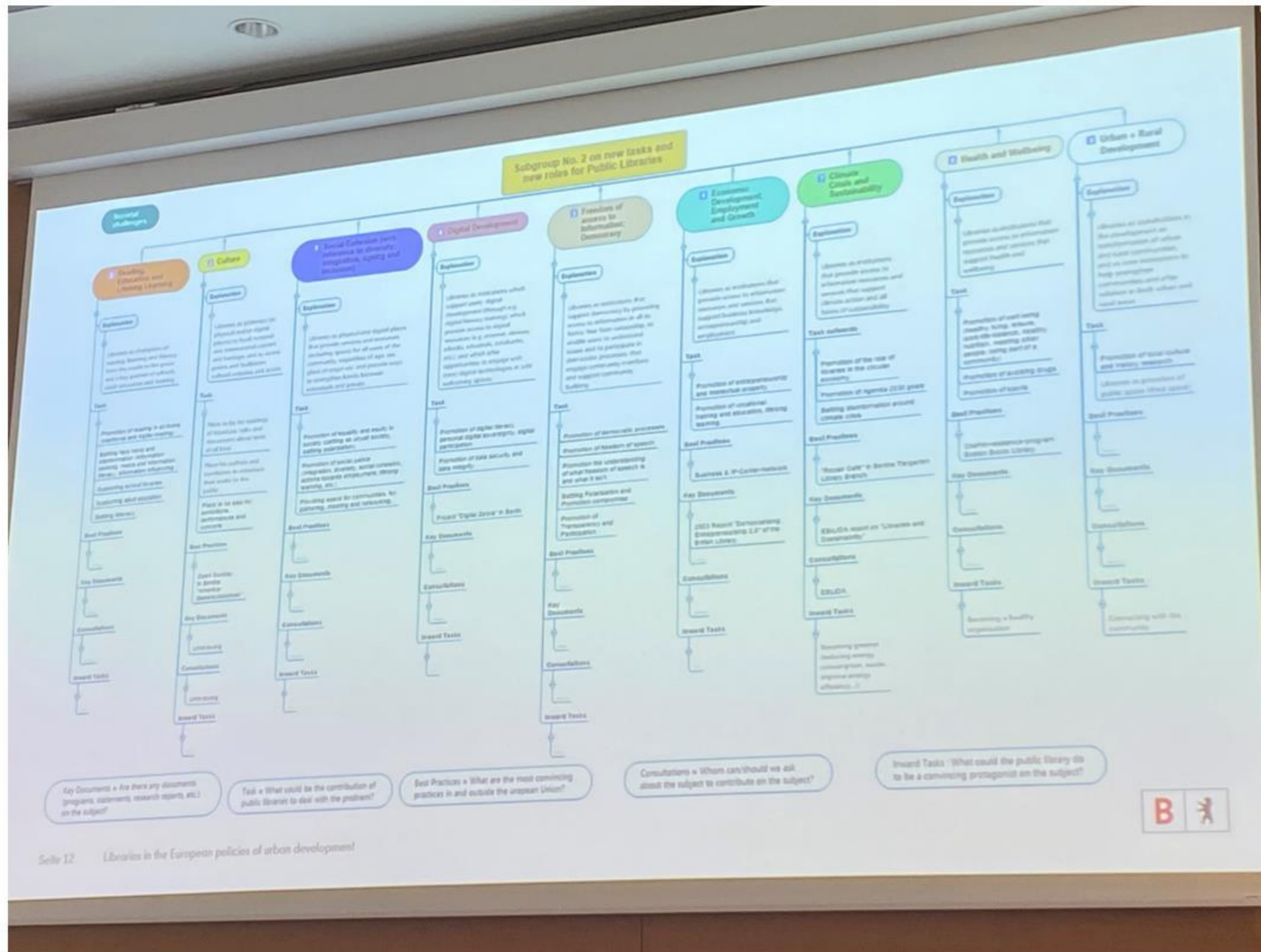
Rationale: Libraries play a key role in Europe's democratic, social, cultural, and educational landscape at all levels. They make a significant contribution to building democracy, citizen engagement and public-participation activities across the EU, including in rural and remote areas, including the outermost regions. They welcome diverse groups, develop programmes and activities reflecting current societal challenges, and provide access to pluralist and reliable information and diverse cultural content in safe and accessible environments. They are essential gateways to local and indigenous data, knowledge, research and culture. Target outputs: Starting a comprehensive debate and explore fields for promoting and strengthening libraries; identifying different dimensions and areas with potential, and exploring funding lines under EU programmes; bringing together policy makers and library professionals; explore possibilities for training and further activities for professionals.

