



WEAK SIGNALS

Emergent and potential trends shaping the future of libraries

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Introduction and Executive Summary

Welcome to the IFLA 2026 Weak Signals Report, the latest volume in the collection of materials linked to our 2024 Trend Report.

‘Weak signals’ is a term taken from Futures Thinking, used to describe early-stage trends. Unlike a ‘trend’, a weak signal is a development or phenomenon that is not yet generalised and may never become so. However, if it does, it could have significant impacts on the theme being studied - in our case libraries and the broader knowledge and information environment.

We look to identify weak signals in order to take account of possible future developments that could affect the appropriateness and success of our plans and strategies. Some - most - will not turn into full trends, but if we have considered the ones that do, we will be better ready for a world shaped by them.

The collection here is the result of the work of the Emerging Leaders Grantees at the 2025 World Library and Information Congress, held in Astana, Kazakhstan, on 18-22 August. The Grantees were tasked with following the different presentations, discussions and posters at the Congress, and from what they heard, identifying potential weak signals.

They then discussed these, before turning them into full entries, using a

template shared by IFLA HQ. Finally, IFLA HQ supported with editing and putting together this final publication. Each signal presented reflects not only the ideas shared in Astana, but also the experience and viewpoints of the authors. The global library field is diverse, and ideas emerge and take root at different speeds in different parts of the world.

What may be an established trend in one setting is just a weak signal elsewhere, and vice versa. Indeed, one of the roles of an organisation like IFLA is to make it possible for such signals - at least as far as they concern how libraries work themselves - to travel faster across borders.

An Overview of the Signals

After the introduction, this report is divided into three broad categories - external signals which are shaping how libraries work, signals associated with emerging approaches to applying technology in libraries and finally signals describing new roles and broader ways of working.

In more depth, the first section of the Weak Signals report focuses on developments coming from outside of the field, but which nonetheless could oblige libraries to adapt or update practices in order to respond effectively. These signals come from broader evolutions in scholarly communication,

and the drive towards openness, but also the politicisation of language policies and market developments around AI. The second section turns to what we can see from looking into how libraries themselves are changing their practices in the light of technology. There are different perspectives around AI, from calls for caution in using it with young audiences, the growing role of libraries in supporting AI literacy and promoting human-centred technology, and the need for diligence in choosing which tools to use. Others look at how AI can enable more people to get involved in creating materials, how it can level the playing field when it comes to access to training, and more broadly how automation can enable libraries to more.

The third and final section looks beyond technology and at developments in how libraries and library services are being managed more broadly. There are signals focusing on changing perceptions around what leadership is and who can be a leader, as well as what happens when libraries are not staffed. Looking at community relations, contributions explore how libraries can support language revival, be catalysts for change and engage users in design decisions but also tensions around the expansion of their role and non-alignment between rhetoric and practice on inclusion. Finally, there is a look at emerging roles for libraries in supporting climate engagement, healing and wellbeing, and diplomacy.

How to Use the Weak Signals Report?

The signals can be largely used in a similar way to the Trends or scenarios already included in the 2024 report. You can think about how relevant they are where you are based (they may well already be a well-established trend for example), reflect on what happens when two weak signals might cross over, or use one (in particular the entries about what it will look like if it becomes a trend) as a scenario in order to test whether your current strategy or plans would prepare you for it.

However, you do not need to be limited to the 24 examples listed here. You can rather use them as models or inspiration for your own collection of weak signals. Whenever you come across a new idea, activity or way of doing things, you can note it down. When (if!) you have moment to reflect, you can run through the stages presented - what is the overall signal, what is the concrete example, what would the world look like if it was generalised, what would the implications be for libraries, users and other stakeholders, and what factors will accelerate or hold it back.

With futures a core theme of IFLA's centenary (IFLA100), running from August 2026 to September 2027, we will be talking a lot more about how libraries can integrate futures thinking into their own work - look out for more!

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CONTRIBUTORS

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A. EXTERNAL SIGNALS

This first section of the Weak Signals report focuses on developments coming from outside of the field, but which nonetheless could oblige libraries to adapt or update practices in order to respond effectively.

Three signals identified by Madiareni Sulaiman discuss phenomena in the broader scholarly communications and research environment, of which libraries are a core part. She looks at the implications of a shift to a more fragmented publishing system, where different outputs are published in different places. She also explores concerns that there is a loss of momentum in the shift to open access and science, with the quiet reintroduction of more restrictive licensing models. Finally, she points to a potential major expansion in the use of persistent identifiers, facilitating open science.

Next, Imogen Negomi highlights the potential of the application of open metadata principles to a wider range of libraries in terms of improving search and discoverability. Dany Miller-Kareko turns to a political trend - the putting into question of efforts to promote Indigenous and minority languages and its impacts. Finally, Alper Menemeniloğlu highlights an economic/market trend - the emergence of AI tools and what they may mean for library acquisitions budgets.

1. PUBLISHING FRAGMENTATION

Madiareni Sulaiman, Indonesia

Publishing fragmentation refers to the progressive decentralisation and diversification of research dissemination channels. It is the move from the traditional model of centralised, journal-mediated publication toward a complex ecosystem encompassing micro-publications, preprint repositories, institutional systems, overlay journals, social platforms, and discipline-specific publishing infrastructure.

This fragmentation is the consequence of tensions between the slowness of traditional peer review, pressures for rapid knowledge-sharing, the spread of open-access mandates, and researchers' demand for flexible publishing modalities that better accommodate diverse research outputs beyond traditional full-length articles.

For libraries and information professionals, this represents a fundamental shift in how scholarly communications are produced, validated, discovered, and preserved.

EXAMPLE

A biology researcher simultaneously deposits preprint versions of an article to bioRxiv, uploads their methods to Octopus IO, registers their hypotheses on a disciplinary OSF project, posts preliminary findings on academic Twitter, shares datasets on Zenodo (with institutional repository integration), and submits a formal manuscript to a traditional journal. Each node exists in separate systems with inconsistent metadata. In order to maintain their research information management system, the library at their institution must spend substantial effort in order to harvest and unify these outputs across platforms, working across incompatible APIs and metadata standards.

IF IT BECAME A TREND...

The traditional journal article would be one dispersed node among myriad modular outputs. Research would exist as interconnected micro-units: preregistered hypotheses, datasets, protocols, analyses, reviews, and replication studies, each published on preferred disciplinary platforms and social infrastructures.

Libraries would operate as integrators across fundamentally

heterogeneous systems rather than curators of unified collections.

Researchers would navigate multiple publication venues simultaneously; funders would aggregate impacts across platforms; institutions would struggle with comparable metrics. The scholarly record would lack centralised authority, requiring sophisticated aggregation infrastructure. Discovery and discoverability would become increasingly dependent on individual researcher networks and algorithmic mediation.

IMPLICATIONS

Publishing fragmentation poses both opportunities and critical challenges for the information environment. Libraries would face an exponentially complex landscape requiring new technical infrastructure, metadata standards, and API integration capabilities to coherently steward diverse scholarly outputs. Discoverability would become precarious, with research visibility increasingly depending on where outputs are deposited and whether researchers have access to multiple platforms and social networks. This could exacerbate inequities for early-career, Global South, and underrepresented scholars. The fragmented ecosystem would create what librarians might term "peak messiness": inconsistent

metadata practices, incompatible systems, and unsustainable manual validation burdens that paradoxically reinforce disintermediation as researchers bypass institutional services for direct platform access.

Conversely, fragmentation would enable greater flexibility in research communication. Modular publishing allows negative results, methodological contributions, and longitudinal datasets to gain visibility and credit, escaping the trap of publication bias. Open preprint servers democratise rapid knowledge sharing, particularly vital during emergencies.

However, without coordinated interoperability standards, persistent identifiers (ORCID, DOIs), and trust mechanisms, fragmentation risks creating an information environment characterised by silos, inconsistent quality assurance, and geographic disparities in infrastructure access. Libraries can occupy a unique position as mediators and bridge-builders, but realising this role requires strategic repositioning and investment in new technical skills.

CONTRIBUTING FACTORS

Level of support for adoption: researcher demand for flexibility, funder mandates favoring open outputs, institutional repository policies, and preprint culture.

Brakes on consolidation: lack of standardised metadata and interoperability protocols, absence of coordinated infrastructure investment, researcher inertia toward traditional publication prestige hierarchies, and library technical capacity limitations.

Incentives and tools for integration: funder and institution mandates requiring integrated reporting across platforms; adoption of emerging standards ([MECA \(Manuscript Exchange Common Approach\)](#)), enhanced metadata, organisational identifiers); library strategic positioning as scholarly communications mediators rather than passive repository managers; and international coordination around an infrastructure commons.

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2. CC- AND OPEN- WASHING

Madiareni Sulaiman, Indonesia

Recent institutional and technical developments have sought to introduce machine-readable customisation layers to the Creative Commons attribution (CC-BY) license framework. These ostensibly are designed to enable content stewards (libraries, data repositories, publishers) to articulate specific conditions around use for machine learning, and in particular artificial intelligence training.

While framed as a refinement of open licensing, this signal reflects a more concerning systemic pattern: the tendency for institutions to adopt the language and appearance of openness while constraining its substance and spirit, a practice increasingly termed "open washing." The customised CC-BY signals emerge within this broader context, where declarations of open access coexist with functional restrictions, embargoes, and technical barriers that delay or condition genuinely immediate, unrestricted reuse.

EXAMPLE

A university research library publishes an article collection with a customised CC-BY signal. The library's metadata

declaration states "CC-BY with restrictions on commercial AI model training." While the text remains technically "open," institutional systems now enforce machine-readable signals that seek to prevent automated harvesting for training large language models. Researchers and libraries outside major institutions struggle to identify and act on this distinction without specialised tools. The work is labelled open, yet systematic reuse pathways for computational research are functionally restricted, achieving the appearance of openness while preserving publishers' control over lucrative machine-learning applications.

IF IT BECAME A TREND...

Openness would fragment into a landscape of standardised looking but substantively varied restrictions. Every open repository and publisher would attach machine-readable declarations to their content, potentially in reaction to fears about crawlers and bots, creating a proliferation of conditional licenses masquerading as CC-BY compliance. Libraries and researchers would face a much more complex taxonomy of exceptions: "open for human reading," "open for scholarship but not commercial AI," "open after embargo delays," or

"open with attribution but not derivative works." Transparency would appear to increase, but genuine, unrestricted reuse would diminish. The ecosystem would resemble "open-washed" content: bearing the badges and terminology of openness without offering its core benefits—immediate, comprehensive access and reuse freedoms.

IMPLICATIONS

This signal's widespread adoption would risk consolidating a troubling pattern already visible in AI and technology sectors: the strategic deployment of open-language rhetoric without substantive commitment to openness.

For **libraries**, which depend on predictable, uniform licensing to enable systematic data mining, preservation, and computational scholarship, proliferating customised signals would increase friction and compliance costs.

Researchers would face a fractured landscape where openly licensed content comes with hidden conditions discoverable only through specialised metadata interpretation, replicating the opacity problems open access was meant to solve.

