



The use of European Structural and Investment Funds in Estonian, Italian and Polish libraries

A Pilot Report

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The Pilot Report “The use of European Structural and Investment Funds in Estonian, Italian and Polish libraries. A Pilot Report” is the first of a series of Reports published within the framework of the TELL project. It is based on information and suggestions provided by:

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About TELL: The TELL - TRANS-EUROPEAN LEARNING LIBRARIES project brings together eight partners from seven countries to develop a successful educational model in promoting the Council of Europe Recommendation throughout Europe and library financing through the European Structural and Investment Funds. The initiative includes a Guide to the Council of Europe Recommendation, the creation of an innovative curriculum, the organization of 2 Winter schools and the implementation of a Road Map leading to the inclusion of libraries in the European Structural and Investment Funds 2028-2035 - all these activities addressing the needs of both librarians and their communities.

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0. Executive Summary

The report “The use of European Structural and Investment Funds in Estonian, Italian and Polish libraries” is based on factual evidence provided by the Ministry of Culture and the National Library in Estonia, the National Library in Poland and documentation gathered by Rete delle Reti, a network of 1,560 libraries in seven Italian regions.

It largely draws on a series of reports released by EBLIDA between 2020 and 2022 as well as several articles published in library journals. The role of European Structural and Investment Funds (ESIF) in boosting activities in the field of culture has been widely explored through the work undertaken by the OMC (Open Methods of Coordination) Groups of Experts established within the Council of European Union. In contrast, the implementation of ESIFs in the library field remains largely unknown.

The projects listed in the current Report are only the tip of the iceberg of ESIF investment made in libraries. The list at the end of the report includes the biggest beneficiaries of ESIF funding - institutions such as the National Libraries in Poland and Estonia. It also highlights the large-scale intervention taking place in the Apulia Region (a regional network including some 150 libraries). Reference is also made to the ongoing library constructions or re-structuring in Milan, Turin and Rome funded through the Next generation EU programme. The submerged part of the ESIF iceberg - small-scale projects funded through local ERDF (for instance, in Montreuil, France) – is still to be explored.

This Report draws three conclusions. First, it emphasises the financial dimension of ERDF contribution to the library world. Evidence collected in only three countries (Estonia, Italy and Poland) shows that the ERDF financial effort has been remarkable in the current decade, as the following Table shows:

Use of European Regional Development Fund in Estonian, Italian and Polish libraries (in Euro)

	EU Structural Funds and Investment Funds	Next generation EU
Estonia (2018-2029)	15 871 010	
Italy (2017-2027)	195 750 000	264 969 000
Poland (2014-2027)	71 068 000	
Total (Estonia, Italy, Poland)	281 868 000	

This table confirms the results of a Report published by the European Parliament (European Parliament, 2013) which emphasized the high relevance of ERDF in relation to funds directly managed by the European Commission. The European Parliament calculated that in the previous ten years much larger ERDF investments were made in the cultural field, at a ratio of 6:1 compared to directly managed programs. In other words, local public policies through ERDF invested six times more in the cultural field than the “official” European Commission programmes (for instance, Erasmus). This ratio may well be much bigger in the library field. Over ten years, ESIF funding for libraries in only three countries amounted to 25% and 11% of the total budget of, respectively, the CERV programme (€ 1.11 billion) and the Creative Europe programme (€ 2.44 billion) distributed to all cultural, educational and social organisations in 27 EU states (2021-2027).

Second, this Report also disproves the assumption that European Structural Funds invested in libraries are exclusively for less-developed regions. Some library projects in Poland certainly fall under the “less-developed countries” geo-economic category established by the Regional Policy of the European Union. Nevertheless,

most of the investment is directed toward “more developed” (Emilia-Romagna) or “transitional” regions, such as the city of Warsaw and the whole territory of Estonia.

Third, European Structural Funds support for libraries is primarily provided by the ERDF. ERDF has been exceptionally successful in supporting libraries.

There are several reasons why ESIF investments are so little known within the library profession. First, ESIF Funds are managed by national governments with rules and specific objectives different from state to state and from region to region. The opportunity to benefit from ESIF depends heavily on the priorities of national and regional political agendas and agencies. Second, the allocation of ESIF funds to libraries is determined by negotiations between the Member State and the European Commission culminating in the signature of a “Partnership Agreement”, which sets the objective and the context of ESIF expenditure. Third, unlike direct managed Funds, ESIF operations do not typically involve transnational projects or direct contact with European authorities. Apart from INTERREG projects, which often entail trans-border partnerships, libraries being the recipients of ESIF grants do not normally interact with European entities.

Another reason for librarians’ neglect of European Structural Funds is the belief that ESIF investment only concerns Southern and Eastern European countries. It is true that the EU Cohesion Policy targets member states with lower levels of development. Nevertheless, this report provides examples showing that all European countries—developed, less developed, and in transition—can benefit from ESIF. The bulk of ESIF investment is directed toward employment, education, lifelong learning, and social inclusion. These are key priorities in countries such as Belgium, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, and Sweden.

Hence, the need to reconsider the whole strategy of resourcing libraries at European level. European funding is typically categorized in two main ways. The first category includes the programmes managed by the European Education and Culture Executive Agency (EACEA), including CERV (Citizens, Equality, Rights and Values), Erasmus+, and Creative Europe.

The second category includes European Structural and Investment Funds, and in particular the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF). The ERDF was established in 1975 under considerable British and Italian pressure (George, 1990, pp. 56–67). Its purpose is to transfer money from richer regions (not countries), and invest it in infrastructure and service provision. ERDF addresses urban, remote, mountainous, and sparsely populated areas with a view to attracting investments and creating jobs. ERDF is the most commonly used ESIF instrument for library projects.

In general, it can be said that directly managed funds tend to be of interest to a smaller number of advanced libraries with the capacity to internationalize their services and expertise. In contrast, European Structural Funds are more relevant for the vast majority of Europe's 60,000+ libraries, which often lack the resources for research, innovation, and partnership development. It is desirable to establish a complementarity of approaches between direct-managed and indirect-managed European funding, so that social innovation in libraries can be transferred into large-scale applications at national and local levels through ESIF.

This Report also looks at the future of the 2028-2035 ESIF programming cycle. The 2028-2035 ESIF programming cycle will be informed by indicators from the European Social Scoreboard (supporting the European Pillar of Social Rights) and the UNESCO Thematic Indicators for Culture within the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. The recommendations, guidelines, and policy orientations from the 2023 Council of Europe Recommendation on Library Legislation and Policy in Europe, as well as the forthcoming OMC report “Building Bridges: strengthening the multiple roles of libraries as gateways and disseminators of cultural works, expertise and European values” (due in 2026), raise important expectations. These expectations can only be realized with a sound, sustainable, and adequate funding strategy, such as that provided by the European Structural and Investment Funds.

1. Introduction

The European Union's regional policy, also known as Cohesion Policy or European Structural and Investment Funds, is a key instrument in the EU's toolbox for promoting economic, social, and territorial cohesion among its member states and regions. With the primary objective of reducing disparities in development levels across the EU, the Cohesion Policy provides financial support to less developed regions to catch up with the more prosperous ones, while also addressing specific challenges faced by different areas.

The EU's regional policy ensures that funds are allocated and projects are implemented in a way that best suits the needs of each region. The policy's funding is substantial, accounting for one third of the EU's overall budget. These funds are channelled through various programs and initiatives, each targeting specific objectives, such as supporting innovation, promoting sustainable development, and improving infrastructure.

The first European Structural Fund – the European Social Fund – was already part of the Treaty of Rome establishing the European Community in 1958. By providing additional resources to Member States, the EU aims to leverage public and private investments, stimulating economic growth and job creation. The EU's regional policy has had a significant impact on the development of many regions across Europe. It has helped to modernize infrastructure, stimulate innovation, create jobs, and improve the quality of life for millions of people. By fostering economic growth and social inclusion, the policy contributes to a more balanced and prosperous European Union.

While the role of European Structural and Investment Funds (ESIF) in boosting activities in the field of culture has been widely explored through the work undertaken by the OMC (Open Methods of Coordination) Groups of Experts established within the Council of European Union Work Plans for Culture, their implementation in the library field is still to be explored in extent.

This Pilot Report is based on factual evidence provided by the Ministry of Culture and the National Library in Estonia, the National Library in Poland and documentation gathered by Rete delle Reti, a network of some 1,000 libraries in seven Italian regions.

It largely draws on a series of reports released by EBLIDA (European Bureau of Library, Information and Documentation Associations) between 2020 and 2021 (EBLIDA 2020; EBLIDA 2021a; EBLIDA 2021b) as well as several articles published in library journals. Three EBLIDA reports are relevant for this Pilot Report; as Ton van Vlimmeren, former President EBLIDA, commented:

“The preparation of a European library agenda in the post-Covid 19 age will require additional funding in order to carry out ordinary library activities and to consolidate the trends experimented with during the crisis. ESI Funds may be an appropriate financial instrument; we have to stimulate ground-breaking developments in libraries and be open to novel directions which cannot be covered by ordinary library budgets” (EBLIDA 2021a).

EBLIDA has done groundbreaking work on ESIF funding for libraries. The extent, quality, and effect of the European Regional Policy on libraries, however, is unknown. No central archive of ESIF-funded library projects exists. Although comprehensive, the websites collecting the whole of ESIF-related information in Italy and Poland do not allow for navigation through search engines.

