**Value Co-creation and Social Innovation for a new Generation of European Libraries**

# Press Release

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## LibrarIN Releases Fourth Policy Brief: Next Generation Libraries: Bottom-Up, People-First and Purpose-Driven

The LibrarIN project proudly presents its fourth policy brief, *Next Generation Libraries: Bottom-Up, People-First and Purpose-Driven*, authored by experts from UNU-MERIT, Roskilde University, the University of Lille, The Lisbon Council, and Athens Technology Center. The new brief explores how European libraries can evolve into participatory, innovation-driven hubs that place people and communities at the centre of their mission.

Building on insights from the LibrarIN large-scale survey and recent case studies, the publication offers compelling quantitative and qualitative evidence on how collaboration, co-creation, and skills development can transform libraries into dynamic "living labs" that drive social innovation and strengthen democracy.

**Libraries at the Frontline of Democracy**
As highlighted during the 2025 LibrarIN High-Level Policy Roundtable, European libraries are on the frontline of a cultural battle for democracy—facing the dual challenges of misinformation and social fragmentation. The policy brief underscores that while libraries are increasingly recognised as democratic, educational, and cultural institutions, the traditional top-down service model is no longer sufficient to address the fast-changing needs of society.

Survey evidence from over 900 European libraries reveals that co-creation—collaboration with users and stakeholders to design and implement innovations—is still underused. Only 24% of public library innovations and a similar share of academic ones involve users directly, despite co-creation significantly improving innovation effectiveness.

**The Case for a People-First Approach**

The brief identifies key enablers of successful co-creation:

- Innovation-related staff skills (including digital literacy, design thinking, and AI)
- Dedicated external funding for innovation projects
- Institutional experience with diverse innovation activities

It also highlights gaps between small and large libraries, showing that smaller institutions face limited access to innovation skills and funding, which restricts their ability to co-create transformative services.

Case studies of "living lab" libraries demonstrate that when libraries balance top-down leadership with bottom-up participation, they can become catalysts for social entrepreneurship and trusted "third places" that foster civic dialogue and community engagement.

**Nine Policy Recommendations for the Next Generation of Libraries**

The authors propose a comprehensive action plan for policymakers and practitioners to transform libraries into bottom-up, purpose-driven institutions. Key recommendations include:

1. Raising awareness of the value of co-creation.
2. Supporting skills development and dedicated innovation funding.
3. Addressing systemic resource constraints.
4. Investing in a modern skills agenda that combines technical and relational competencies.
5. Rethinking funding models to foster innovation
6. Addresing the gap between capabilities in small and large libraries.
7. Tailoring policy approaches to local contexts.
8. Cultivating strategic and balanced leadership.
9. Promoting Libraries as Essential Social Infrastructure.

**From Knowledge Access to Knowledge Creation**

By fostering co-creation and empowering library professionals, the brief envisions libraries not only as gateways to information but as *engines of knowledge creation*—places where social innovation flourishes, public debate thrives, and communities reconnect.

Access the full brief here

**About LibrarIN**

LibrarIN is a Horizon Europe project that provides new avenues for participatory management and sustainable finance for European libraries as key cultural institutions. This project is funded by the European Union under grant agreement ID 101061516. Views and opinions expressed are however those of the author(s) only and do not necessarily reflect those of the European Union or the European Research Executive Agency (REA). Neither the European Union nor the granting authority can be held responsible for them.