The mandate

The OMC Group will focus on how to promote and strengthen the multiple role and visibility of libraries as key facilitators for democracy-building and citizen engagement and as access points and transmitters of cultural works, skills and European values, considering the evolution of those roles in the aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic and in the face of the energy crisis and the Russian war against Ukraine.

The group will explore and identify the different dimensions and areas in which public libraries can play a societal role. For instance:

- the cultural and social dimension of libraries as a community hub or third place;
- democracy building, citizen engagement in libraries, and fighting disinformation;
- sustainable development (education and learning, inclusion, participation, resilience of community and environmental issues);
- digital, media, green and other forms of literacies;
- promoting literacy and reading including promoting literature from other countries.





So why digital?



Short answer



LOCAL NEWS

Study: 10 Percent Of People Admit To Checking Phone During Sex

CBS NEWS PHILADELPHIA

June 7, 2018 / 4:27 PM EDT / CBS Philadelphia



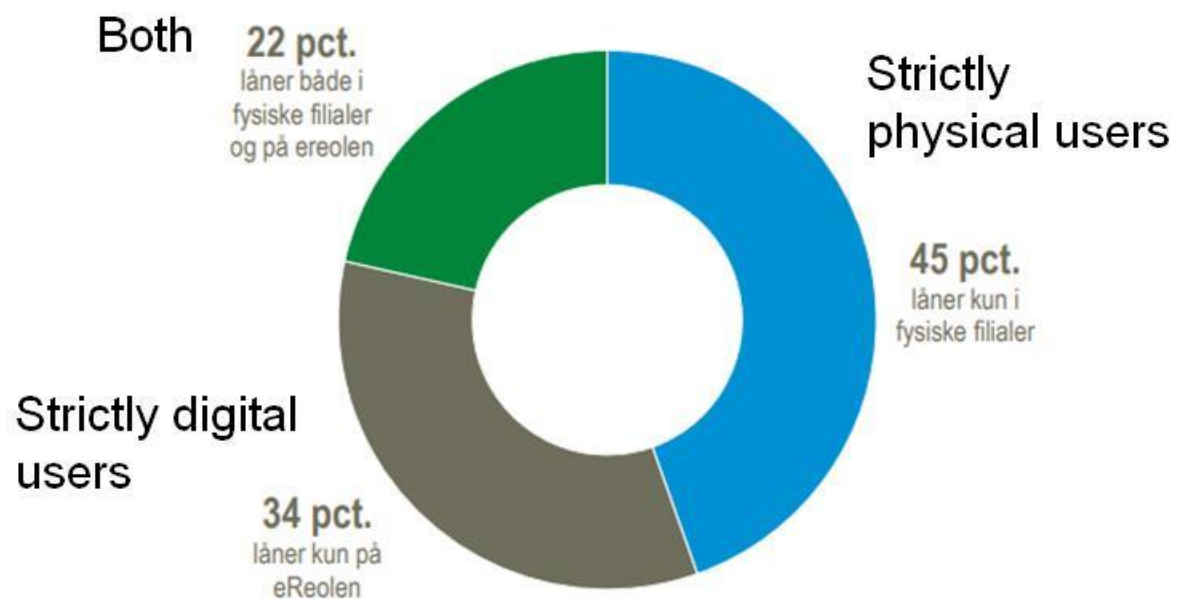
Singapore

The digital natives



Physical and digital users in Denmark

Figur 1 Lånere fordelt på adgangsveje. 2022



Anm.: Grundet afrundinger summerer tallene i figuren ikke til 100.