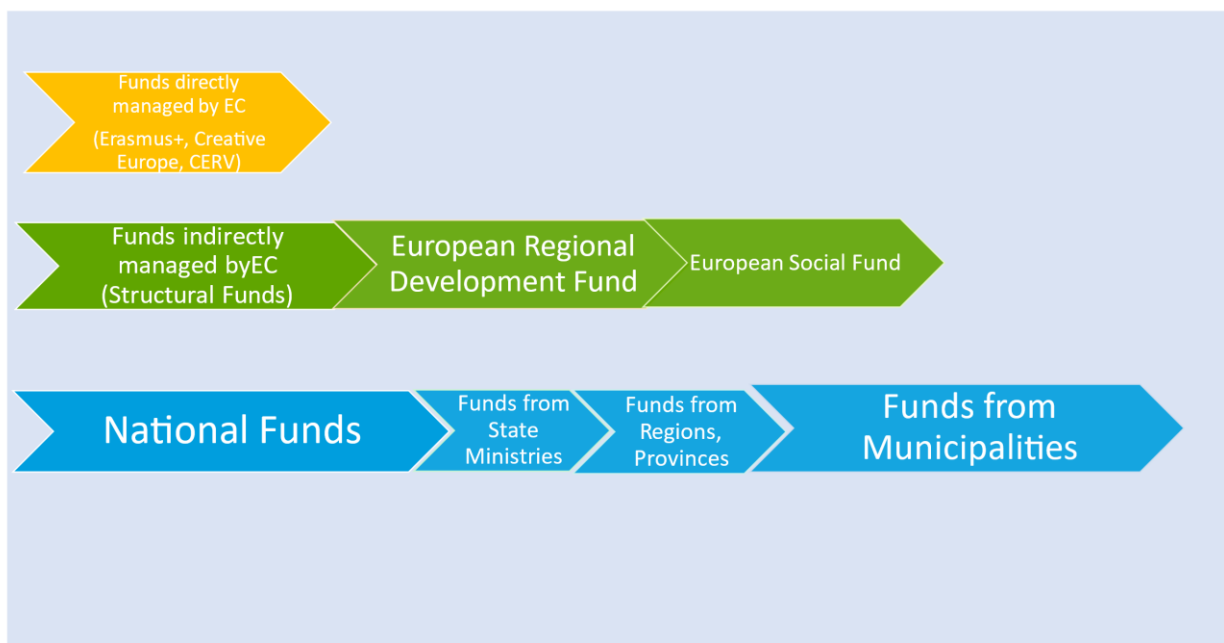
This Pilot Report is significant for at least three reasons. First, it intends to move towards a comprehensive understanding of libraries as a tool contributing to urban regeneration, social inclusion, SDG attainment, wellbeing, internal and rural areas, digital development and other public policies developed in the Partnership agreements between the European Commission and Member States (at the core of the 2030 European Agenda for sustainable development (see Chapter 4). This Pilot Report explores the pervasive nature of library investment - it should be noted that the Appendix represent only the tip of the iceberg of Structural Funds implemented in libraries.

Second, this Pilot Report helps discover how ESI Funds are changing the library picture of a city, of a region, of a state through massive economic investment (see Chapter 7). European Commission-managed programs like Erasmus+, CERV, and Creative Europe prioritize Research & Innovation. Structural Funds, indirectly managed by the European Commission, reinforce a country's cultural infrastructure. While significant in developed countries like Finland and Germany, they are decisive in nations such as Estonia, Italy, and Poland. They are the pivotal intervention around which library policy and planning can be set up.

Third, this Report shows the central role of Networks, Associations and Institutions playing a national role in boosting the activities of public libraries. Library associations, networks and, to a certain extent, national libraries have the duty to address the whole of the library infrastructure and not only the few front runners, flagship libraries present in the international environment. In relation to European funding, therefore, they must broaden their focus and consider all available European funding opportunities.

The following Table describes the effects of funds directly and indirectly managed by the European Commission and the penetration of EU regional policy in public libraries.

Table 1. Funding for European Libraries



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In Poland:

- Julia Konopka, Deputy Director, National Library of Poland.

2. What are European Structural and Investment Funds (ESIF)?

When we speak of European Structural and Investment Funds (ESIF), we are referring to a series of financial instruments governed by a common rulebook. The oldest of them is the European Social Fund (ESF), already present in the Treaty of Rome (art. 123) establishing in 1957 a common market among the six participating countries (Belgium, France, Germany, Italy, Luxembourg and the Netherlands). ESF aimed to improve “employment opportunities for workers in the common market” and contribute “to the raising of the standard of living”, “the ease of employment and the geographical and professional mobility of workers”. As Munzi (1965) noted, it served as a “remedial instrument” to address imbalances that hindered European unification. It has now evolved in the European Social Fund Plus (ESF+) and is now the main EU’ instrument for supporting the implementation of the European Social Pillar of Social Rights. With a budget of €142.7 billion for the period 2021-2027, ESF+ provides an important contribution to the EU’s employment, social, education and skills policies, including structural reforms in these areas.

Under the pressure of the United Kingdom (joining the EU in 1973), another typology of ESIF came to light in 1975 to strengthen the economic, social and territorial cohesion in the European Union: the ERDF (ERDF). To adapt to the arrival of Greece (1981), Spain and Portugal (1986), the Structural Funds were integrated into an overarching cohesion policy in 1988, introducing the following key principles:

- focusing on the poorest and most backward regions
- multi-annual programming
- strategic orientation of investments
- involvement of regional and local partners (European Commission, 2024a).

ERDF is designed to strengthen economic, social and territorial cohesion in the European Union and aims to do this by correcting imbalances between regions enabling investments in a smarter, greener, more connected and more social Europe that is closer to its citizens (European Commission, 2024b).

ERDF contributes to reducing disparities between the levels of development of the various regions within the Union, and to reducing the backwardness of the least favoured regions through participation in the structural adjustment of regions whose development is lagging behind (European Union, 2024a). ERDF, CF and the Just Transition Fund (supporting the regions most affected by the transition towards climate neutrality) are at the centre of the European Regional Policy of the European Union, a policy which aims to improve the economic well-being of regions in the European Union and avoid regional disparities. The European Structural and Investment Funds (ESIF) implement the Union’s political priorities, contribute to the strengthening of its territorial cohesion and thus correct imbalances between countries and regions with different levels of economic and social development.

Another important set of ESIF provisions is the INTERREG programme. Since its foundation in 1990 European Territorial Cooperation (ETC), also known as Interreg, has grown from a Community Initiative to a fully-fledged EU cohesion policy goal. It provides a framework for cooperation between regions of different European countries with the aim to find common solutions to shared problems, and develop untapped potential of namely border areas (Interreg Europe, 2024)

In 2021-2027 Interreg supports 86 Cooperation programmes organised in four strands. Apart from cross-border, transnational and interregional strands, a specific strand for cooperation of outermost regions has been added. Cooperation programmes on EU external borders with neighbourhood countries are also part of the Interreg family, are governed by a single rulebook and managed by a single entity (Commission Staff Working Document, 2023). The Interreg budget is used to support the Green transition and a more social Europe objective – a significant part of the budget is allocated to the “Culture and sustainable tourism” action line.

European Structural Funds are managed in a decentralised manner by bodies located in each of the EU countries. These bodies are normally situated in the capital of the country, if the programme is of a national nature, and in the regional capitals, if the programme is of a regional/provincial nature. The complete list of authorities in charge of managing ESI funds, country by country, is available on the European Commission's website - Regional Policy - Management authorities (European Commission, 2024c and European Commission, 2024d).

In the period 2021-2027, the cohesion policy of the European Union has five policy objectives :

1. A smarter Europe — innovative and smart economic transformation;
2. A greener, low-carbon Europe;
3. A more connected Europe — mobility and regional ICT connectivity;
4. A more social Europe — implementing the European Pillar of Social Rights;
5. A Europe closer to citizens — sustainable and integrated development of urban, rural and coastal areas through local initiatives.

The initial EU allocation for ERDF, ESF+ and Cohesion Fund in the ESIF 2021-2027 cycle is EUR 350 billion.

The ERDF plays an important role in library development. According to Article 4 of the Common Provisions (European Union, 2024b), the scope of ERDF regards: (a) infrastructure; (b) access to services; (c) productive investments in SMEs; (d) equipment, software and intangible assets; (e) information, communication, studies, networking, cooperation, exchange of experience and activities involving clusters; (f) technical assistance (see also EBLIDA, 2020 and EBLIDA 2021a and EBLIDA 2021b).

What follows is a commented description of the Policy Objectives with the mention of specific objectives which may be relevant for libraries.

ESIF Objective 1 - A smarter Europe from a library perspective may be relevant in the Specific objective (ii) Reaping the benefits of digitisation for citizens, companies and governments. Libraries may be sustained in developing digital products, services and applications in public institutions.

ESIF Objective 2 - ERDF: A greener, low-carbon Europe. This Policy Objective largely covers the environmental pillar of the European Union 2030 Agenda.

