Public libraries aim at people of all ages and backgrounds. They reach more or less the entire population, especially low-income groups and younger generations. In addition to the traditional book stock, they offer a great range of media and modern formats (like makerspace activities, programming workshops, reading festivals, language cafes). They also offer digital reading promotion and media literacy instruction.

As third (public) places, public libraries combine different functions and can contribute to educational justice and a social and sustainable transformation of our cities. They are spaces of (collective) knowledge and offer open and low-threshold access to resources. Thus they enable participation in the local community and society as a whole. As places of lifelong learning, they can impart knowledge and skills beyond the formal educational infrastructure and enable encounters - not only with literature but also with culture, with new technologies, with strangers and (future) friends.
**Change through austerity**

The project focused on the following questions:

1. What strategies are municipalities using to respond to processes of digitisation and austerity?
2. How have public libraries developed in their local contexts?
3. What changes are taking place in and after the COVID-19 crisis?
4. How can libraries work with urban policymakers to promote democratic encounters and participation in the city?
5. What role do public libraries play in the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals: By expanding free access to media, technologies, counseling and events, they counteract educational inequalities. They support participation in educational processes and activities. They offer space for social encounters and democratic debate.

**Future Challenges**

Public libraries have always been open to new media. In a way, they have learned completely new ways to communicate and are the mediators of modern digital communication. Digitisation has brought major transformations. It is not only about adapting to digital services, the physical presence of public libraries is still an essential element of the cultural and social infrastructure in a city.

**Conclusion**

Digitalisation and austerity are two sides of the same coin. They are shifting the services to voluntary work. Especially, models of spatial centralisation are followed by an underfunding of public infrastructures, public libraries are under strong pressure to make their services more efficient. Municipal governments are responsible for local public libraries, but their main financial resources come from the state. The state cuts the budget due to austerity measures. Therefore, local authorities can decide for themselves how they shape library development.

The Head of Makerspace contributes to the aim of getting in touch with each other. In the past, he lived in a rural area and was not able to participate in cultural and social processes. Thanks to the Makerspace initiative, he now meets other people and is able to participate in various cultural and social activities, such as dancing, basketball, and volunteering.

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1. What strategies are municipalities using to respond to processes of digitisation and austerity?
2. How have public libraries developed in their local contexts?
3. What changes are taking place in and after the COVID-19 crisis?
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