Kilde. Den individbaserede biblioteksstatistik



Three aspects of library work in the digital era

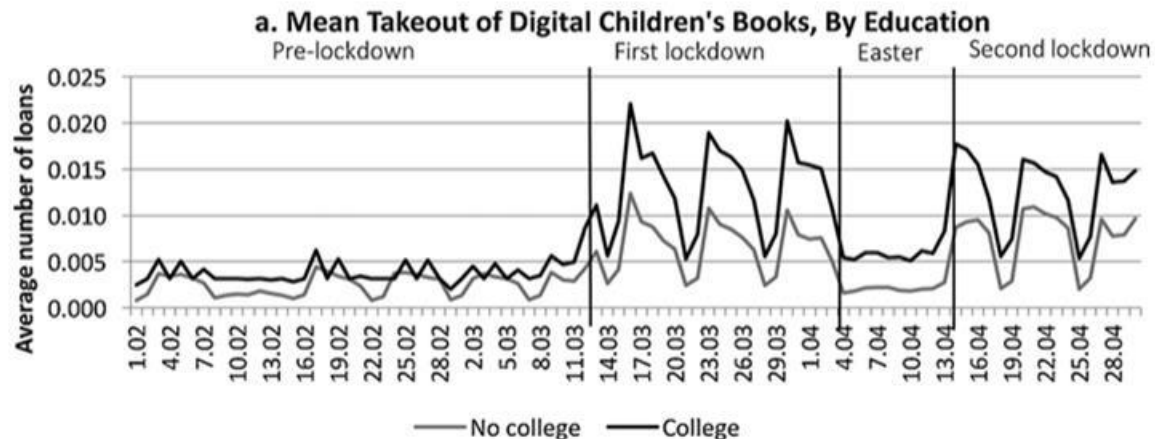


Three aspects of library work in the digital era

- Promotion
- Access
- Media literacy

Promotion

- Two kinds
 - Digital promotion of reading
 - Promotion of digital reading
- NB: The return to analogue is also not good!
- The digital divide; age, socio-economics ...*
- Once again: Trust and self-confidence
- Digital is both a galaxy and a huge black hole



Access

- There's an inexcusable market failure for digital literature!
- Denmark has now 1,6 digital loans per citizen. Greece has 0,002. Portugal has 0.
- Nowhere in the EU would we accept such a difference
- This aggravates the digital divide and it hurts national literatures and culture, because commercial streaming services are very Anglo-American
- It leaves kids without reading alternatives on their screens