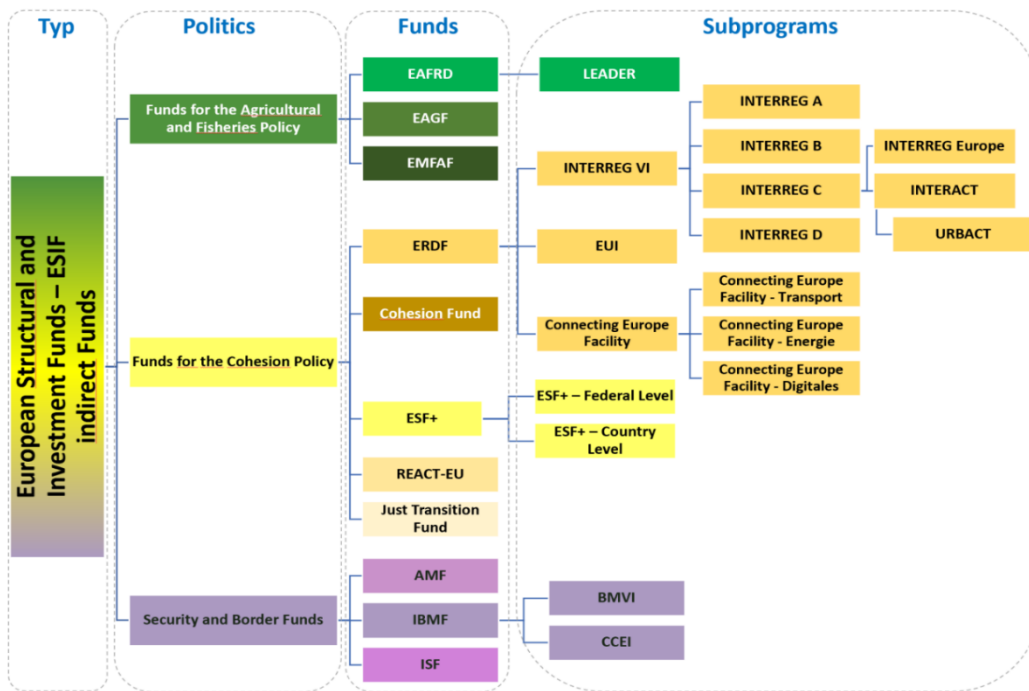
ESIF Objective 3 - ERDF: A more connected Europe, dealing with mobility and enhanced and high-speed transporting systems.

ESIF Objective 4 - ERDF and ESF+: A more social Europe. Specific objectives relevant for libraries may concern access to employment, labour market, education, training and lifelong learning. The European Social Pillar of Social Rights largely overlaps with the Social and Economic Pillars of the Agenda 2030 for sustainable development. The European Social Pillar of Social Rights is structured in three chapters - equal opportunities and access to the labour market, fair working conditions and social protection and inclusion - and twenty principles - going from education, training and life-long learning and gender equality to equal opportunities and access to essential services (European Commission. Employment, Social Affairs & Inclusion, 2024).

ESIF Objective 5 - ERDF: a Europe closer to citizens, with the specific objectives of urban development and the integration of rural and coastal areas in their social, economic and environmental aspects.

Table 2 below lists the Funds in more detail, including those Funds that establish the EU Agricultural and Fisheries Policy.

Table 2: Overview of European Structural and Investment Funds



Source: European Education EU Learning (2021: 19)

3. ESIF implementation in the cultural field

The 2005 Council of Europe Convention on the Value of Cultural Heritage for Society, also known as the Faro Convention, is undoubtedly a cornerstone in the theory and practice of cultural heritage (Council of Europe, 2005). The Faro Convention emphasizes the relationship between heritage, human rights, and democracy. Adopted by the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe on 13 October 2005, it entered into force on 1 June 2011. To date, 20 member States of the Council of Europe have ratified the Convention and 7 have signed it.

The Convention encourages the recognition of objects and places based on the meanings, uses, and values people ascribe to them. Unlike other conventions, this framework convention does not mandate specific actions; it offers recommendations instead of imposing obligations. The Faro Convention is at the basis of the work undertaken by the Council of the European Union (a body of the European Union different from the Council of Europe). On 16 November 2007, the Council issued a Resolution including a European Agenda for Culture 2008-2011 with three strategic objectives: a) promotion of cultural diversity and intercultural dialogue; b) promotion of culture as a catalyst for creativity in the framework of the Lisbon Strategy for growth, employment, innovation, and competitiveness; c) promotion of culture as a vital element in the Union's international relations (Council of the European Union, 2007).

The OMC Group of cultural experts, working on the Work Plan for Culture, immediately identified ESIF as a key EU instrument for funding cultural activities. The OMC work emphasised the contribution of culture to local and regional economic development (WP 2008-2011) and a Policy Handbook was published on how to use the EU support programmes strategically, including Structural Funds (Working Group of EU Member States Experts, 2012) with a focus on Cultural and Creative Industries (CCI).

The Policy Handbook concentrated on how the OMC Recommendations should be implemented in practice and was illustrated by relevant case studies and good practices from all over Europe. One of the studies preparatory to the Policy Handbook was prepared by the Centre for Strategy and Evaluation Services and ERICA Arts (2010). It focused on "The Contribution of Culture to Local and Regional Development - Evidence from the Structural Funds". The report emphasised the dominant contribution of culture to tourism, but also identified a series of trends in the 2007-13 programming period, which can be summarised as follows:

- Culture plays a vital role in enhancing the attractiveness of Europe and its regions for investment and employment;
- Cultural activities and facilities have an important place in the development of the physical environment of town and cities and, in particular, the rehabilitation of old industrial cities;
- Culture is seen to be important in the attraction and retention of people with high skill levels;
- There is some recognition given to the significance of natural and cultural assets and their interaction; cultural heritage is seen as significant in the development of rural areas, especially through its contribution to rural tourism;
- In general, tourism is still regarded as important, as is culture's contribution to its development, but there is greater emphasis on the role of culture in contributing to the delivery of sustainable, high-quality tourism that is well integrated into other activities (Centre for Strategy and Evaluation Services and ERICA Arts, 2010, p. 5).

Following the OMC Report, the European Parliament requested an in-depth investigation on Structural Funds and culture (European Parliament 2013). The European Parliament Report highlighted the importance of acquiring cultural and creative competences, both to allow diverse cultures in Europe to flourish and to boost all forms of innovation, mainly non-technological and social innovation, as well as regional growth (European Parliament, 2013, p. 18-22). It emphasised that, "while the European cultural policy relie[d] on a budget of about € 1.18 billion (Culture and MEDIA Programmes) [...] over the period 2007-2013, € 347 billion will be

distributed to EU Member States and regions to achieve Cohesion Policy's goals, € 6 billion of which [benefited] culture" (European Parliament, 2013, p. 9).

If "culture and tourism" was identified as a sector with important development potential for employment creation, after 2010 culture has been considered as an asset to set up innovation and as a potential catalyst to "boost local economies, stimulate new activities, create new and sustainable jobs, influence other industries (spillovers), enhance the attractiveness of regions and cities as well as to act as a catalyst for structural change in industrial zones and rural areas, thus rejuvenating their economies, strengthening social cohesion and contributing to a change of the public image of regions." (European Parliament, 2013, p. 22).

4. Why should libraries resort to ESIF?

ESIFs are mainly targeted to institutions of a public nature and therefore are of particular interest to European libraries, whether large or small, innovative or in need of innovation, public or university. Furthermore, ESIFs can be used to finance the renovation of buildings, to equip libraries with computers and other basic resources and to recruit additional staff, at least for the duration of the project.

Why should libraries resort to ESIF? For three reasons: economic, political and institutional.

4.1 *The economic benefit*

The first reason is economic. ESIF comprises over one-third of the EU budget, with a significant portion allocated to hard infrastructure such as railway corridors, motorways, broadband networks, and agricultural subsidies. Nonetheless, ESIF investment in culture is significant and devoted to the improvement of the human capital in culture and cultural infrastructure. Libraries should be in the first place to use this money as they improve social cohesion and reduce social gaps.

The construction of the most important European libraries in developed countries (Dokk1 in Aarhus, Oodi in Helsinki, the Deichman public library in Oslo, the OBA in Amsterdam) was resourced almost exclusively through local and national funding. Conversely, the modernization of the National Libraries of Estonia and Poland, the enlargement of the Biblioteca Malatestiana in Cesena, the construction and restructuring of some 100 libraries in the Apulia Region could only be implemented through the European Structural Funds. And very likely, no new libraries in Milan and Turin would have ever come to light without the resources of the Next Generation – EU Funds.

ESIF, however, is not concerned with big projects only. Structural Funds may also concern small projects in the order of € 100,000 (over two years) to fund specific small-scale projects, as the one in the Montreuil City Library in France, which used ERDF for an activity aiming to combat school drop-out and re-integrate school children. It can also be used to support individual and informal learning, act as a place for the urban society to expand and revitalise. The Berlin city Library requested € 6.67 million of ERDF funding (with a further €13.17 million of Berlin state funding) within the ESIF programming cycle 2007-2013; a further € 4 million provided by ERDF in ESIF 2014-2020. From 2007 until today, more than 45 projects concerning Makers, Media literacy, reading activities, language skills and abilities, integration and family libraries as well as the renewal of the equipment and the furnishing of libraries to improve the quality of library visits (Both cases in EBLIDA, 2021, pp. 9-10).

4.2 *The political benefit*

The second reason is political. Libraries serve communities. The word “community” is frequently employed in a variety of contexts and recurrences in the most important document orienting European public library policies : the Council of Europe Recommendation on Library legislation and policy in Europe. It is used:

- in the Preamble, where libraries are defined as “as publicly accessible institutions of a cultural, educational and social nature that serve local, academic or specialised communities and/or society at large” and “community hubs striving towards a democratic, cohesive, inclusive and equitable society”;
- in the section on Freedom of expression, free access to information and democratic participation: “Libraries are created for the benefit of their user communities so as to provide people with open access to information and ideas”; and collection development “should be done in consultation with representative bodies of users, community groups or other educational, cultural and information institutions [...]; on the basis of quality and relevance to the needs of the user community”, “in

- conformity with the European Union's Charter of Fundamental Rights, [libraries should] make [library collections] known to the wider community";
- in the section Library financing - where Libraries are considered "community builders and providers of informal education; therefore, mechanisms should be put in place to ensure co-ordination with development plans and strategies of national and local communities, each with their respective responsibilities and functions";
 - in the section Global and Local Threats - where it should be assessed "the importance of library services for communities hit by threats of a local and/or global nature so as to enable a rapid and effective response to and possible avoidance of these threats", in interaction with "the communities they serve"; and
 - in the section of Information and digital literacy - where "as community hubs designed to encourage the social development of the communities they serve, libraries should host and provide media and information literacy programmes and courses" (Council of Europe, 2023).

