THINK THE UNTHINKABLE. A POST-COVID-19 EUROPEAN LIBRARY AGENDA MEETING SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS TO BE FUNDED THROUGH EUROPEAN STRUCTURAL AND INVESTMENT FUNDS 2021-2027

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■ The author expands upon the "new normals" which will be part of the ordinary library work after the Covid-19 crisis: more socially inclusive libraries, more digital libraries. This will require resorting to new sources of funding - for instance, European Structural and Investment Funds (ESIF) 2021-2027 - and new forms of library governance. He points to the EBLIDA library strategy which is linked with the implementation of Sustainable Development Goals in European libraries to be funded through ESIF 2021-2027. This strategy is fully described in the "Think The Unthinkable" report, available in four versions on the EBLIDA with its translations in French, Italian and Dutch (in preparation).

■ L'auteur développe la "nouvelle normalité" qui fera partie du travail ordinaire des bibliothèques après la crise de Covid-19 : plus de bibliothèques socialement inclusives, plus de bibliothèques numériques. Il faudra pour cela recourir à de nouvelles sources de financement - par exemple, les Fonds structurels et d'investissement européens (ESIF) 2021-2027 - et à de nouvelles formes de gouvernance des bibliothèques. Il souligne la stratégie des bibliothèques de l'EBLIDA qui est liée à la mise en œuvre des objectifs de développement durable dans les bibliothèques européennes qui seront financées par l'ESIF 2021-2027. Cette stratégie est décrite en détail dans le rapport "Think The Unthinkable", disponible en quatre versions sur l'EBLIDA avec ses traductions en français, italien et néerlandais (en préparation).

■ De auteur spreekt over het "nieuwe normaal" dat na de Covid-19-crisis deel zal uitmaken van het gewone bibliotheekwerk: meer sociaal-integratieve bibliotheken, meer digitale bibliotheken. Hiervoor zal een beroep moeten worden gedaan op nieuwe financieringsbronnen - bijvoorbeeld de Europese structuur- en investeringsfondsen (ESIF) 2021-2027 - en op nieuwe vormen van bibliotheekbeheer. Hij wijst op de EBLIDA-bibliotheekstrategie die verband houdt met de tenuitvoerlegging van de doelstellingen voor duurzame ontwikkeling in Europese bibliotheken die via ESIF 2021-2027 zullen worden gefinancierd. Deze strategie wordt volledig beschreven in het "Think The Unthinkable" rapport, dat in vier versies op de EBLIDA beschikbaar is met de vertalingen ervan in het Frans, Italiaans en Nederlands (in voorbereiding).

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 Second 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 article, the United States, Brazil, 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."[2] 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.*"[3] 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 has set up Next Generation EU, 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. Nevertheless, they were able to continue to provide services, re-designing them during the acute Covid-19 phase, very often

resorting to out-of-the-box solutions. Homeworking is being heavily practiced and, in the aftermath of the lockdown, access to digital resources has risen spectacularly. Will these new services, which were set up in response to short-term requirements, continue after the Covid-19 crisis?

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. What follows are the results of a survey 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]

These are the "five new normals" EBLIDA suggests for a European library agenda in the post-Covid-19 age:
•   Exponential social distancing: a well-connected two-meter library;
•   Technologies are mutating and shaping libraries in new ways;
•   Uncharted economic territory: review the library budget composition;
•   Library governance at central and local levels;
•   Do not forget the climate change opportunity and threat.

The Report *A European Library Agenda in the post-Covid 19 age*[5] 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.

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

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*".[6] In the panels, boards and written notes, which are displayed in libraries, 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.[7]

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 Organization; 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 the United Kingdom, Italy, France 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.[8] 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 mainly 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.[9]

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, libraries use official postal services to deliver items. When books are returned, they are kept untouched for 72 hours and only afterwards are re-shelved. In spite of occasional or confused prescriptions, this procedure has been followed by many other libraries.[10]

With the exceptions of perhaps Sweden, 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 article, 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 to. 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, as we are going to see in the next paragraph.

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 Organization. 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 service 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.

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.[11] 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.[12]

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 3D 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 or have already stopped – 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.

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;[13]
- In Italian libraries, e-book circulation increased by 104 % from 24 February to 24 March (against an average annual increase of 20 %);[14]
- 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;
- 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. [15]

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.

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.[16] 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 for this trend is to review the composition of library budgets.

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" included some 3,000 members in April 2020. 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.

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 climate change. The implementation of the 2030 Agenda on sustainable development has to go on, despite and perhaps because of the Covid-19 crisis.

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.

Think the unthinkable and the EBLIDA 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 are 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.

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 Artificial Intelligence (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 / AI 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.

Diversifying funding for libraries means to promote current activities within a different framework and to resort to financial support generated from other funders. 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 a previous paragraph: 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. 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 access to digital services requiring 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.

The Report *Think the unthinkable - A post Covid-19 European Library Agenda meeting Sustainable Development Goals and funded through the European Structural and Investment Funds (2021-2027)*[17]aggregates three reports already released by the EBLIDA European Sustainability House in the first half of 2020 and available on the EBLIDA website:
- *A European library agenda for the post-Covid 19 age*;
- *European Structural and Investment Funds 2021-2027: Funding opportunities for libraries*, and
- *Sustainable Development Goals and libraries. First European Report*.[18]

The three combined reports will also update the "EBLIDA Matrix", now available on the EBLIDA website, which lists 1: A selection of EU SDG-related programmes likely to be relevant for libraries; 2: SDG-oriented Library policies; 3: Opportunities for library Funding within the European Structural and Investment Funds 2021-2027; 4: Main indicators normally used at EU level to evaluate activities corresponding to the SDGs; 5: Library Indicators (work in progress).[19]

The reason for the *Think the unthinkable* Report is easy to understand. We are living hard times with little certitudes ahead of us – first and foremost: what will be the future of libraries after Covid-19 crisis? How will they overcome the financial storm which is now affecting all European societies, to a bigger or lesser extent? And will the Covid-19 outbreak imply a further divide in library development among European states, and among regions in the same State?

It is very likely that the resilience and eventual survival of European libraries will not be left to the fittest, but to those libraries which will be able to innovate, cooperate, learn from others and open to non-library actors. This line of action can highly benefit from the progress of the Agenda 2030 in libraries in a Europe that is smarter, greener, more connected, more social and closer-to-its-citizens - the five objectives of the 2021-2027 European Structural and Investment Funds (ESIF).

If libraries expect to play a role in ESIF, in Europe, and more in general in the 2020-2030 decade, they have to focus on the social, creative, innovative, technological and participative nature of their cultural action. Libraries and sustainable development, and sustainable development in libraries funded by ESIF – this is the realistic strategy libraries could and should embrace, also in the light of the uncertain prospects dictated by post-Covid.

The report "Think the unthinkable" is certainly not a book of dreams; it is a list of best practices, an agenda for European libraries, and a practical Guide to European Structural and Investment Funds 2021-2027. And it is a way for EBLIDA to show how the unthinkable may come true in European libraries.

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Notes

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2. European Court of Human Rights. Derogation in time of emergency (April 2020). <https://www.echr.coe.int/Documents/FS_Derogation_ENG.pdf>.

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