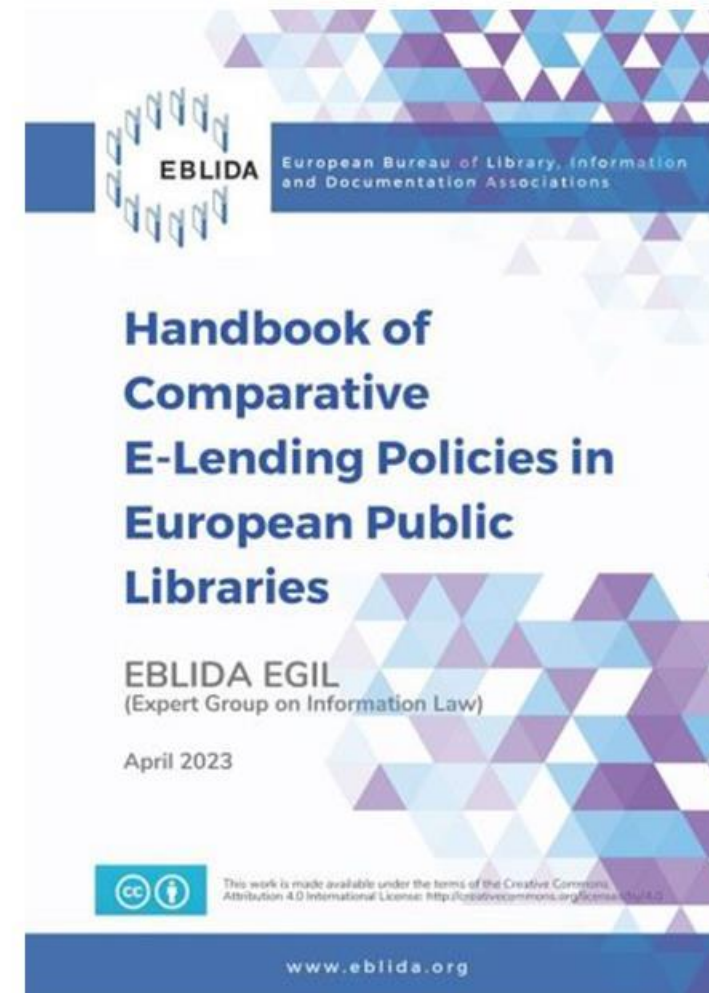


Table 1: E-lending per inhabitant and levels of technological literacy (Eurostat data, 2020)

Country	(1) E-lending Transactions	Population	E-lending/ inhabitant	Book loans (2019) (2)	Lending / Inhabitant	Technological literacy (% of population) (3)
Belgium (Flem, 2021)	378 000	6 653 062	0.05	3 726 663	0.5	54
Denmark (2021)	7 422 102	5 828 022	1.2	24,4 MI	4.2	70
Finland (2021)	1 509 599	5 560 384	0.27	76070,066	13.68	79
France (2020)	1 MI	65 526 762	0.01	280 MI	4.2	57
Germany (2020)	30,2 MI	84 254 408	0.35	274 MI	3.2	70
Greece (2020)	23 919	10 353 203	0.002	?	?	51
Ireland (2021)	2 184 087	5 123 536	0.42	10,753,548	2.1	70
Italy (2021)	1 474 013	60 461 826	0.02	45,4 MI	0.7	42
Latvia (2021)	39 346	1 866 934	0.02	11 MI	5.8	43
Netherlands (2021)	7,5 MI	17 754 400	0.42	63,2 MI	3.5	79
Norway (2021)	1 645 735	5 495 680	0.29	12,2 MI	2.2	83
Romania (2021)	NA	19 012 351	NA	34,2 MI	1.7	31
Spain (2020)	3 746 853	46 786 580	0.08	51 MI	1.1	57
Canada (2017) (4)	9,8 MI	38 353 949	0.2	523 MI	13.6	84 (5)
US (2017) (4)	218,3 MI	331 449 281	0.65	2 053 MI	6.1	84 (6)

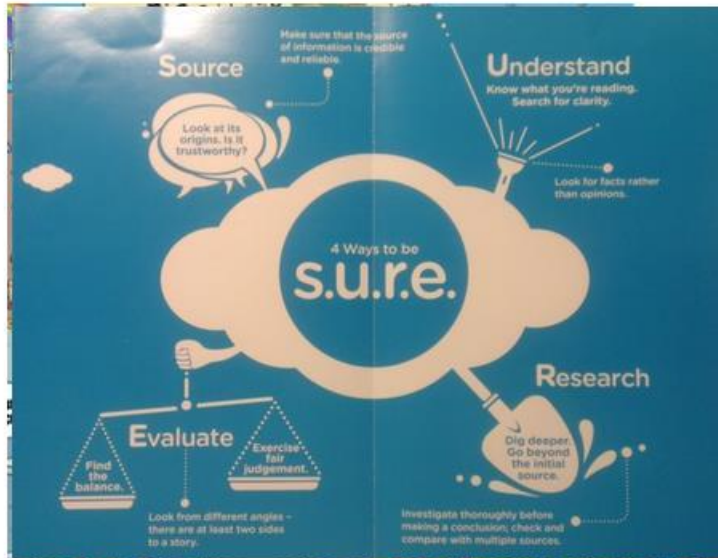
Media literacy: Case fake news

- What is the purpose of fake news?
- It's only partly to make you believe some stupid thing
- It's mostly to make you disbelieve everything!
 - Attacking your trust
 - Attacking your self-confidence
- Steve Bannon (Trump advisor): "Flood the zone with shit"