Bauman (2001: 2 and ss) aptly describes community as a 'warm place,' offering shelter and mutual support." - "a roof under which we shelter in heavy rain", where "we can count on each other's good will". Libraries that lose track of the needs of their communities and are unable to connect with the cultural and social policies promoted at local level, therefore, are introverted institutions, unable to serve their communities properly.

4.3 The institutional benefit

The third is institutional. Libraries operate normally within a culture-oriented, GLAM (Galleries, Libraries, Archives and Museums) framework; they do not have close connections with social institutions. They are considered a link with the book chain and are often unable to decrypt social needs at local level.

The European documents mapping local needs throughout Europe are the Partnership Agreements between the European Commission and the member states of the Union (European Commission, 2021a). Normally, governments flaunt successes and propose easy solutions for electoral purposes. Partnership Agreements are instead complex documents, with little room for political propaganda: governments show the soft belly of the country and national weaknesses are laid bare. They have to do so if they wish to access the resources made available by the European Structural and Investment Funds - more than 500 billion euros in the 2021-2027 period, most of which are directed toward the implementation of the European social policy (European Parliament - Council of the European Union, 2021).

ESIF are normally administered and managed at regional and local level and libraries, especially public libraries, are normally embedded into local administrative frameworks. It is easier for a librarian to report and interact with local municipalities than to negotiate with European officials sitting in European capitals.

Scrolling through the pages of the Partnership Agreements, particularly those dedicated to POs 4 and 5 which most closely correspond to the social pillar of the EU 2030 Agenda on sustainable development, it is easy to detect relevant national variations.

In France, for example, POs 4 and 5 aim to revitalise the education sector by reducing dropout rates (8.9% in 2017) (Agence nationale de la cohésion des territoires, 2022). In Germany, the main challenges are identified in regional disparities in demographic development, the distribution of cutting-edge technologies and the number of people at risk of poverty or social exclusion. Of particular importance in this context is the New Leipzig Charter, which advocates a fair, green and productive urban development through cross-sectoral digitisation plans (Bundesministerium für Wirtschaft und Klimaschutz, 2022).

In Italy the spotlight is on the national indicators reported in the Social Scoreboard, which are far from the European average. The share of NEETs (Not in Education, Employment or Training) is 12.6% of young people

in Europe; it is 22.2% in Italy and 33% in Southern Italy. Highly critical is also the quality and inclusiveness of education in a country where school drop-out rates are 13.5% at national level and 18.2% in the South (against an EU average of 10.2%) (Coesione Italia 2021-2027, 2022).

Portugal has underlined three dimensions in its social policy: (i) increasing the birth rate; (ii) promoting integration policies for migrants; (iii) ageing population. In Portugal, priorities concern the fight against unemployment, especially for young NEETs, the equal participation of women and men in the labour market, and the adaptation of workers and companies to the green and digital transition (República Portuguesa. Portugal 2030 2022). School drop-outs (13.3 per cent of young people aged 18 to 24 in 2021) and equal access of women and men to the labour market are also the priority objectives for Spain, together with adult education, social inclusion of vulnerable people and the fight against poverty (Gobierno de España, 2023).

Partnership agreements orient the allocation of European Structural and Investment Funds and are essentially aimed at institutions of a public nature. These funds are of particular interest to European libraries, whether large or small, innovative or in need of innovation, public or university. Moreover, European Structural Funds are linked to the indicators of the Social Scoreboard supporting the European Pillar of Social Rights (Eurostat 2024b) – a good match for library indicators having a social nature.

5. The quantity and quality of ESIF investment on libraries in Estonia, Italy and Poland

5.1 Expenditure trends

Libraries as a target of the European regional policy is not a new trend. As a fundamental asset of the European cultural heritage, investment in libraries has often been focused on historical collections and old and rare books. Coordinated by the Global Libraries Bulgaria Foundation, for instance, a Romanian-Bulgarian Interreg project worth €486 028 (out of which €413 124 ERDF) involved the written treasures of Lower Danube stored in the Alexandru & Aristia Aman Dolj County Library in Craiova and the Lyuben Karavelov Regional Library in Ruse (see Appendix).

What is significant in this trend is that all ESIF-related library projects included in the Appendix are part of a development strategy which is in line with the objectives of the European regional policy that supports job creation, competitiveness, economic growth, improved quality of life and sustainable development, leaving no one and no region behind.

Let's take the digitisation plans which are often the object of ESIF investments. Digitisation lends itself to several objectives, which go well beyond purely preservation purposes – to view digital copies of archive material without needing to handle them and making them available for exhibitions and long-term display. Digitisation is first and foremost serving access. Digital images are used by researchers and engage new audiences; many more people from anywhere in the world access library collections. Images are posted on websites, attached to emails, posted to social media accounts or printed for promotional purposes.

Digitisation, however, can also be a way of generating income for the community archive and can be diffused for private research or for commercial use, such as publication in books and magazine articles. It is a formidable multiplier for the improvement of services – the National Library of Estonia, for instance, developed an e-lending platform for Estonian publications on the basis of the digitisation exercise. Moreover, through the use of technologies and AI tools, the National Libraries of Estonia and Poland make an important investment on digital literacy which impacts on the whole of the community.

The same can be said for the two Italian initiatives financed through the Next Generation EU Fund. European heritage is only a small part of the remarkable investment. Their main orientation is social inclusion, as both BEIC in Milan and the Civica in Turin are going to regenerate degraded areas and profoundly change urban planning for several years with an impact on urban mobility. Strong impulsion is given to digital activities with an effect on the public as a whole. Remarkably enough, vulnerability indices were taken into account when selecting design measures aimed to improve accessibility and facilitate the mobility of selected targeted audiences. Both libraries look at the city with a view to redefining urban space and making it more compatible with ecological imperatives.

Another strong area of development of ESIF implemented in libraries is networking through digital technologies. Right after gaining independence, Estonia embarked upon an advanced plan to build up a digital society: 1% of GDP has been allocated to this plan since 1998 aiming to make of Estonia the world's most advanced digital society (e-Estonia, 2024). As a result of the Tiger Leap Initiative, 99% of the population uses the internet regularly and Estonia is ranked as #1 in the Digital Development Index. Banking services went online as early as 1996, e-governance and, later, e-ID were initiated with e-Cabinet meetings streamlining governmental decision-making processes. When cyber attacks in 2007 laid low Estonian e-economy, the response was to implement cybersecurity measure; it is not by chance that Tallinn is the seat of the NATO Cooperative Cyber Defence Centre of Excellence and the EU IT Agency. Estonian data are in the cloud with critical databases and services backed up in a high-security data centre in Luxembourg.

Digitisation in Estonian libraries followed national trends and were mirrored in the ERDF investment. Some 800 libraries rely on a unified library system also providing e-lending on a national scale. The ESIF investment financed the merging of the previous three library systems with different user services portals, provisions and functionalities.

In some European countries – the Baltic States, but also the Netherlands - national libraries have a formal role in leading and animating networks of public, school or academic libraries. This is also the case of the National Library of Poland. Its modernisation started from premises, with changes in the common spaces, and soon involved its networking infrastructure. POLONA, one of the biggest digital libraries all over Europe providing free of charge and extensive access to high-quality digital objects was reinforced also through the acquisition of an advanced library system purchased thanks to the ERDF Operational Program “Digital Poland action 2.1”.

ERDF (Operational Program action 2.3) was also used in Poland to improve the IT scientific infrastructure. The Academica interlibrary loan system was set up, providing access to 3 782 552 publications from all fields of knowledge, including the most recent ones protected by copyright. And finally, the “Full Reading Room of the Republic” project was implemented through the European Funds for Infrastructure, Climate, Environment 2021-2027 Program (FENX.07.01 Cultural infrastructure and cultural tourism priority). Similarly, the Malatestiana Library in Cesena, the oldest library in Emilia-Romagna, restructured its building; it is now able to offer almost 100 thousand titles, half of which are distributed in the new spaces.

Very likely, the most impressive and substantial ERDF contribution to the development of the library system has been implemented in the Region Puglia. This success story has to be told in full detail.

The Region Puglia (Apulia, South-Eastern Italy; 3,9 million inhabitants; 2023 GDP pro capite: €20 700) is world-famous for its beaches, cities and history; much less for its attempt to build up a knowledge infrastructure. When entering the new Millennium, there was a general understanding that economic development should be consolidated through enhanced knowledge for all and alignment of cultural objectives to local development trends. The Apulia option was to use European Structural and Investment Funds (ESIF) for local cultural growth.

The Apulia region prepared a solid background document with precise indicators and objectives. The SMART-IN action (acronym for Support – Memory – Arts – Territorial Resilience – INtelligence) aimed to cultural heritage and also included the development of a regional network of libraries. All of them should be re-qualified with appropriate spaces, new technologies and innovative, sustainable management models.

The first call for proposals “Community Library” was ready in 2017 within the framework of ESIF 2014-2020. The Apulia region made available 125,5 million euro and received 162 valid proposals - 75% of them were successful. Indicators showing the poor levels of education in the region and the need for skilled manpower in order to consolidate economic trends were found in the Save the Children database. Investment was made on “cultural welfare”, where citizens’ participation and artistic activities as well social inclusion facilitate the development of “life skills”: critical learning, resilience, stress management and the ability to self-orient individual health. In the Apulia region population is ageing and demography is in full “winter”; libraries play a fundamental role in contrasting depopulation in internal and rural areas. In the ERDF 2021-2027 programming cycle the envisaged investment is 55 million euro. A Call for proposals will soon be launched to experiment innovative management models.

The Apulia strategy for ESIF 2028-2035 will certainly be based on success stories and on the results of the current 2021-2027 programming cycle, also taking into account evolutionary trends and general policy and planning at European level. After an infrastructural investment in Libraries and Museums, which took place in the past ESIF programming cycle, the focus will be on the efficiency of the management activities of cultural

institutes and places. Cohesion policies and the New European Agenda for Culture 2030 already indicate cultural crossovers as pillars of the next decades, i.e. systemic and systematic relations with other policy areas, first and foremost between culture and welfare.