For **publishers and platforms**, customised signals offer a superficially compliant way to

maintain control over commercial AI applications, appearing to honour funder mandates for zero-embargo, immediate openness (as required by Plan S and cOAlition S initiatives) while functionally preserving restrictions on machine reuse.

This dynamic risks corroding (institutional) trust in open licensing itself. When content labelled CC-BY carries undisclosed, machine-encoded restrictions, researchers and developers may increasingly assume all "open" claims require verification, reducing the network effects and efficiency that standardised licensing provides.

The information environment would become stratified: large well-resourced institutions with technical expertise would navigate conditional restrictions, while smaller institutions and Global South researchers would face disproportionate barriers. Paradoxically, the effort to customise openness through technical precision could entrench the inequity and opacity that open science movements sought to remedy.

CONTRIBUTING FACTORS

Accelerating factors: Commercial pressure (especially from AI developers seeking to monetise training data); publisher resistance to genuine zero-embargo

commitments; lack of enforcement against open-washing practices; insufficient community standardisation of signals. Funder and institutional tolerance for "open-like" policies that placate mandates while preserving revenue streams.

Inhibiting factors: Community advocacy and pushback from libraries, researchers, and funders; regulatory clarity distinguishing genuine from pseudo-openness; standardised, transparent signal frameworks with governance; Plan S and funder enforcement against disguised embargoes; technical tools that make deceptive practices evident. Broader recognition of CC-washing as part of a broader open-washing problem, and resistance to the normalisation of conditional, hidden restrictions.

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3. EXPANDING SCOPE FOR PERSISTENT IDENTIFIERS

Madiareni Sulaiman, Indonesia

Persistent identifiers (PIDs) for research instruments, software, and projects remain fragmented and non-standardised across the research ecosystem. While mature PID systems exist for researchers (ORCID), organisations (ROR), and publications (DOI), comparable infrastructure for instruments, software, and projects remains decentralised—distributed across discipline-specific registries, Research Resource Identifiers (RRIDs), Software Heritage identifiers (SWHIDs), and the emerging Research Activity Identifier (RAiD) system. This heterogeneity signals an immature, yet rapidly advancing frontier in research infrastructure development.

EXAMPLE

The NSF-funded FAIR Facilities and Instruments Research Coordination Network (active through 2025) convenes scientists across biomedical, geoscience, and informatics fields to standardise PID practices for research equipment. Simultaneously, the RAiD system (ISO 23527:2022) now provides structured project identification with governance from Australian Research Data Commons and DataCite. In Europe, PID4NFDI integrates emerging PIDs for instruments, material samples, and projects into Data Management Plans

and Electronic Lab Notebooks, addressing adoption barriers across consortia with varying implementation maturity levels.

IF IT BECAME A TREND...

Research reproducibility and attribution would strengthen substantially. Funders could mandate PID registration in project reporting workflows. Publishers could link articles to underlying software versions and instrument specifications through machine-readable metadata. Discovery systems could resolve cross-entity relationships automatically. However, without coordinated governance and metadata standardisation, proliferation of competing PID schemes risks creating fragmentation that undermines the research nexus vision—potentially widening equity gaps between institutions with PID infrastructure capacity and resource-limited research environments globally.

IMPLICATIONS

Library and information professionals would face immediate operational and strategic imperatives. Technically, institutions must develop competencies in metadata harmonisation across heterogeneous PID services and navigate the integration of

emerging PIDs into institutional repositories, research data management platforms, and discovery systems. Professionally, information services must position themselves as connectors among fragmented stakeholder communities—facility operators, software developers, researchers, funders, and publishers—who currently lack shared understanding of why systematic entity identification serves open science and equity.

Educationally, librarians require updated skills in PID landscape navigation, research software citation practices, and infrastructure governance. Strategically, the information field must advocate for inclusive, affordable PID governance models that prevent centralisation and cost barriers from replicating existing global inequities. Libraries that proactively integrate instruments, software, and project identifiers strengthen research transparency and FAIR compliance; those that lag risk marginalisation in an increasingly machine-readable research ecosystem.

CONTRIBUTING FACTORS

Funders can play a major role in determining how far and how fast this signal goes, given their role in setting open science and reproducibility mandates. By requiring PIDs on more materials,

not least to track the result of their funding, they can advance this signal. Funders also accelerate things here by providing support for infrastructure projects (PID4NFDI, EOSC initiatives, NSF RCN).

Institutions too have a role to play. It is their policies that typically determine approaches to data, notably the application of FAIR principles. They are also the best placed to check on compliance with any relevant rules or norms here.

At a **broader community level**, the growing recognition of research software as a first-class scholarly output is significant.

Technological change represents another factor, with growing AI/machine learning applications requiring persistent, machine-readable identifiers for context and provenance.

Finally, the degree to which it is possible to **establish and secure buy-in** to distributed governance models and low-cost alternatives (ARK identifiers) will determine how far it is possible to reduce barriers to adoption in resource-limited research environments, enabling global participation beyond high-income countries.

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4. OPEN METADATA

Imogen Negomi, United Kingdom

There is growing attention to the importance not just of opening up content, but also the metadata that describes it, making it discoverable and so usable by libraries and those that rely on them. Those calling for open metadata are looking to remove ambiguity around who owns the data, who can use it, for how long it can be used and more.

It also offers a solution to a solution that libraries all too often encounter – that different approaches by different publishers and platforms lead to inconsistent data. For example, in my own library, books by the author Taylor Jenkins Reid sometimes come up in our library management system under J, and sometimes under R. It can even be the case that the same titles appear differently depending on their format. In a world with open metadata, all these titles could be linked as one.

EXAMPLE

A growing number of institutions, both academic and national, are joining the push for open metadata, making this part of their negotiations with vendors, authors and publishers

to ensure it is now part of the contract. Many of these are subsequently using a public domain (CC0) dedication for this data, ensuring that it is free and open for all to access.

IF IT BECAME A TREND...

A move towards global uptake of open metadata practices will allow more interconnectivity between libraries globally, not just larger national and academic institutions, but also public, school and prison libraries which typically have more limited resources. It will allow easier linking to source material across different locations, as well as more complete results from search. This will be of particular benefit to library and information institutions that lack the resources to create their own metadata for every item, or who cannot pay licensing fees to just have access to the data. As a result, there will not only be fewer imbalances in the level of service that libraries can offer, but also possibilities to reinvest savings in better support.

IMPLICATIONS

For **librarians**, while it will require investment in negotiations in the short term, the longer-term outcomes would be less frustration, and more time and money freed up to support users. It would also

open the way to more innovative and connected approaches to collections management and services to users, with intensified cooperation with colleagues within and beyond national border.

Users – especially those relying on smaller or less well funded libraries – will not only see better discovery and access to information, but also new services and forms of support. Scholars in particular will benefit from greater simplicity in connecting works and so advancing their research.

CONTRIBUTING FACTORS

Money will have a role. At present, copyright holders and vendors make a lot of money of owning and controlling the use of metadata, and so are likely to defend this. Clearly the creation and sharing of metadata does require investment, so it will be necessary to find better

ways of paying for this, for example as a service, rather than as part of a package subject to copyright. Given the sums already being paid, this is not a case of paying more however, rather just paying differently.

The **capacity of libraries to collaborate**, across the sector and across borders, will require effort. While this will bring huge dividends, it will also be a huge undertaking and could be stalled by certain countries' copyright laws or those more financially dependent on the vendors making money off metadata.



5. THE POLITICISATION OF LANGUAGE

Dany Miller-Kareko, New Zealand-Te Aotearoa

In multicultural settings – and in particular in those countries looking to address past injustices towards Indigenous communities – the provision of content and support in a diversity of languages has long been part of the wider service offer, with a view to fulfilling libraries' broader mission to meet the needs of all members of the community.

However, levels of consensus around such broader efforts have tended to weaken in recent years. As a result, language provision in libraries increasingly reflects political conflicts around national identity, and cultural survival.

EXAMPLE

Several international colleagues at the Congress described growing tensions around providing resources in multiple languages, with each language tied to cultural sensitivities and broader politics.

This seems to be especially true for Indigenous communities, where the use and availability of language can signal belonging or exclusion. As was highlighted, libraries' multilingual provision was once viewed as neutral,

but is now becoming politically charged especially in contexts marked by colonisation or war.

IF IT BECAME A TREND...

If the politicisation of language as described above continues or grows, libraries may face increasing expectations to privilege some languages or be accused of suppressing others. Collections, cataloguing, signage, and programming could become highly sensitive activities as they relate to national and ethnic identity and sovereignty. Neutrality may become impossible with every choice seen as representing a statement in support or opposition of something. Language provision could be framed as resistance, domination, or exclusion.

This could lead to conflict in multilingual settings, with libraries either taking an active stance in championing access and inclusion or reverting to previous policies that could spark critique from minority language speakers.

IMPLICATIONS

This raises pressing questions **professionals** must consider urgently about equity, access, and identity. Libraries' stance on

language shapes which knowledge and knowledge systems are preserved and prioritised, and conversely which are at risk of being lost. Supporting minority languages affirms culture and identity but may draw political backlash. Preferencing dominant languages supports broad access and efficiency but entrenches preexisting inequities. Digital systems can exacerbate the issue by favouring majority languages but can also be used to preserve minority languages and their context. Libraries may choose to embrace explicit frameworks for linguistic protection and provision, positioning themselves as more than just service providers.

Meanwhile, there would also be implications for users. Those from the communities that have been the focus of language inclusion efforts risk seeing progress in this space stall or even reverse. Given that this has tended to be associated with poorer social, economic and cultural outcomes, this is hardly good news. Meanwhile, even if users from dominant cultures may not see immediate consequences, the effects of persistent inequality in society can only be negative.

CONTRIBUTING FACTORS

Drivers include nationalism, war, colonisation, and migration. Politics

around this may subsequently shape official national language edicts, which can serve to constrain provision if they are restrictive. More broadly, local public perceptions and political climates will shape libraries' choices depending on whether multilingualism is broadly celebrated or viewed as threatening.

There are also **economic aspects**. Publishing processes often favour majority languages due to economies of scale, limiting the availability of materials in minority languages. Without economic support, publishing in languages with relatively small readerships may be uneconomic.

Finally, **professional ethical standards** may push libraries toward linguistic inclusion, given the consistency of this with the mission to meet the information needs of users. However, the desire to develop and maintain such services may run up against funding limitations and political pressure.

6. AI DRIVES UP SUBSCRIPTION FEES AND COMPLEXITY

Alper Menemenlioğlu, Türkiye

Publishers are heavily integrating AI-based features (e.g., deeper, contextual search, academic text generation assistance, multi-language summarisation, and chat-based querying) into their current content databases to gain a competitive edge and enhance user experience.

These "AI Enhancements" may initially be offered as a value-added service. However, the costs behind these enhancements (training AI models, server/processing power, and maintenance) will soon drive publishers to treat them as a separate cost centre. They also come with a stronger desire to control use of content in order to maximise the value that may come from training based on it.

EXAMPLE

In the software and database sector, offering advanced features added to a core service (e.g., advanced analytics modules, increased cloud storage) through additional licensing or tiered pricing is already a common business model. This enables price discrimination – i.e. to charge higher prices to those willing to pay them.