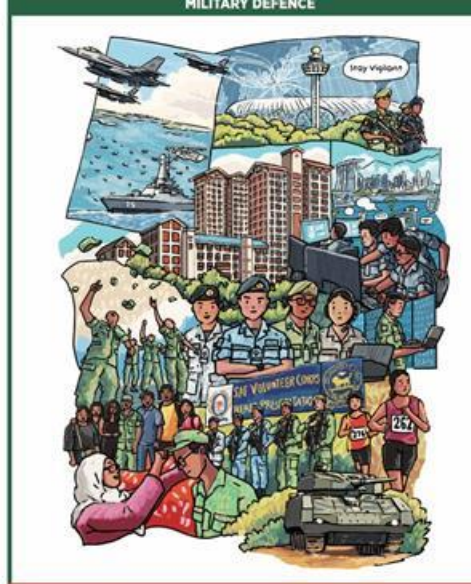
Media literacy: Case fake news



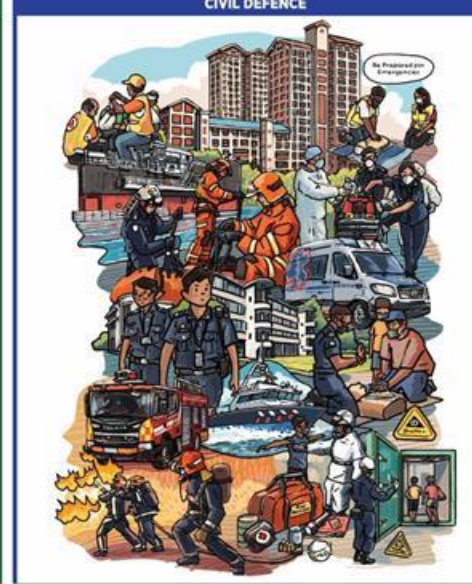
TOTAL DEFENCE Our unity is our strength. Together we keep Singapore strong

There are many ways to put Total Defence into action. Can you spot these 9 and more? aldefence.sg