For cultural welfare to be grafted into the everyday life of the country and becoming a social and economic lever, it is necessary to overcome the fragmentary nature of interventions and aim at systemic actions. In this respect, the design of highly innovative cultural services with a social impact represents an approach that is necessary to qualify cultural policies and to better target the enhancement of cultural venues in cities and municipalities. Moreover, thanks to the Faro Convention (2005), the New European Agenda for Culture (2018), the E.C.'s COM 2021/573 on the New European Bauhaus, it is necessary to adopt policies that foster people's artistic and cultural participation and expression throughout the life cycle, from the peri-natal period to the end of life, with spin-offs in terms of well-being and health that are appreciable for citizens and groups of people who benefit from them on different levels.

The Apulia's intervention will take place within PO 4 - A More Social Europe, the Specific Objective: RSO4.6: Strengthening the role of culture and sustainable tourism in economic development, social inclusion and social innovation (ERDF).¹

Another issue is worth noticing. As a rule, ESIFs are designed to repair unbalances and therefore help less developed countries to catch up. And normally, less developed countries take the lion's share of European Structural Funds, as Table 3 clearly shows.

Table 3: Repartition of European Structural and investment Funds: more and less developed countries, transition countries



Source: European Commission (2023), p. 2.

Nevertheless, in the analysis carried out in the Report, there is evidence that libraries being ESIF recipients *are not* situated in the poorest regions of Europe – rather the opposite. Table 4 below breaks down libraries recipients of ESI Funds by the way they are designated in the Development Index of the European Union.

¹ Letter by Mr Mauro Paolo Bruno (25th November 2024) to the Author of the Pilot Report.

Table 4. Libraries in EU more / less developed countries and transition countries

	More developed countries	Less developed countries	Transition countries
Estonia			X (whole country)
Italy			
BEIC, Milan	X		
Civica, Turin	X		
Malatestiana, Cesena	X		
Apulia - SMART IN 2017-20			X
Apulia - SMART IN 2021-27			X
Region Emilia-Romagna	X		
Poland			
National Library, Warsaw			X
Czatoryski Library, Krakow		X	
University Library Śląskie		X	
Skawina Library		X	

Table 4 shatters the idea of ESIF being exclusively associated to less developed regions in Europe. In Italy, ESIF Funds have been used in more developed regions, and not the less developed ones. An EBLIDA Report shows that ESIF has also been used in Germany, France, and the Netherlands (EBLIDA, 2021).

5.2 The economic dimension

The total ESIF budget allocated to library initiatives in only three countries – Estonia, Italy and Poland - is in the order of more than € 280 million (€ 281 868 000). ESIF-funded projects listed in this Report span over a decade and encompass two ESIF programming cycles: 2014-2020 and 2021-2027. With the inclusion of the Next Generation EU library projects in Italy, the total amount of resources allocated to the three countries is ca € 546.8 million (€264 969 000, Turin, Milan and Rome).

The amount of € 281.868 000 represents 25% and 11% of the total budget of, respectively, the CERV programme (€ 1.11 billion)² and the Creative Europe programme (€ 2.44 billion).³ The EECEA budget spans over seven years (2021-2027) and is allocated to projects filed by educational, cultural and social organisations in 27 EU Member States. Figures raise to 49% and 22% of the budgets of CERV and Creative Europe, if projects funded by the Next Generation–EU are also considered in the calculation.

Table 5 below summarizes data for all libraries having been the recipients of ESIF funding over two programming cycles (2014-2020 and 2021-2027).

² https://commission.europa.eu/strategy-and-policy/eu-budget/performance-and-reporting/programme-performance-statements/citizens-equality-rights-and-values-programme-performance_en#budget

³ <https://culture.ec.europa.eu/creative-europe/about-the-creative-europe-programme>

Table 5: Use of European Regional Development Fund in Estonian, Italian and Polish libraries (in Euro)

	EU Regional Dev Fund	National contribution (when applicable)	Total ERDF	Next generation EU
Estonia (2018-2029)				
Digit Cult Heritage 2018-23	6 900 000	2 800 000		
Digit Cult Heritage 2024-29	5 900 000			
Library Info System 2024-27	2 040 000			
E-Lending 2022-23	265 000	45 000		
Books on the Move >2022	313 732	333 332		
DigCult accessible >2022	68 648			
KRATT >2022	83 640	14 760		
KRATT >2020	72 000	10 800		
E-Lending (business analysis) >2020	38 250	6 750		
KRATT – Ask us >2020	58 140	10 260		
Digital Archive (Business analysis) >2019	42 000	17 500		
LS modernised >2019	50 000			
NBS Analysis >2019	39 600			
Total Estonia	15 871 010		15 871 010	
Italy (2017-2027)				
BEIC, Milan				101 574 000
Civica Library System, Turin				113 395 000
Library System, Rome				50 000 000
Malatestiana	1 200 000	1 606 000		
Apulia - SMART IN 2017-20	125 550 000			
Apulia - SMART IN 2021-27	55 000 000			
Region Emilia-Romagna	14 000 000			
Total Italy	195 750 000		195 750 000	
Poland (2019-2027)				
NL Modernization (2019-22)	2 188 000	1 642 000		
Polona 2020-22	15 995 000	2 926 000		
Written Monuments (2014-20)	6 582 000	1 196 000		
Ex Libris ALMA (2014-2020)	6 470 000	1 277 000		
Academica ILL (2007-2013)	6 807 000	1 222 000		
Nova Academica (2021-2027)	5 513 000	1 403 000		
Reading Room	6 063 000	3 194 000		
Czatoryski Library	8 606 000	4 041 000		
University Library Slask	12 192 000	5 691 000		
Skawina Library	652 000	1 036 000		
Total	71 068 000		71 068 000	
Total (Estonia, Italy, Poland)			281 868 000	264 969 000

The amount of € 281.8 million represents only the tip of the iceberg of the ESIF investments made on libraries. It includes big investments made on the infrastructure of some regions in Estonia, Italy and Poland – Tallinn, Apulia Region, Warsaw – and does not take into account investments in other cities for small-scale projects, such as those of Montreuil and Cesena also mentioned in the report.

The main, if only, source of funding is the ERDF. Less used is the European Social Fund, which is allocated to special projects targeted at special categories of people.

6. The reasons why ESIF Funds are so little known among librarians

If the first step in any Europeanisation of a library project is to access ESIF grants, why is there so little awareness about them? Why aren't they actively promoted by European organisations dealing with library development?

6.1 A national component where European partnership is no must

6.1 A National Component Where European Partnership Is Not a Must

The first reason for limited awareness of ESIF grants is that they are managed by national governments, each with its own rules and specific objectives. The opportunity to benefit from ESIF funding depends heavily on the priorities set by national or regional agencies. Unlike directly managed EU funding, ESIF is difficult to present in a single, comprehensive document applicable to all potential applicants with clear and transparent rules. Because the scope of ESIF projects is typically national or regional (with the exception of Interreg programs), much of the funding is often pre-allocated to projects planned in advance under the partnership agreement by the time calls are published. This can create the impression that communication about ESIF is unclear, or even that hidden agendas influence funding allocation.

A review of the European Commission's "Management Authorities" website for Regional Programmes reveals the diverse levels and statuses of authorities managing ESIF across countries. All EU countries have central authorities administering ESIF, some specializing in individual Funds (as in Spain), and others establishing special offices within Ministries for Regional Policy (e.g., Austria, three central agencies in Belgium, Spain). In many other cases, ad hoc regional agencies manage funds (e.g., France, Germany, Italy, Netherlands, Poland, Portugal, Romania), and their number doesn't always align with the number of official administrative units.

Negotiations between each Member State and the European Commission occur during the development of the "Partnership Agreement"—the "contract" outlining the implementation program and its funding. Subsequently, each agency implements its own funding distribution methods. Some funding is typically earmarked for specific national-level operations. In the cultural field, a portion of the funds may be pre-allocated, such as resources assigned to the National Library of Poland. However, a significant portion of ESIF funding is distributed through regular calls for proposals, to which libraries can apply.

ESIF operations do not require direct contact with European authorities. Libraries and librarians receiving ESIF grants typically don't interact with European colleagues unless project activities include visits to libraries in similar European regions or other forms of European collaboration. Beyond the Interreg program, which promotes European cooperation under specific conditions (e.g., trans-border projects), librarians receiving ESIF funds may be unaware that their projects are part of the EU budget, especially as ESF+ or ERDF funding is often combined with municipal, regional, or national funds.