In parallel, as some publishers begin using their content to train generative AI models, new and complex copyright and terms of use clauses regarding AI usage are appearing in database license agreements. This includes efforts to prevent all text-and-data mining (despite laws to the contrary), or the imposition of unlimited liability on libraries for the actions of their users.

IF IT BECAME A TREND...

In a similar vein to the signal around choosy AI customers, decisions around what AI tools to buy will become part of the wider acquisitions process for libraries. This will require tough decisions about what to buy or not, given that each new purchase means that something else may need to be sacrificed.

Where low-cost or free options are available, these risk either being less high-quality or coming at the cost of user privacy – for example publishers claiming copyright over user prompts as well as overseeing text-and-data mining activities in order to inform their own strategies.

Ultimately, some will be able to pay and others will not, leading to gaps between those institutions (and

their researchers) who do and do not have access to AI tools or the possibility to carry out text-and-data mining. Given that these certainly do have a contribution to make to advancing research, this would put the latter at a disadvantage.

IMPLICATIONS

Building on the previous point, for **libraries**, especially those with constrained budgets, this development has the potential to further increase the cost of existing subscriptions, thereby deepening access inequity. This implies that some will (continue to) be better able to participate in research and knowledge generation than others (insofar as AI tools are truly effective). This may serve to reinforce wider inequalities.

Depending on how open or closed the relevant tools are, they may (in contrast) also lead to restrictions on **development of the technology more broadly**. In particular, where publishers retain complete control of data for AI purposes, with a view to developing downstream services, competition is restrained and the possibility for alternatives to emerge is limited. Even if publishers are willing to share data, this is usually at a price. This can only be charged by imposing more restrictive licensing on publications, undermining efforts to achieve open access.

A deeper point is around whether charging for such tools implies that libraries are not only being charged for accessing content, but also for using it.

For **researchers**, a lot will depend on where they are based, but any rise in equity will be felt most immediately by them. They will also need to deal with questions around when it is useful and responsible to use AI tools, both from the perspective of what their institution can afford, and in terms of the transparency they have over how results have been arrived at.

For **publishers**, the need to invest to develop AI Tools (as well as for a large corpus of work as training data) may mean that smaller operations are simply not able to participate. This may therefore serve to accelerate consolidation further and so reduce diversity in the sector.

CONTRIBUTING FACTORS

Once again, the **attitudes and expectations of users** will have a major impact, determining how much room for manoeuvre libraires have in negotiations. Even if purchasing an AI tool is objectively not good value for money, it can be hard to resist pressure.

Similarly, the **readiness of government to regulate** will make a difference. This question affects issues from the degree to which

copyright exceptions to enable text-and-data mining are upheld, to whether they see a competition issue in publishers retaining a

monopoly in the market for downstream tools using their content.



B. APPLYING TECHNOLOGY IN LIBRARIES

The second section moves away from external signals, and more to what we can see from looking into how libraries themselves are changing their practices in the light of technology (or pushing back on this as the case may be). The cases provide a full range of experiences and viewpoints on technology and what it can bring to (or take from) the field.

First of all, Sarah Gardiner notes the growing ambition of library initiatives involving AI, but underlines concern about the impact of this on cognition, as well as the resources these draw away from other core activities. Tolgonai Kozhokanova meanwhile highlights the potential for AI-translated training materials to close long-standing divides in terms of access to continuing professional development in the sector.

Denis Chakov then shares insights picked up from Congress conversations about automation, which is advancing quietly but effectively, bringing efficiencies but also requiring work to maintain trust. Merve Yavuzdemir follows on from this, discussing examples shared of libraries taking a more proactive approach to supporting human-centred technologies. In a second article, she then also looks at library uses of generative intelligence and the potential this offers to support those who may not have the technical skills none the less to express themselves through creations.

Finally, and also related to AI, Alper Menemeniloğlu looks at changes emerging in how libraries buy in resources and services, in response to the way in which markets for AI tools and more work, while Naira Atshemyan took inspiration from those modelling how libraries can represent an infrastructure for trust and AI literacy, helping people rediscover a sense of agency.

7. AI OVERREACH IN PUBLIC LIBRARY CHILDREN SERVICES: NOVELTY OUTPACING EVIDENCE

Sarah Gardiner, Australia

Publishers are heavily integrating AI-based features (e.g., deeper, contextual search, academic text generation assistance, multi-language summarisation, and chat-based querying) into their current content databases to gain a competitive edge and enhance user experience.

Globally, public library systems report that children's collections and programmes constitute a disproportionate share of participation, engagement, and circulation. This is particularly the case for pre-school-aged children and their families.

As the world rushes to explore where and how to apply AI, it is therefore unsurprising that there is reflection on how such technologies might be used in public libraries' offer to children. However, this brings the risk of diverting funding, value and focus away from foundational early childhood

literacy initiatives that support young children and their families. While digital tools may complement learning for older children, the core drivers of early literacy sit outside of what AI-based tools can currently offer. Nonetheless, the hype around the technology - in part driven by AI companies' own marketing - means that such traditional, foundational early-years practices risk being perceived as antiquated and deprioritised in resourcing.

EXAMPLE

At WLIC 2025, speakers raised various examples of digital and AI-enabled experiences for children, concerning all of library spaces, programs, and collections. Examples include Singapore Public Libraries' AI-driven installation Chatbook that allows children to interact with fictional characters through generative AI. Beijing Library - winner of the 2024 IFLA/Baker & Taylor Public Library of The Year award) was lauded for featuring an interactive digital projection map of children's reading journey with responsive AI recommendations. These projects are

highly visible, well-resourced, and strongly positioned as future-focused innovation. By contrast, relational and play-based early years library services were comparatively underrepresented in global innovation discussions, despite strong evidence of their developmental impact.

IF IT BECAME A TREND...

It risks absorbing disproportionate funding, attention and resources, just because AI and related technologies are trending or seen as innovative. Core early-years public library programming and resources may be deprioritised and long-term community impact may not be felt until adverse effects manifest, by which point it may be too late.

IMPLICATIONS

For **public libraries**, this trend presents a risk of undermining services that support children's critical cognitive, social, and emotional development in the first five years of life. Particularly, it has the capacity to engender developmental inequities, most impacting vulnerable children and families who depend on free, accessible library-based early learning opportunities to support emergent literacy (in addition to home or formal education).

Additionally, libraries may unintentionally frame innovation as primarily technological, rather than

recognising evidence-based early years practice as a form of critical long-term social infrastructure with its own space for innovative practice.

Once resourcing is reduced, rebuilding expertise, programmes, and trust may be difficult. A reduction in resources could lead to diminished expertise, fewer early years programmes, and less investment in children's collections. Over time, this might result in a **narrowed conceptualisation of "learning"** in the library context, with fewer staff-led literacy initiatives and a diminished emphasis on relational and play-based approaches to engage children. While these effects may not be immediately apparent, they could manifest later as widening developmental gaps.

CONTRIBUTING FACTORS

The **rapid advancement and cultural momentum of AI**, attracting disproportionate funding and attention: *the cult of the new*. This can be associated with strong institutional and cultural pressure to demonstrate innovation through visible, technology-driven initiatives.

The gradual **devaluing of children's librarianship** globally, including reduced recognition of specialist early years expertise and a shift toward more generalist library staffing models. In many systems, this has led to fewer

dedicated children's librarians, less specialist training, and a diminished institutional understanding of the complexity and impact of early years library work.

A **global discourse** that increasingly equates future readiness with technological

familiarity and fluency, rather than developmental foundations.

Challenges in **quantifying and showcasing the long-term impact** of relational, play-based early learning compared with engagement with digital tools.

8. AI TRANSLATION ENABLES A LEVELLING-UP OF LIBRARY EDUCATION

Tolgonai Kozhokanova, Kyrgyzstan

For a long time, language and geography have served to reinforce inequalities in access to library and information science education and continuing professional development (CPD). Whereas colleagues in richer countries, as well as those who speak major languages, have tended to enjoy wider possibilities to create and develop knowledge and skills, this is not the case everywhere.

However, rapid improvements in translation powered by artificial intelligence (AI) offer new possibilities to librarians in rural areas who often face barriers due to limited English proficiency and distance from centres of excellence.

Such a shift in professional development would give practical form to the values of equity, linguistic diversity and digital inclusion.

EXAMPLE

Across different regions, librarians are beginning to join translated webinars and peer-learning communities, while international conferences are experimenting with machine translation tools such as Wordly and simultaneous interpretation initiatives. The value of investing in translation was made clear during the IFLA WLIC in Astana, where participants emphasised the value of accessible, multilingual CPD to support librarians from diverse linguistic and regional backgrounds.

IF IT BECAME A TREND...

We would see considerable

professional empowerment, with rural librarians gaining the confidence and skills necessary to modernise library services, drawing on a wider range of ideas and experience. It will also be a powerful signal for members of the global library field to see clearly that professional learning does not need to be limited to those who have a sufficient level of English. This in turn would have positive consequences for communities, who would benefit from better trained librarians providing more inclusive, relevant, and so effective support.

At the same time, the fact of being translated into a local language does not necessarily mean that a given training course is relevant to everyone. Once language barriers are overcome, there will still be work to do in order to ensure that learners can adapt materials and lessons to their own contexts.

IMPLICATIONS

For **librarians** who currently struggle to access CPD, the change could be significant, opening up possibilities to become life-long learners and innovators in the services they design and offer. This could lead to stronger retention, especially among the most imaginative and ambitious members of the profession, as well as a greater attractiveness of posts in more remote areas.

In turn, **library users** outside of major urban centres would see greater innovation in the services they receive, reflecting ideas and practice from around the world. As a result, they could be better able to make effective use of information, both on their own behalf, and on that of those around them.

For the **global library field**, the potential for AI-translated learning offers an opportunity to offer value to people who previously might not have seen much advantage in participation. At the same time, with a wider range of training available, those offering this locally may face greater competition, and need to focus more on what they can do uniquely (such as in-person learning).

CONTRIBUTING FACTORS

Funding will still be a concern.

While AI translation tools are becoming cheaper and more affordable, it is still often necessary to pay for quality. Linked to this is the need for institutions themselves to value CPD enough to allow staff to participate, and even to incentivise this.

Managing expectations: tools are still in development, and there is a risk that free, poorer quality translations will be less accurate, and so hard to follow, if not positively misleading. It will be important to avoid disappointment,

as well as to promote the provision of learning in forms that are clear and easy to translate.

The **persistent dominance of English** in professional training will remain an issue, limiting opportunities for full participation by those who do not have a high level of the language. While tools may make webinars and more traditional courses easier to follow,

the end goal should remain the development of the capacity to provide CPD in the widest possible range of languages.

Connectivity challenges in remote areas: technology will only be as useful as the strength of an internet connection, at least when it comes to resources that cannot be downloaded locally.

9. AUTOMATION AS THE QUIET REVOLUTION IN LIBRARIES

Denis Chakov, Uzbekistan

A quiet but powerful signal is emerging across the global library landscape — the rise of automation across a much wider range of library services. Once limited to cataloguing or circulation systems, automation today extends to data analytics, cloud-based services, and AI-powered tools that reshape how libraries organise, preserve, and deliver knowledge.

