

IFLA – the International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions – is the global organisation for libraries. With members in over 150 countries, and from all types of institution, we work both to build the capacity of our field to deliver excellent services, and to advocate for libraries and access to information with partners.

We are the primary interlocutor on library issues at the global level, and engage actively in work around development, education, research, heritage, digital issues and broader access to information at the UN, UNESCO and WIPO.

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Libraries

Partners for Sustainable Cities and Human Settlements for All



International
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The Multifunctional Library: A Driver of Local Development

There are over 2 ½ million libraries around the world, including over 430 000 public and community libraries! Together, they represent an enormous potential to help achieve the goals of local and regional governments, in line with the New Urban Agenda. Here are just ten of the different roles they can play:

1. Cultural Centres

Libraries are specialists in promoting books and literature. They provide an opportunity for everyone to engage with the written word, offer a showcase for authors – especially local ones – and are key players in wider initiatives such as UNESCO's Creative Cities.

2. Literacy and Learning Hubs

Not just through supporting a love of reading, but also through advice, informal and more formal opportunities, libraries are also a core part of the infrastructure for promoting literacy, especially among adults. Libraries are also portals to further education, and offer a wide variety of courses themselves to boost inclusion, participation and entrepreneurship.

3. Connectivity Points

Even as global internet connectivity rises, almost half of the world's population is still not online. For millions of people, libraries are where they first experience the web, and places they keep on coming back to in order to access the right hardware, with the right support, to make the most of the opportunities on offer.

4. Public Health Information Centres

In fulfilling delivering local governments' role to promote health and well-being, information plays a key role. It enables people to make better choices about how they live, and how to manage conditions. Libraries are key venues for accessing this, especially in private!

5. Guardians of Local Heritage

Many libraries maintain collections of local materials, documenting the past of the areas they serve. Through holding, and giving access to relevant publications and materials, they are a key reference for local historians, as well as for those carrying out wider research. Many host community archiving initiatives.

6. Showcases for Sustainability

Libraries are already a great example of the sharing economy in the case of books. More and more are realising their potential to demonstrate other practices and techniques for sustainable consumption, as well as offering places to provide sustainability education.

7. Shop Windows for Local Government

Clearly the internet is playing a growing role in informing people about council initiatives. But it is not possible to be sure that everyone will visit a website regularly. Libraries offer a great additional means of getting posters, leaflets and other information in front of people, especially those who may not necessarily engage with other 'official' services.

8. Open Civic Spaces

Public libraries have a vocation to be open for all, often providing the only non-commercial indoor space in a community. In many cases, libraries have gone a step further, organising debates and meetings, providing space for civil society groups, or helping people to use open government data and so build democratic engagement.

9. eGovernment Access Stations

As many government services move to an online-only format, it is essential to offer a means for people who lack connectivity, hardware or confidence to fill in the necessary forms or make the necessary request. Libraries provide this.

10. Sources of Local Pride

Finally, a great library can represent a real source of civic pride, both for locals and visitors. Either as historic landmarks, or as new-builds or renovations at the heart of equality-focused redevelopment programmes, they can add to the sense of belonging and engagement with place.