6.2 Different levels of national priorities and orientations

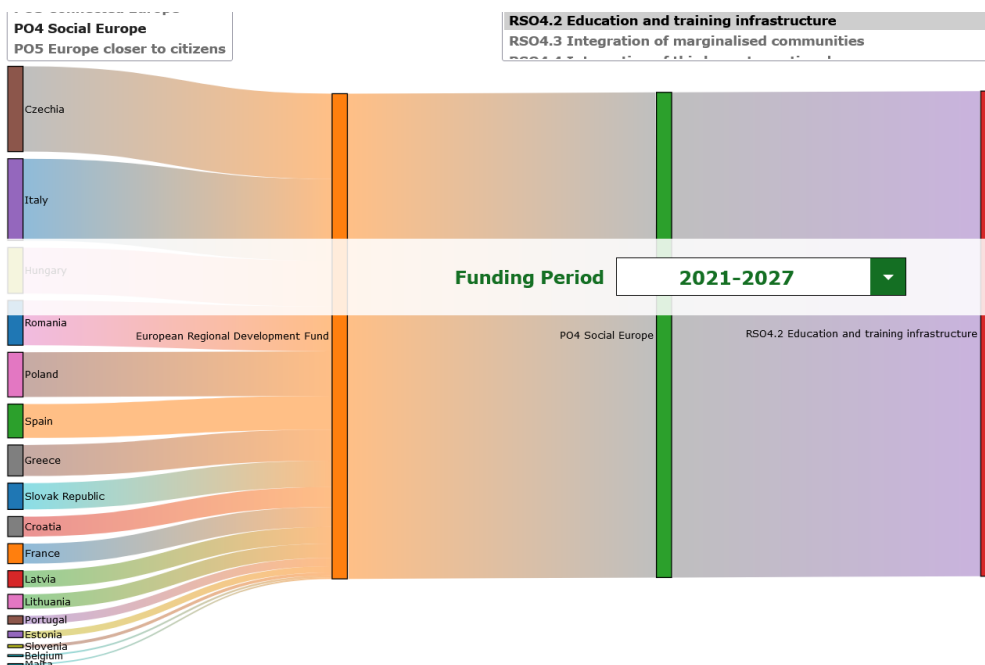
Another contributing factor to limited awareness is the varying levels of interest in ESIF among European libraries. European regional policy aims primarily to address regional imbalances. Development areas include technologies and innovation, competitiveness, climate change adaptation, risk prevention and management, sustainable and quality employment, social inclusion, combating poverty and discrimination, education, training and lifelong learning, and public administration efficiency.

The European Union's Cohesion Policy targets less-developed states, particularly in Southern and Eastern Europe. However, ESIF funding is not exclusively concentrated in these regions. A report on the outcomes of

the 2021-2027 cohesion policy programming demonstrates how all EU countries (including those with higher GDPs) benefit from ESIF. ESIF investments for a more social Europe often focus on employment, education and lifelong learning, and social inclusion (e.g., Belgium, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Sweden). In all EU countries, ESF+, sometimes combined with the ERDF program, supports the unemployed and inactive, with a focus on young people and vulnerable populations to combat poverty and promote social inclusion. Some countries, such as Finland, highlight increasing internal regional disparities, where even wealthier regions are declining towards the level of the poorest (Commission Staff Working Document, 2023).

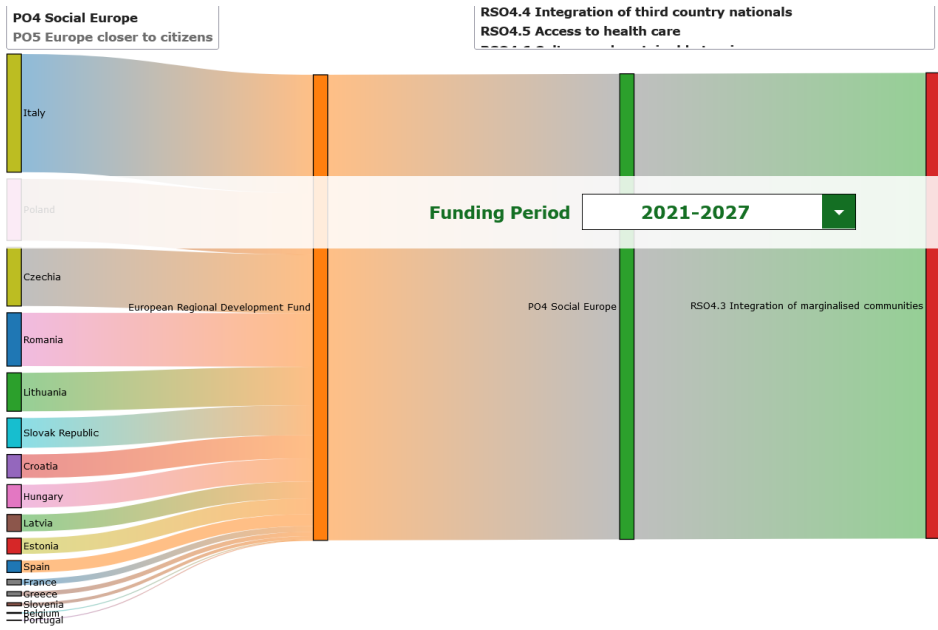
Furthermore, Member States may not prioritize the same areas; some may even undervalue educational and cultural issues. Tables 6 and 7 (below) illustrate the level of involvement of EU countries in two themes crucial to libraries as "third places": "Education and Training" (specifically community-oriented education) and "Integration of Marginalized Communities" (activities for NEETs and disadvantaged populations). The varying levels of involvement among Member States help explain why libraries in some countries are less likely to seek ESIF funding.

Table 6: Member States having selected Education and Training infrastructure as an ESIF priority



Source: European Commission, 2024e.

Table 7: Member States having selected Integration of marginalised community as an ESIF priority



Source: European Commission, 2024e.

7. Preparing ESIF programming cycle 2028-2035

7.1 Why should ESIF be the basis of any European library policy: the pros and the cons of indirect managed Funds (ESIF) and direct managed Funds (Erasmus+, CERV; etc.)

There are two main sources of European funding: indirect-managed (European Structural and Investment Funds) and direct-managed Funds (Erasmus+, CERV, Creative Europe, Horizon).

ESI Funds are primarily used for national and regional projects. Management and administration are decentralized, with responsibility lying with the individual Member State or region. ESI Funds are divided into "Funds for the implementation of cohesion policy" and "Funds for the implementation of agricultural and fisheries policy".

Direct managed funds are also divided into two main groups: the "sectoral specialist programmes" and the "programmes for external action". The "sectoral specialist programmes" have an internal impact and operate for the EU27. The "programmes for external action" have an impact outside of the EU and implement the EU foreign policy.

When seeking European grants, libraries must carefully weigh their own needs, resources, capacities, and the needs of their potential partners. Generally, several programs (both indirectly and directly managed) may be of interest to libraries; however, in some cases, only one program will meet the specific needs of a library project.

Table 8 below, adapted from EU official sources, lists the distinctive features of indirect / direct managed Funds and their impact on the territory and the beneficiary libraries.

Table 8: Indirect / Direct management of European Funding: distinctive features

Funds indirectly managed by the European Commission	Funds directly managed by the European Commission
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Managed in a decentralised manner at local level (regions and/or municipalities) 2. Implement European cohesion policies through different funds (ERDDF, ESF+, etc.) 3. Operate in a clearly defined geographical area (a State, a Region, a geographic area, etc.) 4. Allow large-scale investments (e.g. renovation of buildings) 5. Often, but not always, grant large subsidies 6. With the exception of INTERREG, partnerships in other countries are not required 7. Programmes are negotiated well in advance; therefore, project submission may be complex for libraries, unless a budgetary line is envisaged (German case) 8. Financial administration often detailed and based on national rules 9. Target groups: All and in particular, public entities - therefore it fits well libraries 10. Presentation of projects in the national language 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Centrally managed at European or national level (e.g. Erasmus+) 2. Implement sectoral strategies (sustainable development, culture, education) 3. Can only be developed through cooperation with other EU Member States 4. Generally do not allow for large-scale investments 5. Generally, subsidies are relatively small 6. Partnership in other European countries is always required 7. Project submission is often simplified by resorting to specialised agencies that facilitate project writing 8. Financial administration often based on lump sums issued in advance 9. Target groups: All, especially NGOs, public entities are less involved 10. Presentation of projects in an international language

Indirect managed funding (a selection)	Direct managed funding (a selection)
ERDF, ESF+, INTERREG, AMIF (migrants); etc.	Erasmus+, Citizens, Equality, Rights and Values (CERV); Creative Europe (CREA), Horizon, etc.

Source: European Commission (2021b, p. 19) – partially modified.

An intense involvement of libraries in programmes like Erasmus+, CERV, and Creative Europe fosters exchange among libraries and collaboration at various levels on many issues. Some advanced libraries are able to open new avenues and be at the forefront of library innovation. It is an illusion, however, to think that directly managed funds can be a one-size-fits-all solution for all library challenges and that they can naturally create synergies with national programmes and initiatives. Directly managed grants typically provide seed money: they cover the cost of transferring ideas from one context to another or of implementing a best practice elsewhere. Their financial scope does not allow for redesigning policies, let alone infrastructure, and therefore they cannot revamp library systems across Europe or fill structural gaps among libraries. The impact of the “Telematics for Libraries” programme – the only previous example of EC directly managed funds applied to libraries – clearly demonstrates this (European Commission, 2001).

The Third and Fourth Framework Programmes (the European Commission's research programme, predecessors of Horizon, respectively, 1990-1994 and 1994-1998) included a scheme designed to serve the specific needs of libraries. Both programmes ushered in a memorable period for the development and cooperation of library services in Europe, with €25 million allocated to library projects during the Third FP and €29 million during the Fourth FP (the equivalent in 2023 would be €93 million). Libraries submitted applications to the European Commission for the enhancement and standardization of network-oriented library systems, services, and information resources (Aslan, 2012; Vitiello, 2014).

This considerable injection of European funding into the library sector fostered the development of library networks and systems. Library union catalogues in many countries benefited from financial support, and numerous experiments and pioneering activities were initiated. Participation was strong, and issues such as digitization, standardization, document delivery, metadata, and licensing made significant progress (European Commission, 2001).

Despite this substantial amount of funding, activities in libraries were not overhauled, nor were regional disparities overcome. The Programme attracted many libraries, but the participants represented “only a part of the European library community: almost two-thirds of participants were national and academic libraries, with public libraries accounting for only 25%” (European Commission, 2001, p. 32).

The following outlines the pros and cons of both funding channels.

With the exception of INTERREG, ESIF-funded projects lack the excitement of participating in a European cooperative project. Planning, calls for tender, project implementation, and even dissemination of results – all of this takes place in a national environment; only the funding is transferred from the European Commission to the member state. Nevertheless, there are many advantages to embarking on an ESIF project.