With it, it brings the promise both of delivering existing services more efficiently, as well as brand new offerings to support library users in seeking, accessing and using information. At the same time, it requires careful oversight, as well as an evolution in the skills and role

of librarians.

Automation is, at its core, a quiet revolution. It does not shout for attention but steadily changes how libraries operate and evolve. Those who notice this weak signal today - and respond with openness and strategy - will shape the libraries of tomorrow: more intelligent, connected, and inclusive than ever before.

EXAMPLE

In Uzbekistan, the signs of automation are becoming increasingly visible. Libraries are adopting integrated management systems such as Koha and Atrium, experimenting with cloud-based OPACs, and improving digital access for users. These steps demonstrate a growing recognition that automation

is not a luxury but a foundation for modern library services. The process is also serving to build new collaborations between librarians, IT specialists, and academic institutions, fostering a culture of innovation and data-driven decision-making.

IF IT BECAME A TREND...

The potential is vast - automated cataloguing, smart recommendations, multilingual interfaces, and mobile access can transform how users interact with libraries. But success depends on ethical frameworks, professional development, and user-centered design.

However, this signal also brings complexity. Libraries must address questions of interoperability, transparency, and data sovereignty. The reliance on third-party systems raises concerns about privacy and long-term access to data. Smaller institutions may face difficulties with funding, technical expertise, or infrastructure - widening the digital gap between regions.

IMPLICATIONS

This shift is not only technical but deeply cultural. Automation challenges **libraries** to redefine their roles: from manual gatekeepers of information to digital facilitators of knowledge ecosystems. For librarians, it does not mean replacement but transformation. As repetitive tasks move to automated workflows,

library professionals can focus on curating digital content, guiding users in information literacy, and ensuring ethical data use.

Users will in turn see greater value from the work of their libraries, supporting research and discovery. They will likely see more of their librarians, who have been freed up to provide more targeted, more responsive services to users. At the same time, they will need to develop the skills and awareness necessary to make effective use of new tools, understanding how and why they are receiving the information that they are from systems that they cannot ask in the same way as they would a librarian.

CONTRIBUTING FACTORS

Resources are an issue. While in the longer-term automation does promise to be an effort saver, it will require investment at first, both in terms of money and time from staff. Closely linked to this is the extent to which libraries have staff – or access to staff – who can advance this evolution in a responsible and effective way.

Trust – and either the presence or lack of it – may also have a role to play. With automation meaning handing over some activities to the machine, it will be important for librarians and users alike to understand enough about systems to be able to have confidence. Otherwise, the risk is that people

simply do not want to engage. Providers of automation services will need to bear this in mind in order to meet the needs of libraries.

The **ability of libraries to manage change**, especially in tasks and workflows, will also have a determining impact. Simply trying to implant automation into existing processes is unlikely to lead to the desired results.

10. LIBRARIES PROMOTE HUMAN-CENTRED TECHNOLOGY

Merve Yavuzdemir, Türkiye

That technology is creating exciting new possibilities is nothing new. Neither are concerns about the alienation it can cause. It brings simplicity, but also a sense of a loss of agency and control over different aspects of life, which has negative effects for wellbeing and rights in general.

In response, libraries are starting to recognise a potential to adapt long-standing principles of focusing on people, making choices in favour of human-centred technologies – both in their own operation, and in the support they offer to users.

EXAMPLE

A regular theme at the Congress was how libraries and cultural institutions are exploring human-centred

technology — designing AI, UX, and digital archives in ways that reflect empathy, inclusion, and human stories rather than pure efficiency. Users are invited to question and shape the technologies they use, challenging aspects that do not leave enough room for human agency and indeed learning how to apply the same principles in their choices outside of the library.

IF IT BECAME A TREND...

Building on their well-recognised existing role in supporting connectivity and core digital literacy, libraries would take on a deeper role in the digital ecosystem. Working alongside organisations focused on digital and consumer rights, they could play a vital role in promoting higher standards, helping producers embracing human-centred principles to get ahead of those who are readier to compromise.

This would open up, or at least expand, a new audience for libraries, potentially leading to further partnerships around digital rights and emancipation. They could become laboratories for human innovation, even collaborating with technology producers ready to look beyond extractivism. Nonetheless, such a clear engagement in markets would risk raising questions around neutrality. Furthermore, balancing openness, privacy, and accountability will remain challenging.

There would also be the expectation that libraries embody good practice themselves. This may require a reconsideration of tools and providers, including a shift away from more commonly used platforms if they are judged not to be up to standard. This may be uncomfortable at first but would ultimately help libraries better fulfil their role of providing knowledge and services based on the human, with interfaces and systems embodying ethics, empathy, and accessibility by design.

IMPLICATIONS

At an **overall** level, we would be in a space where rather than just being seen as a product or service, technology would be reframed as a relational, co-created element of civic life. **Digital literacy** would be redefined as digital empathy, and

agency and ethics would be seen as being just as important as speed and scale.

While questions will remain, the potential is for a far healthier information environment overall, where not only knowledge and information, but also the tools with which they are created and shared, are guided by ethical principles. This would be backed up not just by libraries, but also by greater awareness in the wider population.

CONTRIBUTING FACTORS

A key driver behind this trend is the **public backlash against dehumanising technology**, driven by both a general sense of powerlessness as well as scandals and distrust in the leadership of tech firms. In parallel with this is the rise in policy focus on human-centred AI, both from a perspective of safety and wider ethics.

Closely linked to this will be the ongoing **evolution of ethical design education and advocacy movements**, and their ability to sell their message to the wider population. Given the addictive design of many services, as well as the initial difficulty of breaking away, the arguments will need to be strong. Libraries and their leadership too will need to buy into the change.

Commercial incentives may also serve to slow the spread of this

signal. Rich companies can pay for lobbying which may slow uptake of alternatives, as well as try to lessen

the scale of the problem in the mind of decision-makers and the public.

11. GENERATIVE LIBRARIES

Merve Yavuzdemir, Türkiye

The idea that libraries should be places of creation, and not just consumption of knowledge is nothing new. From their long-standing role in supporting researchers, organisation of creative writing programmes and hosting of community archiving, libraries have a well-established role in supporting the emergence of ideas and innovations.

In parallel the rise of generative AI has brought the possibility of creating text, music, art and more without needing the technical skills and investment previously required to do this. Just as many individuals are doing, libraries too are exploring the possibilities to use this technology, responsibly and effectively, for co-creation, curation, and interpretation of knowledge.

EXAMPLE

It was highlighted at WLIC that some libraries are piloting tools that generate metadata, translate collections, or create AI-assisted learning paths based on their collections. Meanwhile, others directly

invite communities of all ages to co-create digital storytelling projects using generative models. Across these efforts, nonetheless, there is a clear aim to augment—not replace—human curation.

IF IT BECAME A TREND...

Libraries become “generative knowledge ecosystems,” enabling adaptive and personalised information services, in ways that build confidence in working with tools, safely. They offer a form of technology ‘sandpit’ for users who may not otherwise know how to use AI effectively, as well as ways for people to turn their ideas and experiences into creations that can in turn inform and inspire others.

Meanwhile, a positive, if not uncritical, approach to generative AI opens the door to supporting the training of models based on ethical and culturally diverse data sets. This promises to support discoverability of materials, including across institutions, through more accurate responses to queries, although this remains a technology in development.

IMPLICATIONS

Generative libraries would **blur the line between user and creator**, enhancing discovery but also raising ethical, legal, professional, and epistemological challenges. Librarians could become “AI mediators”, ensuring transparency, bias mitigation, and authenticity.

Meanwhile, there is the **contrast between the technological capacity of AI** to base responses on a more complete range of information than any one human ever could, **and the risk of fragmentation** of the information environment into as many personalised internets as there are people (if not more). This raises important questions about human agency and broader rights and ethics questions which libraries will need to be able to answer to the satisfaction of their members.

Finally, as we make the revolutionary move away from a model where the creation of artistic works was the preserve of professionals, complex questions will emerge around the concept of individual authorship and intellectual property. Once again, libraries will be needed to offer

answers of some sort.

CONTRIBUTING FACTORS

A first factor is the **availability of mature and high-quality open-source AI tools**. This is an essential step for libraries to fulfil their potential here while still pursuing the goals of transparency and ethics. Closely linked to this is the ability of libraries in turn to define effective policies around AI use and tools that favour trustworthiness and responsibility.

For libraries globally to be able to make the most of possibilities here, there also need to be the **models available in their languages**. This in turn will depend on the availability of quality multilingual training data. This is an area where libraries potentially can contribute significantly, if copyright law and other factors work in their favour.

The **readiness** among individual librarians and library leadership **to take and manage risks** (rather than avoid them) will also count for a lot. AI remains imperfect, and so we will need both to maintain an open mind, and open eyes, when engaging with it.

12. CHOOSY AI CUSTOMERS

Alper Menemenlioğlu, Türkiye

While traditional e-resources come in the form of content (e-books, journal articles) as the final product. Budgets and licensing processes for these are therefore predominantly based on rights management and concurrent access models for fixed content.

In contrast, generative AI tools offer a productive capability (content creation, summarisation, coding, etc., for example through specialised AI assistants). Licensing also works differently, requiring managing not just access to content, but also the service itself (i.e., usage based on per-query or per-output cost). This fundamentally changes technical integration, copyright/citation tracking, and cost predictability.

The compulsion for libraries to filter AI services through the same selection, access, and budgeting lens as other e-resources risks leading to obsolete paradigm traps that are ill-suited to the nature of these new, dynamic tools. Instead, new approaches need to be developed and spread, in order to ensure both the effectiveness and sustainability of library services.

EXAMPLE

Major academic publishers have begun testing AI-based summarisation/querying tools (e.g., "AI Assistant" features in large databases) embedded within their journal or book collections. These tools may be integrated into existing e-resource licenses (at least at first) or offered as an add-on module. There is certainly demand for this from faculty keen to integrate AI into their workflows.

The problem is that library budgets are not necessarily expanding, forcing hard choices. Models of pricing based on numbers of queries or outputs can see exhaustion of available funds well before the end of the year, obliging rationing or a drive towards agreements where publishers and vendors take on more of the risk themselves.

IF IT BECAME A TREND...

With the rise of bundling on the part of publishers, and subsequently efforts to promote transformative agreements in order to allow for both access and open access publishing, the shape of contracts has already evolved significantly in the last decades. Yet they look set to change further.

The addition of provisions around AI tools – at least if libraries deem

these to be trustworthy and worth the money – will see new dynamics at work, and likely a degree of trial and error in the short term as both sides find models that work. There may be scope for academic libraries to learn from the experiences (both positive and negative) of public libraries, which have a longer record of making payments per use of eBooks.

IMPLICATIONS

For **libraries**, it is a further complexity to be accommodated in managing resources. This is both a question of developing the knowledge necessary to evaluate whether the AI tools being offered represent value for money. This will include consideration of how far requirements around transparency, data privacy, and ethical use are met – complex criteria which sit alongside existing criteria in e-resource evaluation matrices.

