



MEPs welcome 100 cycling librarians to the European Parliament in Brussels

On the 26th of June 2013 MEPs from the Culture and Education Committee welcome over a 100 librarians from 24 countries on bicycles to Brussels in recognition of the crucial role libraries play in European communities.

Before arriving at the steps of the European Parliament on the morning of the 26th of June, the hundred-strong group of librarian-cyclists pedalled over 400km in 8 days after the 2013 [Cycling for Libraries](#) (C4L) tour officially kicked off in Amsterdam on the 18th of June. This [year's tour](#) included visits to libraries in The Hague, Delft, Bruges and Ghent alongside fringe events organised by C4L and their local partners. The unconference is built upon the intellectual and physical contributions of each participant while discussing key topics such as social inclusion, public access to information and new approaches to networking and collaboration.

So why have 100 librarians decided to leave their desks and get on their bicycles? One of the key messages behind this year's cycling campaign is that the EU's 65.000 public libraries do much more than just lend books – they have the power to address social and economic needs in communities throughout the European Union. Furthermore as the European Commission strives to meet the needs of an increasingly digital society in the midst of an on-going economic crisis, a [2013 survey of public library services across 18 European Member States](#) provides new evidence of the positive impact of libraries in their local communities (see note 5 below).

Perhaps unsurprisingly, this research confirms what most librarians already know - that public libraries are instrumental in delivering lifelong learning opportunities, providing information and services to underserved populations, and offering access to information technology and training that people cannot find elsewhere. They offer a safe and welcoming environment accessible to disadvantaged and marginalized groups where users can learn at their own pace and at the time of their choosing. They provide a community gateway into our new digital world – whilst supporting universal access to the fruits of human creativity, culture and learning to all.

On the evening of the 26th of June Mr Hannu Takkula MEP and Ms Doris Pack MEP welcome 100 librarians (minus their bicycles) for dinner at the European Parliament to celebrate the end of their long journey to Brussels as well as their valuable work serving local European communities by promoting access to information, knowledge, culture and digital online resources and learning opportunities.

The dinner also serves as an official launch for a Parliamentary Written Declaration on “The Impact of Public Libraries in European Communities”. The Declaration is designed to raise political awareness of recently published research on public library usage across the EU which demonstrates that public libraries provide essential services to marginalised and disadvantaged groups which can assist with EU2020 policy objectives, particularly in relation to digital inclusion, social inclusion, lifelong learning and pathways to employment.

Quotes from participants and supporters:

“Public libraries are well placed to provide innovative e-inclusion services at grass roots level alongside local and regional private, public and third sector stakeholders, promoting smart, sustainable and inclusive growth in society. In the Cycling for libraries tour we share good practices and debate about how digital access, information skills and library services can stimulate also employment and enterprise and how public libraries at a local level play a pivotal role in delivering growth and prosperity across the entirety of the EU.”

Jukka Pennanen and Mace Ojala – organisers Cycling for Libraries

“I am delighted to welcome the participants of the 2013 Cycling for Libraries tour to the European Parliament. The essential role of public libraries in local communities across Europe is often overlooked, which is why I am pleased to lend my full support to Written which I sincerely hope will raise awareness amongst my Parliamentary colleagues of the crucial role that public libraries play in support of culture, digital skills, lifelong learning, social inclusion and pathways to employment.”

Hannu Takkula MEP, Member of the Culture & Education Committee, European Parliament

“As a professional association of Flemish librarians and archivists, the VVBAD is excited about Cycling for Libraries. Highlighting the essential role of libraries in our society is important, as Europe is cutting back on budgets. Access to information, bridging the digital gap and encourage reading, are now more important than ever. The public library plays an essential role.”

Bruno Vermeeren, coordinator of VVBAD (Flemish Association for Library, Archives and Documentation)

“Most policy-makers associate public libraries with culture and books – but many struggle to appreciate the role of the modern public library in local communities. A 2013 report from the European Commission’s Joint Research Centre has highlighted that public libraries play a ‘crucial role both in providing digital literacy to excluded groups as well as using ICT to support social inclusion of groups at risk of exclusion such as to provide new skills (through eLearning platforms) or for employment’. And yet despite these findings most public libraries lack recognition and funding because awareness of the full extent their valuable community functions have failed to penetrate mainstream political debate at EU level.”

Dan Mount, Head of Policy and Public Affairs, Civic Agenda EU

Notes to the editor:

1. Originally founded in Finland, the Cycling for Libraries tour is now in its third year. 2011 saw the group cycle from Copenhagen to Berlin, and last year the tour spanned from Vilnius to Tallinn.
2. Cycling for Libraries is an ecologically friendly low-carbon footprint “unconference” where the agenda is shaped by its participants, not dictated by the organizers. The focus is on shared open air experiences and collaborative networking and interactive debate – not static PowerPoint presentations and speeches.
3. The Cycling for Libraries international community is rapidly growing each year with interested parties looking to organise follow-up events in the United States and Nepal.
4. The Parliamentary Written Declaration on “The Impact of Public Libraries in European Communities” was registered with the President of the European Parliament and sponsored by MEP’s BADIA I CUTCHET Maria (S&D), BLINKEVIČIŪTĖ Vilija (S&D), DUFF, Andrew (ALDE), IVAN Cătălin-Sorin (S&D), SANCHEZ-SCHMID Marie-Thérèse (PPE), SCHAAKE Marietje (ALDE), TAKKULA Hannu (ALDE), TRŪPEL Helga (Group of the Greens/European Free Alliance), VERGIAT Marie-Christine, (Confederal Group of the European United Left - Nordic Green Left) and VERHEYEN Sabine (EPP).
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6. In March 2013 independent research company TNS published a quantitative and qualitative study in 18 EU Member States to identify perceptions and use of public libraries, including the use of information and communications technology (ICT), among library users and the general public. The [research](#), commissioned by the Global Libraries initiative of the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, provides new and compelling data about the impact of public libraries and library computer and Internet access in the EU. Key findings include:
 - Nearly **100 million** adults across the EU used a public library in the last year.
 - **24 million adults** (1 in 4 public library users) participated in non-formal/informal learning activities at a library in the last year—particularly the elderly, ethnic minorities, and the unemployed.
 - Public libraries represent the only option for accessing the Internet for **1.5 million** marginalized Europeans (most frequently Roma, the disabled, the elderly, and the unemployed); another **1.9 million** EU adults have no other source of free Internet access.
 - In the last year, more than **4 million** adults in the EU used the Internet on a computer at a public library to support employment-related activities – **1.5 million** used public library computers to apply for jobs, and a **quarter of a million** adults secured jobs in this way.
 - **83%** of those accessing the Internet in a public library reported positive benefits, including helping them save time and money, improving their access to resources and skills necessary to find work, and increasing access to government services.

Images and info

www.cyclingforlibraries.org

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