While projects funded through directly managed funding typically aim at innovation (and not all libraries in Europe can afford a Research & Development Department), ESIF funding normally combines support for infrastructure and projects. An ESIF-funded project typically has high visibility with long-lasting effects.

The construction or modernization of a library has an impact not only on the institution that benefits from the grant but also on the entire library infrastructure, often at the national level. In Italy, the large-scale implementation of ESIF-funded library projects, and, in Poland, the modernization of the National Library, will change professional mindsets and the public perception of libraries. Especially in Southern and Eastern

European countries, a library that has leveraged ESIF to modernize its infrastructure and expand its services will strengthen its role as a cultural and educational provider within the country.

Since the implementation of an ESIF-funded project takes place in a national environment, libraries do not need to resort to specialized agencies to develop a project. Small public libraries often lack the capacity to file an application for directly managed programmes; often, innovation in their environment is driven by a set of actors (often firms) specializing in specific European programmes. These actors manage to combine real progress in the library world while securing a useful profit margin for reinvesting in further activities and projects. In this virtuous (or vicious, depending on one's point of view) circle, the push for innovation is driven from the outside, according to the priorities and development policies of third-party actors.

Directly managed funds are of interest to a restricted sphere of advanced libraries able to internationalize their services and know-how, to file applications for EU programmes, and invest in research and development. European Structural Funds address the 60,000+ libraries in Europe with no international activities, whose scope of services is strictly oriented to their communities – libraries that have no resources to invest in research and innovation or partnership building.

In conclusion, there is a complementarity of approaches between directly managed and indirectly managed European funding, and it would be desirable for innovative results identified in library projects to be cross-fertilized through effective and sound synergy.

7.2 The link between ESI-funded library projects and the Agenda 2030 for Sustainable Development – Preparing the basis for the 2028-2035 ESIF cycle

When preparing the basis for its large-scale investment investments in libraries under the 2014-2020 ESIF program, the Apulia region had to resort to Save the Children indicators to demonstrate school dropout rates and low educational attainment at the regional level. This situation has since changed. The European Commission and the Agenda 2030 offer a broad spectrum of indicators throughout Europe.

The European Social Scoreboard (Eurostat, 2024), which supports the European Pillar of Social Rights, provided indicators used in drafting the Partnership Agreements between the European Commission and Member States. These agreements form the basis for the allocation of European Structural Funds (European Commission, 2021a).

The European Pillar of Social Rights (EPSR) comprises 20 key principles and rights aimed at building a fairer Europe in the areas of labor markets and welfare systems (European Parliament – Council - European Commission, 2017). The EPSR was the subject of a solemn interinstitutional proclamation in November 2017. However, it is not a legally binding document. As stated in its preamble, it “does not entail an extension of the Union’s powers and tasks as conferred by the Treaties” (European Parliament – Council - European Commission, 2017). It serves to reaffirm and complement existing rights enshrined in the Treaties establishing the European Union.

The 20 principles of EPSR are divided into 3 chapters:

1. Equal opportunities
2. Fair working conditions
3. Social protection and inclusion

Equal opportunities

- Adult participation in learning during the last 12 months

- Early leavers from education and training Individuals who have basic or above basic overall digital skills
- Young people neither in employment nor in education and training (NEET) (15-29)
- Gender employment gap
- Income quintile share ratio (S80/S20)

Fair working conditions

- Employment rate
- Unemployment rate
- Long-term unemployment rate
- The real gross disposable income of households per capita (index = 2008)

Social protection and inclusion

At risk of poverty or social exclusion components

- At risk of poverty rate
- Severe material and social deprivation rate
- People living in households with very low work intensity (0-64)

At risk of poverty or social exclusion (AROPE) for children (0-17)

- At risk of poverty rate for children (0-17)
- Severe material and social deprivation rate for children (0-17)
- Children (0-17) living in households with very low work intensity.

Even more compact is the set of indicators elaborated by UNESCO to measure cultural development and its contribution to the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. Adopted by the United Nations in 2015, this Agenda strongly recognizes that culture, encompassing the values, beliefs, arts, and traditions that shape societies, plays a crucial role in achieving sustainable development goals.

UNESCO's "Thematic Indicators for Culture in the 2030 Agenda" provides a valuable framework for understanding and measuring the contribution of culture, including libraries, to sustainable development (UNESCO, 2019). These Culture 2030 Indicators are designed as an aspirational tool to support countries and cities in assessing their progress and measuring the impact of their policies. The 22 indicators are qualitative and quantitative, economic and non-economic, and applicable at both urban and national levels.

The 4 groups of the 22 indicators are:

- Environment & Resilience
- Prosperity & Livelihoods
- Knowledge & Skills
- Inclusion & Participation

Environment & Resilience

1. National and local authorities should build on the UIS [UNESCO Institute for Statistics] methodology to disaggregate their expenditure (public and private) on the safeguarding of all cultural and natural heritage

2. Careful monitoring of the management and safeguarding of cultural and natural heritage, practices, knowledge, and movable historical artefacts with evidence from administrative data,
3. Improve assessment of measures taken to foster climate change mitigation and adaptation and enhance resilience through sustainable safeguarding and management of tangible, intangible, and natural heritage nationwide and in cities,
4. Local and national authorities should assess the diversity and spatial distribution of cultural facilities to ensure the promotion of cultural expressions of all social/cultural groups within the population and to assess their reach to the widest possible range of cultural professionals and businesses,
5. Monitoring of public space at the city level should include size, number, spatial distribution and use, as a way to guarantee equal access to and diversity of cultural life.

Prosperity & Livelihoods

6. Assessing the contribution of the culture sector to economic growth, including the level of production, and
7. tracing employment rates and trends in cultural employment
8. The enabling conditions for small and micro cultural enterprises should be assessed through trends in numbers of cultural businesses.
9. Monitoring household expenditure on culture expressed as a percentage of total household expenditure is essential to assess the size of local markets for cultural activities, goods, and services and to inform cultural policies that can foster greater social inclusion through cultural activities.
10. Tracking the export of cultural goods and services as a percentage of all exports
11. Any cultural framework must attempt to gain a clear picture of public spending in culture and the arts from a variety of different funding sources. Hence the data must be disaggregated to distinguish direct support from the central government from local sources including grants to local communities and payments to NGOs.
12. National, regional and local authorities must keep track of existing policies and regulations aimed at supporting the culture sector

Knowledge & Skills

13. Assess the extent to which education for sustainable development includes cultural diversity, heritage, and cultural values at all levels of education in policies, curricula, and classroom practice.
14. Monitor the availability of training provision related to heritage and creative fields across all levels of education and training.
15. Use national and local curricula to assess the extent to which multilingualism is advanced in primary and secondary education to promote intercultural dialogue and the understanding of cultural diversity.
16. Assess the degree to which cultural and creative fields are included in secondary school curricula to monitor levels of creativity and the appreciation of the diversity of cultural expressions.
17. Assess the proportion of students who receive training in cultural and creative field

Inclusion & Participation

18. Examine the degree of respect accorded to people from other cultures to practice and participate in cultural activities through a measure of intercultural understanding and a respect for their rights.
19. Monitor the degree of artistic freedom and assess the level of development of a sustainable environment for artists and creators.

20. Assess whether all parts of the country and all urban neighbourhoods have equal access to the full range of cultural facilities.
21. Monitor cultural participation of by assessing the proportion of people visiting cultural sites, facilities, and events as well as household reporting on cultural practices at home including the use of internet for cultural purposes.
22. Assess the opportunities open to civil society and to cultural sector professionals to participate in decision-making processes related to cultural activities.

The basis for greater participation of libraries in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and better use of European Structural Funds lies in this set of indicators. They measure how libraries can contribute to the enhancement of a healthier, more prosperous, democratic, and social Europe.

The future of European libraries is associated with policies such as the Recommendation of the Council of Europe on Library Legislation and Policy in Europe and the OMC Report "Building Bridges: strengthening the multiple roles of libraries as gateways and disseminators of cultural works, expertise and European values" (Council of the European Union, 2022). The realization of expectations raised by the recommendations, guidelines, and policy orientations of these important European documents is linked, however, to a sound, sustainable, and adequate funding strategy – such as the one provided by the European Structural and Investment Funds.

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Appendix 1 ESIF Library Projects in Estonia, Italy and Poland

Estonia

1. Digitalisation of Estonian cultural heritage

Project Title: “The Plan of Action for the Digitisation of Cultural Heritage 2018-2023”

Related to libraries: Within the action plan two digitisation projects of printed materials in libraries were carried out. Within the two projects 3,5 million pages of printed materials were digitised and made available publicly and the ESIF investment was 751 719 euros. Within the action plan, The National Library of Estonia developed an e-lending platform for Estonian publications. The ESIF investment was 210 000 euros.

SDG 10: Reduced Inequalities; SDG 11: Sustainable Cities and Communities; SDG 9: Industry, Innovation and Infrastructure; SDG 4: Quality Education; SDG 9: Industry, Innovation and Infrastructure

- Total: €9,7 million
- European Regional Development Fund: €6,9 million

Investment Timeframe: 2018-2023

Main Actors:

- Ministry of Culture
- The National Library
- National Public Broadcasting
- The National Heritage Board
- National Archives

Impact:

Digitalization of:

- 4% of the documentary heritage;
- 42% of artefacts;
- 78% of photos
- 56% of films
- 30% of printed heritage; i.e. 42% of of the cultural heritage of Estonia’s memory institutions

2. **Project title:** “Digital Cultural Heritage Action Plan 2024-2029”

Project context: Related to libraries: Digitisation of cultural heritage (printed materials among other heritage fields). Also, The National Library will develop a new user interface for the digital archive of the National Library, create an AI to automatically catalogue and tag digital publications, develop shared ontologies for all memory institutions, develop an automated application for archiving digitised materials in the digital archive of the National Library, develop a platform for collecting and visualizing library statistics and procure a joint library information system for all Estonian libraries.