Where tools are deemed to be worthwhile, librarians will then also need to ensure that licensing happens on terms that are as beneficial as possible. This will require a further focus on negotiation skills, which are not necessarily part of formal library education, as well as putting pressure on budgets for resources themselves.

Nonetheless, success in this would increase the pressure on **publishers** to maximise the quality

of their tools, as well as their compliance with principles of ethics and transparency. However, as we have seen in other sectors of the economy, there is also the risk that AI tools are offered simply because they are perceived as being expected, without necessarily asking whether they add value. Indeed, unless there are increases in budgets, increased library spending on tools from big publishers may come at the expense of spending on content from smaller ones.

For **users**, and in particular researchers, a successful outcome will mean that those who can really benefit from access to tools will be able to do so. It is possible that this access will be limited, potentially only to those who already have a strong grounding in their subject area. This may not be a bad thing, if it helps ensure that those who are newer to their topics fully develop their ability to understand and analyse independently.

CONTRIBUTING FACTORS

Demand from researchers and faculty will have a determining influence. It is imaginable that the pressure to get access to the newest tools will oblige libraries to spend money on tools that may ultimately not be as useful as they are sold to be. This will also have impacts on how much basic content libraries can buy, and the diversity

of publishers from which they do so.

We are clearly in a phase of rising interest in AI at the moment, with major investment in innovation in order to maintain competitiveness and attract further capital.

However, with talk of a **potential bursting of the bubble**, the future may look very different. Regulation may well also play a role here, imposing stricter rules on AI tool providers.

As highlighted above, simply **the ability of libraries to negotiate** in the face of (often much larger, better resourced) publishers will be a key factor. As has been the case with eResources, the formation of consortia and a greater readiness to say no can be key mitigating factors, although these too will need to account for the novelty of the dynamics of AI markets.

13. LIBRARIES AS TRUST ANCHORS IN THE AI-DRIVEN INFORMATION AGE

Naira Atshemyan, Armenia

AI-generated information is becoming increasingly widespread – even apparently dominant on many platforms. While it may be entertaining, it is clear that it cannot necessarily be relied upon as fact. However, with it not always transparent to what extent it has been used, readers do not always have the references and skills needed to make responsible and effective use of the results.

In response to this, libraries are emerging as trust anchors - spaces

where people learn to distinguish fact from fabrication and engage critically with machine-produced content. This offers a middle way between denialism and evangelism, helping make the most of AI while avoiding the pitfalls.

EXAMPLE

During discussions at WLIC and beyond, many participants expressed concerns about misinformation amplified by AI tools. Libraries, especially public and academic ones, are beginning to respond by organising “AI Literacy” sessions and offering hands-on workshops on how to verify AI-generated texts, images, and citations.

These can involve educational games, creative storytelling workshops, and interactive literacy sessions that help children and young users in particular understand what AI is, how it works, and how to think critically about the content it produces. Such initiatives aim to empower communities to use technology responsibly while preserving human creativity and critical thinking.

IF IT BECAME A TREND...

If the provision of such support becomes generalised, libraries will be able to assert their position as a key civic infrastructure, leading the way in safeguarding truth and public understanding. They would become AI interpretation hubs - teaching not only how to use AI tools, but how to question them. This would expand librarians' mission from information mediators to ethical digital guides.

The fact of a network of local institutions offering such support may give stronger impetus to efforts to build a skills-based response to AI, rather than focusing just on top-down regulation.

IMPLICATIONS

This trend would strengthen **libraries** as the last bastion of trusted information in an era of deepfakes and algorithmic bias. At a time of growing automation – and arguably alienation – this matters in terms of maintaining a sense of

agency and connection between people and the knowledge environment. This could in turn lead to complementary initiatives to support public engagement in wider internet governance questions.

For libraries, it would be a powerful means of demonstrating ongoing relevance, while for users it would mean access to a key skill in both their professional and personal lives.

CONTRIBUTING FACTORS

The rapid **spread of uses of (generative) AI tools** in education and media is a key factor here, creating in itself the need for the skills that libraries can provide. Indeed, the speed of this spread is a key factor in the rush to prepare opportunities to build skills and confidence. Linked to this is the sense of crisis around misinformation and deepfakes internationally.

On the side of the public, the **level of demand** will also have a major influence. If people refuse to be powerless and make clear their desire to understand and make their own choices around AI, this signal will be stronger.

Investment nonetheless matters. The ability to provide AI literacy will depend on staff upskilling, partnerships with educators and technologists, and the development

of transparent, open educational resources tailored for different age groups.



C. MANAGING DIFFERENTLY

The third and final section looks beyond technology and at developments in how libraries and library services are being managed more broadly. Responding to social, economic, cultural and political changes, libraries themselves are exploring questions around staffing, relations with communities, and new partnerships in order to meet needs.

The section opens with a second contribution from Sarah Gardiner, who looks at the emergence and uptake of new paradigms of leadership that prioritise the making of connections and delivery through others, rather than pure management. Damilare Oyedele's builds on this point, discussing the growing readiness to give emerging leaders more senior positions as a means of supporting greater responsiveness to community needs.

A second contribution from Imogen Negomi then discusses the implications of experiments with unstaffed libraries for both institutions and communities, and then a third highlights libraries' potential role in helping to revive local languages in situations where these have long been marginalised or suppressed.

Next, two contributions from Dany Miller-Kareko look at how libraries engage with communities. A first highlights evidence of a desire to push back against perceived 'scope-creep' and to recentre work on traditional library activities, while the second digs into the risk that libraries' strong rhetoric on inclusion is not always followed up on in reality. Two further signals also look at relations with communities - Damilare Oyedele writes about cases of librarians taking on a mobiliser or catalyst role, triggering new initiatives and collaborations in communities. Merve Yavuzdemir then talks about the growing acceptance of community-led design in the field, with leadership ready to loosen control and let users decide more.

Three final entries look at specific roles that libraries can plan - as climate hubs where the enthusiasm of young people can combine with the tools and spaces libraries offer (Madina Kerimova), and then the role of libraries in supporting healing and wellbeing, and diplomatic relations (Merve Yavuzdemir).

14. A FOCUS ON LEADERSHIP UNLOCKS RADICAL COLLABORATION

**Sarah Gardiner,
Australia**

A renewed focus on leadership in library landscapes has the potential to decrease barriers and open space for radical collaboration as a way to address current resourcing reductions. This signal results from both a growing recognition of leadership being about innovation and imagination - including in partnerships - as well as a change in the global temperature in favour of cooperation rather than competition, of collective strength over intellectual ego.

Indeed, in a shrinking resource climate, radical cooperation may indeed be a survival strategy, offering ways to sustain impact, extend reach and maintain buy-in from communities in economically challenging times.

EXAMPLE

During the Congress, there was lots of discussion regarding leadership models that emphasise facilitation over gatekeeping. These sought to prime leaders within the field for more open, cross-institutional and

cross-cultural forms of collaboration. These discussions typically came up in the context of reflections around the response to shrinking capacity and stripped funding - a growing trend of under resourced libraries.

IF IT BECAME A TREND...

The role of libraries - and in particular their leaders - would focus far more on what they can achieve together with others, rather than on those specific outputs for which libraries alone can take credit. Success would be measured more in the number and depth of partnerships, and the degree to which other stakeholders rely on libraries in order to achieve their own goals. This in turn would translate into a wider and more diverse alliance of support for libraries.

This also creates space to question long-held assumptions about who libraries can and should partner with. In many public library contexts, commercial or for-profit partnerships have traditionally been viewed as inappropriate or misaligned with public values, while libraries operating under different global funding models have already

experimented more openly in this space. As resourcing pressures intensify, leaders who treat constraints as a dive board rather than a barrier begin to reimagine what partnership could, should, or would look like.

This includes exploring ethically aligned collaborations with the private and for-profit sectors, where mutual benefit, transparency, and community impact are clearly articulated. By deliberately challenging these taboos, library leaders are not diluting public purpose but are instead expanding the toolkit available to sustain it. Those willing to test new partnership models are creating pathways for others in the field to think differently about legitimacy, possibility, and influence.

Library leaders themselves may have far more mixed career paths, combining experience within libraries with that in other sectors, allowing them to take a broader perspective on how best to achieve goals, as well as giving them much broader networks. The most successful may well find themselves taking on very senior roles within government and elsewhere, building stronger connections for our field in advocacy.

IMPLICATIONS

For **librarians** themselves, in particular those with the desire to

experiment and move outside of their comfort zones, new possibilities to (co)create services and offers with an ever-expanding coalition of partners. There may be a reduced focus on direct delivery, and more on coordinating the activities of others, recognising that this represents the most effective way of using time and resources.

For the **communities libraries** serve, they would see a more joined-up approach, with both library services available in venues that they might not have expected, but also a wider range of activities within libraries themselves.

For **local governments** (in the case of public libraries), this would create new opportunities to deliver services to communities and potentially reach more people than before. This applies as much to finding possibilities to offer library services to groups that may previously not have used libraries, as to reaching populations who may feel stigma seeking out specific provision (health, unemployment, learning).

CONTRIBUTING FACTORS

Our own **ability as a field to shift our definition of leadership** away from management and towards a model focused on attitudes, innovation and strategic foresight, and to support this through formal and informal learning.

The **readiness of governments and parent institutions to enable collaboration** with a wide range of

actors, and to redesign expectations and targets in ways that reward radical collaboration.

15. BRIDGING THE GENERATIONAL DIVIDE IN LIBRARY LEADERSHIP & PRACTICE

Damilare Oyedele, Nigeria

The Harvard Business Review article on [Bridging Generation Divides in Your Workplace](#) (2023) discusses the changing workforce demographics and presents the need for the development of intergenerational teams that is aimed at fostering collaborative workplace for older generations and attracting newer professionals.

Libraries are no different here, operating within an increasingly multigenerational environment that reflects broader shifts in global workforce demographics. Library and information professionals from different generations, and who are shaped by different upbringings, heavily influenced by the advancement and development of their time, are finding themselves not just in the workplace, but also in leadership teams.

This trend builds on efforts promoted at all levels to support emerging leaders take on higher level roles in their organisations. The International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions has commenced amazing work bringing together emerging library leaders to participate in various IFLA systems such as the [Emerging International Voices](#), IFLA's [Skills Agenda for the trend report](#), [Capacity development of young library leaders in Zambia](#), IFLA [Emerging Leaders Programme](#) among many others.

EXAMPLE

There is evidence of this signal, for example, in Africa, where [Library Aid Africa](#) is active in supporting emerging leaders through the [Young African Library Leaders Fellowship](#). A particularly valuable outcome of this is its success in helping participants build the confidence and networks to [take on](#) library leadership positions

with older generations. In a context where there is a high level of deference to the wisdom of elders, it is powerful to see recognition that younger leaders can also take on such roles.

IF IT BECAME A TREND...

A world without a generational divide in library leadership would most likely reflect both a mixture of firmer rules and improved practices. On the side of rules, we would anticipate stricter provisions around the share of institution and association leadership positions that are held by emerging leaders, creating the spaces in which they can build their skills and prove themselves. There would also be a much greater emphasis on succession planning, and leadership development at the systems level, including through the provision of leadership programming.