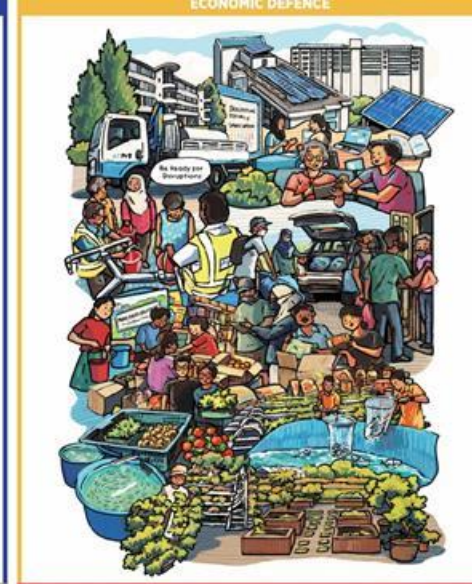
@WeAreTotalDefence



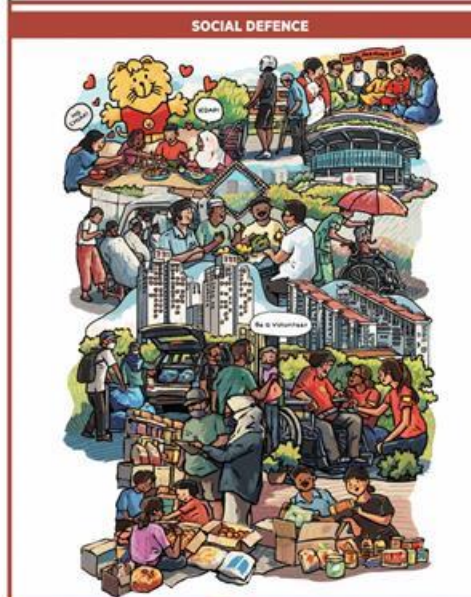
MILITARY DEFENCE



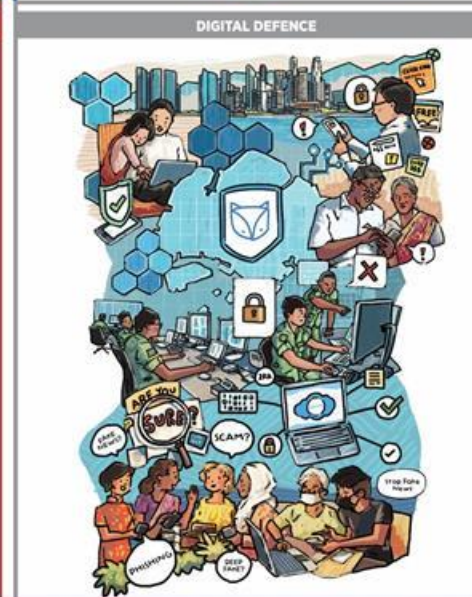
CIVIL DEFENCE



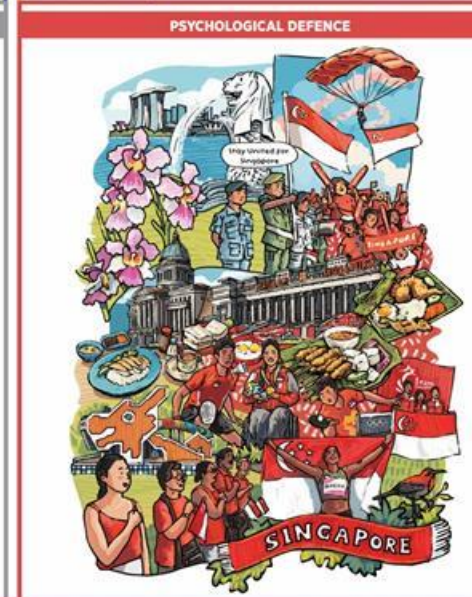
ECONOMIC DEFENCE



SOCIAL DEFENCE



DIGITAL DEFENCE



PSYCHOLOGICAL DEFENCE



TOGETHER
WE KEEP SINGAPORE STRONG!
Let's play our part and be ready for crises and disruptions



@wearetot defence
go.gov.sg/td40



Carsten Reisinger/Shutterstock @watchTENET/YouTube (Licensed)





Summing up

Summing up

- Democracy is rare historically and presently
- It's under pressure!
- Democracy is a way of life and it's tied to a sense of place and people and community
- It relies on active participation which requires trust and self-confidence
- Libraries are ideally suited to work for democracy by working for safe spaces, inclusion, facilitation, literacy and exposure to culture
- Libraries *must* develop their digital side, because digitalisation has just begun and the new generations are fully digital; start with promotion, access and media literacy
- The EU is supporting libraries' role like never before and it's up to us to seize the moment



Epilogue: ELAN



EBLIDA is close to major EU funding

- A Creative Europe Network grant
- -> EBLIDA will become the network of networks in the area of culture (mostly)
- 4 years of building capacity in European library associations -> to help libraries -> to support patrons
- Work packages on librarians' competencies, audience development, democracy building, sustainability, the digital transformation and more
- ... and we owe it all to your support!

THANK YOU!



**Questions, comments, threats,
love letters to:**

Mikkel.christoffersen@eblida.org

+45 2049 1885

www.eblida.org