At the same time, it will be important not to end up in a situation of 'old vs young'. The generalisation of this signal would also include the creation of spaces for intergenerational dialogues and spaces where older and younger professionals can share and develop collaborative ways to work together and innovate for the future of the profession. In addition, we would see much more mentoring.

IMPLICATIONS

The evolution in the demographics of library leadership reflect a wider change in the information environment, with a greater readiness to think again about how things are done and appreciate the insights and ideas that emerging leaders may bring. By cutting loose from old assumptions of what is and is not possible, as well as taking fresh perspectives, libraries are better to foster an inclusive environment that serves the diverse needs of users from different generations.

Library associations and other peak institutions or bodies will have a key role to play here in setting the tone and providing the space for this more collaborative approach, defining what good practice looks like, and recognising and rewarding innovation.

CONTRIBUTING FACTORS

A major driver here are the **demographic changes** already highlighted in the introduction. With a current generation of leaders approaching retirement age, there is a need to find ways to ensure continuity, as well as to retain promising future leaders in the profession.

Digital transformation also plays a role, obliging libraries to enter a cycle of continuous innovation in order to keep up with technologies and user expectations. Library

leaderships need to be able to respond.

Expectations of what leadership should look like – in government, the private sector and libraries –

are also evolving. There is an understanding that it should better reflect both wider workforces and the communities that libraries serve.

16. OPEN BUT UNSTAFFED

Imogen Negomi, UK

There is nothing new about university libraries offering 24hr access in different parts of the world, if not all year, at least during exam periods. Meanwhile, a lot of public libraries globally have increased general opening hours to 7 or 8pm especially in densely populated areas. However, there is an emerging trend towards extended hours, but without extended staffing by librarians.

We all know what free access to learning and entertainment resources can do for a community, both in advancing different forms of literacy (including digital literacy), as well as in building empathy and a sense of belonging. As extended hours become more of a trend, barriers are falling to this access. People no longer have to choose between their professional, study or caring responsibilities and visiting the library – the library will be there and open to them whenever they need it. However, this nonetheless forces reflection

on whether a library is a building that collects and distributes information resources, or is it distinguished by the librarian who curates and manages the information resources?

In the library profession, the answer is clear-cut – it is the librarian who makes the difference. However, for policy makers and those controlling public service budgets, the possibility to be able to claim that they are providing more extensive services at lower cost risks leading them down the path of staff-less libraries.

EXAMPLE

Heping Library, Shanghai, China opened in April 2024 and was shortlisted for the 2025 IFLA Baker & Taylor Public Library of the Year Award and is open 24 hours a day. A public library taking public access to resources at any time to the next step – while being staffed: “While maintaining its welcoming atmosphere, the facility implements comprehensive security measures — the night shift is staffed by two

security guards and one librarian, with regular police patrolling. Entry after midnight requires real-name registration through Shanghai's government service platform, according to [Wang](#).

However, elsewhere the presence of staff is not a given. [Guldborgsund](#) public libraries in Denmark, and [Oslo's Public Libraries](#) in Norway are giving access to the library 7am – 10pm with staff only being on duty 10am – 6pm. To use services outside of staffed hours, residents must be 15+ and complete an induction. In the UK we see similar hybrid locations at work, with [Sutton](#) in South London giving access 5 – 9pm to their Public Libraries and [Gorton](#) in Manchester until 8pm. Here, users need to be 18+.

The signs are that this trend is not weakening. For example, the June 2025 Library Strategy for [Wandsworth](#), South London [plans to take forward](#) pilots of ways to extend other library hours through a partnership approach, engaging with the local community. Youth services and cultural partners are cited as sectors that could get involved, but this raises questions about how far qualified library staff will be involved.

IF IT BECAME A TREND...

We could expect the generalisation of practices already seen in those libraries which have already taken steps in this direction. Libraries would be open potentially 24/7, with greater possibilities for those

otherwise busy during traditional opening hours to visit, expanding the share of the population directly benefitting from library services, at least where the rules determining who is able to visit are broad enough.

At the same time, if these extended hours are unstaffed, visitors at these times would not be able to draw on the physical presence and support of librarians. While users would certainly see the results of the investment of library professionals in designing services (although they may not always register this), this would remain an incomplete, and so sub-optimal service. Inevitably, there would be pressure to take measures to ensure security, either through the presence of security guards, or more intensive remote supervision of users.

The alternative would be for more librarians to work at different times – as in the case from Shanghai mentioned above. However, this would need to come with the support necessary to ensure wellbeing and the attractiveness of the profession.

IMPLICATIONS

For **users**, as highlighted above, there is an immediate dividend in being able to use library services at a wider range of times. This will make it simpler to fit with other commitments, both personal and

professional. In other words, libraries will be a part of more people's lives, which should help consolidate public support. For those able to navigate resources themselves, or simply in search of a place of sanctuary, this would be a major win. As [Wang](#) notes, this could have life-changing consequences in populated areas with lower economic demographics.

"Each night, we light a 'lamp of knowledge' that never goes out. In this fast-paced city, people need more than just books; they also need a space that understands and accommodates their varied lifestyles. Beyond disseminating knowledge, public libraries serve as warm places that connect people."

At the same time, this experience would not be as full or meaningful. Without librarians in attendance, there is less scope for providing advice, guidance and support. Those users who would stand to benefit most from in-person help would not get it outside of staffed hours. It is not impossible that the most vulnerable might find themselves excluded by rules around entry, while those using services may need to face greater surveillance (cameras, tracking) linked to security policies. This would all reduce the positive, equalising effects on communities.

Ultimately, this may also reduce support for libraries more generally.

For **librarians** themselves, there would be the challenge of how to design services in ways that maximise impact even without themselves being present. At the same time, there would be an advocacy need to demonstrate that the presence of librarians nonetheless makes a difference, in order to avoid a scenario where those funding libraries decide that they can operate without staff for an even higher share of the time.

Alternatively, if there is staffing, a greater share of colleagues would be expected to work out of hours. This is clearly already a reality for many other professionals, in the health sector, emergency services, and indeed also in the education sector when it comes to evening schools. Nonetheless, non-traditional working patterns can have negative impacts, which will need to be taken into account.

CONTRIBUTING FACTORS

Funding will clearly be a factor. Budget cuts are likely to increase the pressure on staffing numbers, with staff-less operation the only way to keep facilities open. On the other hand, if additional funding is available, it may be possible to find a more positive balance, although this will nonetheless require choices between number of staffed

vs unstaffed hours, levels of staffing, and investment in tools to ensure that the library remains safe and welcoming.

Librarians' readiness to work different hours will have an impact. In some countries rules stand in the way of librarians working on certain days and at certain times. More broadly, extended staffed hours will also depend on whether there are

librarians willing and ready to work at these times.

Social attitudes may also play a role. In addition to the politics of public spending in general (how far are people willing to pool funding to make services like libraries possible), lower levels of trust may lead to less faith in whether staff-less libraries will work, or greater restrictions on who has access (regardless of the evidence).

17. LIBRARIES AS ENABLERS OF LOCAL LANGUAGE REVIVAL

Imogen Negomi, UK

There is a growing readiness to reassess the past, and in particular historical events that have led to the restriction of pre-existing cultures and ways of life. A particular manifestation of this has been in efforts better to recognise – or revive – local, indigenous languages, which are a huge part of identity. While such efforts may already be well-established in some parts of the world with a history of colonisation in the 18th and 19th centuries (even if they are far from complete), the suppression of cultures is a global phenomenon. As a result, the potential for such initiatives is also global.

These efforts come with different degrees of official state approval. For example, Burkina Faso has downgraded French – the colonial language – from being an official language to only a working one. Meanwhile in the UK, Wales and the Orkney Islands are working to build up (further) use of native languages as an alternative to English.

Libraries have long had a role as a guardian of languages and the writings and ideas expressed in them - this is often a core part of the role of [national libraries](#). However, rather than just sustaining the status quo, there are also signs of them taking a more activist, catalysing role, finding ways to build skills and help people

connect – or reconnect – with languages other than the ones imposed by centralizing governments. In this, they are finding new ways to deliver on cultural rights.

Public libraries in particular can do this in a way that emphasises active engagement. They are that unjudgmental, open-to-all institution that can help ensure those languages which have suffered from historical and political changes can still live on and more importantly, grow.

EXAMPLE

The examples of North Wales and the Orkney Islands given above are instructive. Both are – or at least feel – a long way away from the capital and have languages that were subject to repression well into the 20th century. Both have seen a revival, but not one that has yet seen universal take-up, including by newcomers.

Elsewhere, the experience of local librarians in Kazakhstan was telling. They had been active in supporting Kazakh language publishing and translating. However, in areas such as accessible formats, they had run into the challenge that no local publishers were producing works in Kazakh, leaving them with the responsibility to record audiobooks and more.

In fulfilling this role, libraries have reassessed their approach to collections, supporting the

development and dissemination of local language content. This has required a readiness to reduce the space and focus available for the dominant language, requiring clear communication and transparency with the community. They have also looked to build collaborations with groups and other actors who can support language learning, as well as hiring staff and engaging volunteers who can provide services in the local language. Less conventional approaches have also been tried out – for example, libraries in [Orkney](#) have also taken a less direct approach, developing a Flora Trail focused both on local flowers and sharing poetry recordings in local dialect.

These have also opened the way to programming allowing people to use this language in practical ways and so build the habit of speaking and communication. To these collaborations they have brought their understanding of their users and their needs to maximise take-up of opportunities.

IF IT BECAME A TREND...

As underlined in the introduction, there are places in all parts of the world where pre-existing local cultures have been diluted and suppressed by the emergence of metropolitan, hegemonic ones, typically associated with the development of nationalism and more centralised states. There are therefore communities all over the world where libraries could play the

role of regenerators of local languages and culture.

As in the examples shared above, this would require a fresh look at collections and programming, including a readiness to reallocate resources away from dominant culture/language materials and activities. At the same time, it would merely be a reinforcement of something that libraries have long taken pride in – their focus on the needs and characteristics of local communities. There are also opportunities to learn from others - for example, New Zealand's Nest programme was [successfully adopted](#) in Finland for Sámi languages.

How well this is accepted in communities – especially those who perhaps feel less affinity with the local culture – may nonetheless raise some questions. Where the promotion of local culture and languages had become politicised, the same too may be true of library decisions in this regard.

IMPLICATIONS

For **users**, it will mean that the way they perceive their library changes. For those who speak local languages and/or feel affinity with it, the shift is likely to be welcome, supporting reconnection with local identities and so cultural rights. They will see the library as a more welcoming environment and may even be more willing to support its

work.

For those who do not speak the language and are more resistant to the change, things may be more challenging. Without a solid approach to communicating change, there is a risk that libraries become a polemic issue, identified with the culture of only part of the community (even if this has arguably always been the case). The fear of being left behind or marginalised may translate into opposition to any institution that embodies this change. However, there is nothing inevitable about this.

For **libraries** themselves, it will mean a need to reassess current practices, something which is not always comfortable (like any change). This is not just about more traditional actions (collections building), but also to develop initiatives that proactively promote languages and culture.

To facilitate this, relevant libraries and librarians may need to invest in training. However, these are transferrable skills, which could enable different approaches in other areas, such as around supporting creativity, employability and other forms of literacy. In addition, libraries may want to work towards a different staffing profile, with more local language speakers.

Furthermore, this change could

raise important questions about **how libraries work together**, potentially requiring different forms of collaboration (although of course it would also provide a new focus for cooperation between libraries within a language community).

CONTRIBUTING FACTORS

The **level of autonomy** of libraries will play a major role. Where there are more centralised systems – often for good reasons around economies of scale and supporting sharing and learning – they may also come with characteristics that may serve as a brake on efforts to invest in local language content and training. It is of course possible to have a national network and local freedoms, but this requires systems to be designed effectively.

The **politics of language** is also relevant. The promotion of local languages and culture is not always

neutral, meaning that changes in the colour of relevant governments could translate into swings in approaches to libraries that embrace the trend.

The **ability of librarians themselves to change**, and to embrace this evolution (both in terms of their own practice, and to welcome new colleagues and collaborators) will be essential. Goodwill is important but may not be enough on its own – support (through training and freeing capacity) may be needed to make a success.

Resources also play a role. In those countries looking to move away from colonial languages, libraries will only be able to fulfil their potential if they have the funding and stability necessary to build collections and services tailored to support wider use of local language.

18. EXPANDING SCOPE VS CORE MISSION

Dany Miller-Kareko, New Zealand-Te Aotearoa

The role of libraries as part of the social work infrastructure of societies is well established as a general trend, with many even

having trained social workers as part of the wider library team, ready to support patrons who could benefit from their help. There is growing success in securing the recognition of libraries in wider approaches to social inclusion and

integration. As such, this is already a well-established tendency.

The phenomenon that is emergent, however, is the backlash against this. This is a symptom of increasing concern about libraries' scope-creep. Libraries' social care responsibilities are growing, but colleagues raise questions about whether expanding our role risks compromising core functions and whether some libraries will begin refining services back to their traditional mission.

EXAMPLE

One colleague at the Congress presented their experience of a "failed innovation" where previously inaccessible library spaces were opened to the community. However, they reported that rather than being used for reading, study or work, they were "treated like restaurants". Another suggested that digital help and training is not a librarian's role and should be provided by other agencies. Rather librarians should focus on their strengths.

IF IT BECAME A TREND...

If this thinking becomes more mainstream, libraries may abandon community service roles and focus more narrowly on information collection and provision, reference, and study spaces. This might preserve our sector identity and reduce resource strain but could exclude vulnerable users who rely on libraries for broader services.

Some systems may embrace expansion, formalising their social service work and partnerships. A distinct separation could emerge between those libraries which focus on the core mission of knowledge stewardship, and others who shift and become civic centres; a polarisation between "houses of knowledge" vs. "community hubs."

IMPLICATIONS

Narrowing scope could increase confidence in **libraries'** academic expertise, focusing on collections, and literacy, but risks damaging libraries' image as inclusive, accessible spaces in the eyes of **communities**.

Meanwhile, an expanded scope strengthens social wellbeing outcomes, reinforcing **libraries** as key pillars of civic infrastructure, but risks diluting core the mission and exacerbating resourcing concerns, unless there is adequate investment to allow libraries to fulfil all roles.

The **profession** must grapple with its identity at large, and how it addresses questions around meeting community needs, professional integrity and trust. Is a library's ultimate purpose knowledge stewardship, community wellbeing, or both? Staff training, policy, and advocacy will be shaped by how institutions and their funders answer this question: what kind of institution is the

library of the future?

CONTRIBUTING FACTORS

One key factor here is the state of **social cohesion** in general, and how far governments are investing in this. Social inequity, rising hardship, and the erosion or withdrawal of what were previously government services all play into this. When there is no other option, people in need of help are more likely to end up in the library and will still have expectations as users.

More internally to the library sector, **professional standards, resource constraints and political climates** may affect how far libraries can sustain a focus on broader missions. Demographic differences in staff and users will also influence service trajectory, while (uptake of) technology may accelerate the shift in either direction. The balance chosen will also vary by region and context.

19. POSITIVE SPACE MESSAGING VS LIVED REALITY

Dany Miller-Kareko, New Zealand-Te Aotearoa

In many parts of the world, there is a growing readiness to recognise and value diversity, overcoming old prejudices and ignorance. This brings with it a much greater freedom for individuals to be themselves, rather than facing a sense of shame, stigma, or exclusion. A society where everyone can be confident in who they are is one which is better able to fulfil its potential.

Libraries have often leant into this at the level of rhetoric and policy, reflecting their broader commitment to inclusion and

support for all members of the community. However, this is not always carried through into front line service provision. As user expectations continue to advance, too often, the self- and desired perception of libraries as inclusive spaces conflicts with users' experiences of exclusion or censorship.

EXAMPLE

Several colleagues discussed how libraries promote themselves as democratic hubs or LGBTQIA+ inclusive spaces, yet this is not always reflected in the experience of users. Vulnerable community members encounter staff who are unable or unwilling to meet their

diverse needs, and events are cancelled or restricted due to political or safety concerns.

After years of progress, the risk is of an emerging gap between the image that libraries want to project of being inclusive spaces, and the reality of compromised programming, limited resourcing, or local political pressures.

IF IT BECAME A TREND...

If this disparity grows, communities will experience a deepening mismatch between space messaging and reality. Declaring inclusivity without meaningful delivery will erode trust, reputation, and institutional legitimacy, particularly among marginalised groups.

Alternatively, an awareness of where gaps exist may trigger renewed efforts to bridge the gap, increasing tolerance for risk and trying new things, and accepting the potential political and practical costs of aligning reality with values.

IMPLICATIONS

This signal exposes the vulnerability of libraries' role as trusted civic spaces for all. If positive messaging is not aligned with delivery, trust in libraries as neutral and inclusive institutions could be undermined. Communities may disengage from services, losing faith in libraries and viewing them as purely emblematic of inclusion, but insubstantial in

action. For those communities who do not see a place for themselves in libraries, this translates to a loss of the services offered. Beyond the democratic consequences of this, the risk is of deepening the exclusion they face and so reducing access and well-being.

Alternatively, acknowledging this disparity now could drive innovation in programming, policy, and partnerships to grow genuine safety and inclusivity. At a time of polarisation, it would better position libraries to be leaders of an alternative, more positive information environment where everyone is welcome.

CONTRIBUTING FACTORS

From within communities, a key driver is the increasing **expectations from communities of users**. How far they are able to see themselves in their libraries is the ultimate determinant of success here.

Among librarians, levels of **professional confidence and competence matter**. Professional values of intellectual freedom and democracy compel libraries to live up to their positivity rhetoric, but local political and social climates constrain action. Staff must be empowered and resourced to create genuinely inclusive spaces. The future depends on whether libraries can manage risks and optics meaningfully to align with

values or end up unable to resist external pressures.

Last of all, the state of the **broader political debate** will affect things, with social media too often not helping. Rising extremism risks

creating situations of concern for the safety of staff and users, which must remain the priority. Libraries are vulnerable to political and societal trends that restrict speech, and the tension between institutional survival and advocacy.

20. LIBRARIES AS MOBILISERS

Damilare Oyedele, Nigeria

Libraries' roles are changing as the needs of our society evolves. Meeting the evolving needs of our users in turn requires different capabilities, often not taught in library schools. In response, we are seeing a new type of skillset emerging, including and not limited to library advocacy skills, community engagement and outreach, and library-tech skills.

Such a skillset builds on top of traditional librarianship and includes a meta-reflection about how to design and combine library services with other initiatives in order best to serve communities.

EXAMPLE

There is a rich set of examples based on the results of the work of Library Aid Africa in this space. For example, through the Library Internet Governance Ambassadors programme, it has been possible to

integrate libraries into the discourse and actions of digital inclusion actors at the local, national and regional levels. This empowers librarians to lead on digital inclusion projects such as The [Cyber Zone Project at La Lucia Library](#) which closes the Digital Gap for Pensioners by providing them with access to digital literacy skills, to promote initiatives such as '[Think before you click](#)', and training in how to get the most out of technology to boost service provision.

Meanwhile, through the Young African Library Leaders Fellowship, librarians are leading community engagement and outreach programs in their communities through [capstone project component](#) embedded into the program structure. Over the past 4 cohorts, YALLF have trained 100 young library leaders across 19 African countries who have developed over 50 capstone projects. As highlighted in my other signal, this has seen emerging leaders with the skillset highlighted here take on leadership roles.

Finally, there is also a rise in advocacy, which will be a key skill in defining (and ensuring the continuity of) the library of the future. For example, the IFLA regional [In-Country Library Advocacy Co-Design Team](#) project is empowering library leaders to lead country level advocacy efforts for libraries on the Sustainable Development Goals and Voluntary National Reviews.

IF IT BECAME A TREND...

the role of librarians in a world where this signal is generalised would be markedly different. Without losing the skills taught in library schools, they would take on the role of social ‘entrepreneurs’ or mobilisers within their communities, making connections, stimulating initiatives, and delivering as much through others as directly.

As this type of position becomes more widespread, not only will the type of training provided to librarians evolve, but they will also become a partner of choice for other stakeholders, including agencies. This should have a positive financial impact, although the risk is always of giving libraries additional responsibilities without additional resources.

Meanwhile, for communities, they will gain a much more multifunctional, responsive space and infrastructure to support them

in meeting their needs and achieving their goals. Perceptions of libraries should change for the better, as too people’s impression of the value of knowledge and information – given growing cynicism about this in the current environment, this would be a major positive.

IMPLICATIONS

We would anticipate renewed understanding of the emerging roles of **libraries** as community hubs for innovation, empowerment, and connection, and as strategic access points to diverse community needs contributing to national development plans. **Librarians** will be seen as active members of their society leading key initiatives, advocacy and programs with the community they serve.

As hinted already, a generalised, more proactive approach to realising the potential of knowledge and information to improve lives will represent a welcome antidote to fears of misinformation and the weakening of information integrity. We may also see **other policy actors** gain a stronger appreciation of the importance of the information environment, and readiness to respect the skills of those who can navigate it.

CONTRIBUTING FACTORS

A first driver is the **evolution in communities** themselves, and so

their needs (or at least a growing recognition of what these needs are). This represents a list of goals that libraries can seek to meet, with the right approach and mindset. Digital transformation, at least currently, is only accelerating this trend.

In parallel, there are changes in **library skills and practices** themselves, including the ability to embrace and implement change. Prior to this, though, is listening to

the needs of the community that we serve – if we cannot do this, then our ability to respond to need is highly limited.

Shrinking library **budgets** in many countries play a role, obliging libraries already to be entrepreneurial in how they seek support and deliver on their goals within restricted means. This can be a driver of partnerships, at least with actors who share the same goals and missions.

21. COMMUNITY-LED LIBRARY DESIGN

Merve Yavuzdemir, Türkiye

Rather than following top-down instructions or following particular models of organisation, libraries are increasingly co-designed with communities to reflect local needs and values. Users are invited to come to the table when planning is taking place, with their views helping to shape everything from buildings and collections to service patterns and the rules around programming.

This requires a degree of loss of control by leadership and policymakers, but this is worthwhile given the dividends in terms of

libraries' ability to serve communities and demonstrate their responsiveness to demand. When done effectively, this proves an excellent means of identifying unmet needs, and what libraries can do about them.

EXAMPLE

Several public libraries have begun involving local residents, youth, and marginalised groups in the early planning and design stages of new or renovated facilities. They have used workshops and participatory mapping sessions, where users co-create spatial layouts, service priorities, and cultural programming, ensuring that the library mirrors the identity and aspirations of its

community. While this has not always been comfortable, the results have been impressive, both in terms of usage of the library and attitudes towards it.

IF IT BECAME A TREND...

Participatory design would become a standard phase of every new library project, with policy frameworks requiring community input. Where this has not been the case, library leadership would need to explain why, demonstrating accountability to the community. This could democratise design processes, as well as improving trust between institutions and citizens.

In the meanwhile, library spaces would shift from being expert-defined to co-owned social infrastructure, yielding more inclusive and adaptable spaces across regions. This would likely improve support for libraries at a broader level, bringing benefits across the sector as a whole, at least as long as processes are well run.

IMPLICATIONS

If **libraries** are designed *with* rather than *for* **communities**, they can become engines of civic participation and local democracy, based on an offer of information designed around **users'** characteristics and needs. The result would be stronger trust in public institutions.

Furthermore, by promoting active engagement and a readiness to create and act, this signal would mean an information environment that better reflects diverse voices. Local narratives, histories, and needs would gain visibility, helping reduce social exclusion. A corollary of this is a rebalancing of the relationship between professionals and community needs, closing gaps and recognising the contributions that community members can provide.

CONTRIBUTING FACTORS

A phenomenon that would support the transformation of this signal into a trend would be a broader shift in favour of **participatory governance and design justice** – at the level both of institution like libraries, and of communities as a whole in the context of regeneration initiatives.

Underpinning this would be the expectations of communities, the recognition among institutional leadership that this approach leads to better results, and the growing awareness of civic tech tools that facilitate collective decision-making.

Linked to this is **awareness** among urban regeneration professionals of the value of public space as a driver of wellbeing and social cohesion. With the internet risking leading to a fragmentation of societies, the need for places that people can share with others has

become clearer. To ensure that this goal is met, the value of participatory design is clear.

On the other side, **budget and time** constraints could slow or stop the spread of this signal, and rather favouring a return to more familiar, and apparently less complicated decision-making processes (even if the results are less effective). Participatory design takes time,

which will need to be allocated if it is to be done meaningfully.

There is also the need for librarians themselves to have the **attitudes**, as well as the facilitation and co-design skills needed to make a success of such processes. These are not always skills that professionals learn during their formal education, and so will need to be picked up.

22. LIBRARIES AS CLIMATE ENGAGEMENT HUBS

Madina Kerimova, Kyrgyzstan

Based on my experience at the IFLA conference, I see a promising opportunity for libraries in Central Asia to evolve into vibrant hubs for sustainability. At the heart of this transformation would be the growing environmental passion and engagement of young people, who understand the threat to the planet and are impatient to do something about it.

Libraries offer a high-potential hub for this work, given their role not just in providing access to by also in helping people to activate information, turning global inspiration into local impact. Their broader commitment to the

wellbeing of societies also means that libraries are particularly well suited to taking on this task, even if it may appear to be a new area of focus.

EXAMPLE

At the conference, the mobilisation of libraries in different parts of the world to support community engagement in climate action was clear, both through sessions and in the posters displayed. One that stood out in particular highlighted use of artificial intelligence to facilitate environmental monitoring, offering an exciting way of working directly with data and understanding how climate change is playing out.

IF IT BECAME A TREND...

Libraries across the region, and

beyond, would (further) affirm their role as active, collaborative centres for learning and action. This would help address outdated stereotypes of libraries as places for passive consumption of knowledge, and rather as a space for engaging, interrogating, and creating.

Such a transition would also be likely to see far more systematic cooperation between libraries, NGOs and schools, placing libraries right at the heart of an ecosystem of institutions and actors focused on promoting positive change. Furthermore, while work on climate engagement provides a great gateway topic, it could also lead to the integration of wider sustainability topics (including the economic, social and cultural pillars) into the very fabric of our community work.

IMPLICATIONS

For **libraries** themselves, this signal promises an opportunity to (re)shape our role in the eyes of the community, positioning ourselves as essential, trusted spaces for civic engagement and environmental stewardship. Embracing this grassroots, youth-led energy offers an opportunity for a new dynamism which can flow across our work, promoting collaboration and

innovation across our areas of focus.

For the **young people** involved in library hubs, it is an opportunity to turn interest and enthusiasm into concrete actions, building on the information and other resources that the library can offer. They will develop skills and literacies that enable them to be more effective and engaged citizens, not just around climate issues.

CONTRIBUTING FACTORS

Funding is unsurprisingly an issue, given that the acquisition of the relevant tools and resources will require investment, even if the pay-off is certainly much higher. This may in turn need efforts to convince those who are taking decisions about funding to be open to initiatives around climate engagement. Leadership from associations and major institutions can help here.

Communities will also need to be ready to reimagine the role of libraries, breaking away from old stereotypes and realising all that can be done in library spaces. The same will go for NGOs and schools who may not automatically think of libraries as partners in this space.

23. HEALING LIBRARIES

Merve Yavuzdemir, Türkiye

Traditionally, the way in which libraries present themselves has taken knowledge and information as a starting point. However, libraries are increasingly framing themselves as restorative spaces promoting collective and emotional well-being for their communities. While knowledge and information are still central to their activities, the refocusing on healing as the desired outcome of library services allows for a reconsideration of how services are offered, to the benefit of users.

EXAMPLE

As highlighted in sessions at WLIC, public and academic libraries are experimenting with “healing corners,” sensory rooms, or bibliotherapy programs supporting users facing trauma, anxiety, or burnout. Following crises such as pandemics, earthquakes, and wars, libraries have come to act as quiet, safe places for reflection, connection, and recovery — sometimes in collaboration with local health organisations or social workers.

IF IT BECAME A TREND...

The role of the library would expand from information provider to a *healing public commons*. We

would see the widespread uptake of biophilic and trauma-informed principles in library building and service design, with the updating of relevant standards and conceptions of good practice. Libraries would host interdisciplinary programs merging culture, mindfulness, and mental health support as a matter of course, bringing in new audiences who benefit from what they can offer.

Meanwhile, libraries would also be systematically integrated into public health and resilience strategies, with library initiatives coordinated with those of more traditional actors in this space. Referrals from health professionals to libraries would become commonplace, while libraries would also receive support in order to fulfil their role here.

IMPLICATIONS

If generalised, this signal would strengthen **libraries’** social legitimacy and visibility as community care institutions. Meanwhile, **members of communities** would benefit from additional infrastructure for wellbeing, underpinned by the knowledge libraries can offer, with stronger understanding of how this can enable empathy, social connection and human-centred recovery.

However, it would also raise questions around professional boundaries, and how to equip **staff** to deal with the emotional labour that this new role would bring. There would need to be support and reflection to ensure ethical collaboration with **health professionals** when working with sensitive issues and information.

CONTRIBUTING FACTORS

A key driver here will be the growing **awareness of the importance of mental health** (and the costs of not providing support for this) in the wake of the Pandemic. Experiences of loneliness and stress all too often feed into poor physical health, as well as struggles in economic and social life. While the effects of the Pandemic are still with us, climate anxiety represents another driver

of angst and pessimism about the future. The value of action is clear.

An open question is around how effectively actors involved in arts, culture and care policies can create **integrated approaches**. This is not a given, with health and social care policies in many countries already struggling to find a way to fit together. This will require a readiness to find new ways of working and measuring impacts.

This signal will struggle to become mainstream if there is no way **to support care-focused roles**, especially in situations where libraries are already underfunded. Making spaces welcoming and safe-feeling will require investment, otherwise libraries will struggle to achieve the goal of healing individuals and communities.

24. LIBRARY DIPLOMACY

Merve Yavuzdemir, Türkiye

In some parts of the world, libraries have long been seen as having a role to play in 'soft power' initiatives (think American corners), while national libraries more generally often have international strategies designed to complement broader

bilateral relations strategies. Such efforts are well established, often coming in the form of formal agreements, jointly organised exhibitions and more.

However, there are signs of the emergence of a more balanced (i.e. less 'power'-orientated) approach, coming from different countries, and that involves more than just

the most prominent institutions. This promises to make many more libraries part of diplomatic efforts.

EXAMPLE

Beyond the fact that participation at WLIC can be seen as an instance of library diplomacy at work, experiences shared highlighted how national and public libraries are engaging in cross-border collaborations, exhibitions, and digital heritage exchanges. These seek to foster intercultural understanding. Initiatives like library twinning and multilingual digital archives highlight shared global heritage while supporting mutual trust.

IF IT BECAME A TREND...

All but the smallest library would be encouraged to add an international dimension to their work, connected with neighbouring countries, those with which there is a diaspora link, or those with which the government wishes to strengthen relations more broadly. This could be supported by library teams within ministries of foreign affairs (or international teams within the ministry responsible for libraries).

We would see more international collections and programming, reflecting these relationships, and opportunities for bilateral exchange. Organisations like IFLA may become better recognised as a diplomatic space, potentially leading to a formalisation of engagement there.

IMPLICATIONS

Libraries would be recognised as key diplomatic actors, bridging nations through shared knowledge infrastructure and cultural exchange. This could reshape international cultural policy frameworks. In this context, libraries would serve as neutral, trusted intermediaries in global dialogue—especially amid geopolitical tension and information disorder. Their collections and networks would become platforms for peacebuilding and cultural empathy.

There is, however, a risk of the instrumentalisation of libraries. As their profile – and that of knowledge and heritage – grows, the desire to use them for political purposes may also. This could undermine the legitimacy and trust that they have, as well as the professional principles of their staff.

For **librarians** themselves, this trend would imply much more regular contact with colleagues and others from beyond borders. This is likely to be an exciting new development, although how far they can enjoy it will depend on whether they are given the additional time and resources to do so. Furthermore, and as already highlighted, they may face tough choices if political goals come into

conflict with professional values.

CONTRIBUTING FACTORS

A driver behind library diplomacy is the focus on **international cultural policy** more broadly. As long as governments recognise the value of this as part of broader strategies, the chances of this signal becoming a trend are higher. The resumption of MONDIACULT meetings after a 40-year hiatus may be an indication here. At the same time, some governments at least have sought rather to cut spending to traditional cultural networks.

Open cultural heritage practices, as well as the rise of standards and practices for digital unification and repatriation can also play a role. If these practices can secure and retain a high level of trust, then they will be at the heart of library diplomacy. However, if they do not – for example due to a lack of a sense of equity or of willingness to share in this way, diplomacy efforts will be less effective.

Overall **geopolitics** will also matter here. Fragmentation makes it all the more important to find a basis for communication between peoples, as well as trust-based diplomacy, but at the same time make these harder. One risk is that libraries themselves are dragged into more polarised thinking, looking for nationality-based differences between themselves,

rather than what they have in common through librarianship.