Investment timeframe: 2024-2029

Main Actors:

- Ministry of Culture
- The National Library
- National Public Broadcasting
- The National Heritage Board
- National Archives

Impact: Estonian cultural heritage is accessible to all interested parties in digital form, conveniently usable, and securely preserved. By 2029 we aim to make 55% of our cultural heritage within our memory institutions available digitally. Also, we aim to make 21 % of our priority immovable heritage available in 3D.

Funding: European Regional Development Fund planned investment: 5,9 million euros.

3. Joint library information system for all Estonian libraries

Related SDGs

[1: No Poverty](#) , [4: Quality Education](#) , [8: Decent Work and Economic Growth](#) , [9: Industry, Innovation and Infrastructure](#) , [10: Reduced Inequality](#) , [11: Sustainable Cities and Communities](#) , [12: Responsible Consumption and Production](#) , [16: Peace and Justice Strong Institutions](#) , [17: Partnerships to achieve the Goal](#)

Background

Estonian libraries (~830 in total) currently rely on three different library systems (ILS) and three different user services portals. All these systems differ by their user experience, service provision, and their functionalities that support the day-to-day work of libraries.

Impact:

- Replace three user services portals with a single portal;
- Improve the ability of libraries to offer digital services;
- A single integrated library system (SILS) is being developed, consisting of three separate components: a user service portal for readers, a central database of bibliographic records and a library system software for librarians.

Main Actors:

- National Library of Estonia

Investment Time frame: 2024-2027

Funding:

- Total: 2,04 million euros
- European Regional Development Fund: 2,04 million euros

Impact:

- Replace three user services portals with a single portal;
- Improve the ability of libraries to offer digital services;
- A single integrated library system (SILS) is being developed, consisting of three separate components: a user service portal for readers, a central database of bibliographic records and a library system software for librarians.

4. Lending of e-publications

Related SDGs: [1: No Poverty](#), [4: Quality Education](#), [8: Decent Work and Economic Growth](#), [10: Reduced Inequality](#), [11: Sustainable Cities and Communities](#), [12: Responsible Consumption and Production](#), [16: Peace and Justice Strong Institutions](#), [17: Partnerships to achieve the Goal](#)

Objectives

To create a national e-lending environment for e-publications that encompasses e-books, e-newspapers, e-magazines, and audiobooks. This service will be free for all Estonian ID holders and accessible via smart devices and web browsers. The new service aims to address the needs of applied higher education institutions to support learning. Additionally, the platform will be designed for accessibility, including for people with disabilities, such as the blind and visually impaired. The environment will allow users to access, store, and borrow e-publications, with usability ensured even without an internet connection.

Why?

A pan-European study, involving the Estonian National Library and the University of Tartu Library—surveying a total of 2,500 people—revealed that individuals want to borrow e-books from libraries. Nearly 90 percent of respondents considered it important to have the option to download books to their own devices. Before the project, Estonia lacked a free and unified countrywide e-publication lending system.

Main Actors:

The National Library of Estonia

Investment Time frame: 2022-2023

Funding:

- ESIF: 265 000 euros (+ RaRa self-financing 45 000)

Impact:

- Free of charge service through an Estonian personal identification code, both from a web browser and from a smart device.
- A separate mobile application, to allows for e-publications to be used without the internet connection.

5. Books on the move

Related SDGs: [4: Quality Education](#), [8: Decent Work and Economic Growth](#), [10: Reduced Inequality](#),

Objective: To develop a technical platform that enables borrowing and home delivery of books from anywhere in Estonia. As part of the project, the collections of Estonian libraries were integrated into a single, easy-to-use search system that operates on existing e-catalogues, allowing users to order the desired books to their homes from anywhere in Estonia.

Why?

As a result of the project, a user-friendly platform, **Minu Raamatukogu (MIRKO)**, was created, accessible from both computers and mobile devices. In MIRKO, libraries process user orders, and users can:

- Search for literature across various libraries,
- Order books to a selected parcel locker or via courier directly to their home,
- Track the progress of their orders,
- Receive notifications about book arrivals and return deadlines,
- Recommend books to friends,
- Even transfer loans to friends, and more.

Main Actors:

- National Library of Estonia

Investment Time frame: Completed in 2022

Funding:

European Regional Development Fund. The project received support from the EAS (Enterprise Estonia) programme for promoting innovation through public procurement.

ERDF : €313 732,12 + RaRa self-financing: €333 332,5€.

6. Analysis of Making Digital Cultural Heritage Accessible

Related SDGs: [4: Quality Education](#), [10: Reduced Inequality](#), [11: Sustainable Cities and Communities](#),

Objective: The project aims to identify the bottlenecks in the accessibility of digital cultural heritage and seek new, effective, and innovative approaches to making cultural heritage accessible and usable. The focus is on analysing the shared accessibility of digital cultural heritage, including user expectations and the interoperability of systems in designing and offering joint services. The management, development, and technical platforms of digital cultural heritage information systems (digital archives) are examined specifically in this context.

Why? Currently, in Estonia, there are several different platforms for making digital cultural heritage (and digital materials more broadly) accessible. These platforms vary in content, standards used, interoperability, and the services they offer. For users, access to digital materials is fragmented—different types of objects must be searched for in various information systems or portals.

Main Actors:

The National Library of Estonia

Investment Time frame: Completed in 2022

Funding:

- European Regional development Fund: 68 648 euros

7. KRATT: Automated Article Keyword Tagging

Related SDGs: [4: Quality Education](#), [8: Decent Work and Economic Growth](#), [10: Reduced Inequality](#), [12: Responsible Consumption and Production](#),

Objective: To create a prototype for keyword tagging of articles using artificial intelligence.

During the project, the following were identified:

- Whether it is possible to develop models based on the existing training material to fully automate keyword tagging for articles published in Estonian journalism;
- Which methods can be used for this purpose; and
- To what extent and under what conditions these methods can be applied.

Why?

Manually processing the ever-growing volume of digital material is no longer feasible. Automation helps improve data quality, enrich data, and enhance and expand search capabilities.

Main Actors:

The National Library of Estonia

Investment Time frame: Completed in 2022

Funding:

European Regional Development Fund: 83 640 Eur (+RaRa self-financing €14 760)

8. KRATT: Automated Keyword Tagging for Books

Related SDGs: [4: Quality Education](#), [8: Decent Work and Economic Growth](#), [10: Reduced Inequality](#), [12: Responsible Consumption and Production](#),

Objective: To create a prototype based on machine learning and artificial intelligence to automate content analysis and keyword tagging of publications; to support the development of Estonian language

technologies; to reduce costs, increase speed, and ensure the objectivity and consistency of the keywords used.

Why?

Keyword tagging for publications is a resource-intensive process. It relies on individual knowledge and judgment, and consistency in keywords is not always guaranteed for different versions of the same publication. Currently, it is a manual task.

Main Actors:

The National Library of Estonia

Investment Time frame: 2020

Funding:

European Regional Development Fund: Eur 72 000 (+RaRa self-financing € 10 800)

9. Business and Detailed Analysis of E-Publication Borrowing

Related SDGs: [4: Quality Education](#),

Objective: To describe the requirements for the development of an e-publication borrowing service platform. The goal is to create a unified library service that reaches every Estonian citizen and meets their expectations and needs.

Why is the e-publication borrowing project necessary? It is known that while library attendance is steadily decreasing, the share of e-book readers is increasing. Libraries' task is to adapt to consumer needs and enable the borrowing of e-publications across Estonia, as is already being done in several European countries, the United States, and Australia.

Main Actors:

The National Library of Estonia

Investment Time frame: Completed in 2020

Funding:

European Regional Development Fund: Eur 38 250 (+RaRa self-financing € 6 750)

10. KRATT: Responding to Information Queries / Ask Us

Related SDGs: [4: Quality Education](#), [8: Decent Work and Economic Growth](#), [10: Reduced Inequality](#), [12: Responsible Consumption and Production](#),

Objective: To develop a solution that enables the National Library to provide users with an information service 24/7, saving resources by replacing first-level queries with a technology-based process driven by artificial intelligence.

Why?

Every day, the National Library of Estonia receives questions/information queries. These questions often follow repetitive patterns and cover recurring topics, which consume too many human resources to answer. The National Library receives approximately 14,000 emails annually with questions. As a result of the project, a prototype for an application based on artificial intelligence will be developed, capable of sorting incoming questions by topics and automatically answering first-level questions that follow repetitive patterns.

Main Actors:

The National Library of Estonia

Investment Time frame: Completed in 2020

Funding:

European Regional Development Fund measure "Conducting Pre-analysis, Business Analysis, and Usability Studies for the Development of Public Services – 18.05.2015–01.07.2020": Eur 58 140 (+RaRa self-financing € 10 260)

11. Business and Detailed Analysis of the Digital Archive

Related SDGs: [4: Quality Education](#), [8: Decent Work and Economic Growth](#), [10: Reduced Inequality](#), [11: Sustainable Cities and Communities](#),

Objective: The goal of this project is to describe the business model and system requirements for the solution necessary to fulfill the National Library's digital preservation task. As a result, an analysis of new digital archive services will be completed, and readiness will be established to begin procuring the required software components and implementing them in the next phase of the project.

Why? The aging archive software does not allow the provision of services that meet modern requirements

Main Actors:

The National Library of Estonia

Investment Time frame: Completed in 2019

Funding:

European Regional Development Fund: Eur 42 000 (+RaRa self-financing € 17 500)

12. Analysis of the modernisation of Library Systems

Related SDGs: [4: Quality Education](#), [8: Decent Work and Economic Growth](#), [10: Reduced Inequality](#), [11: Sustainable Cities and Communities](#),

The objective of this project was:

- To analyse the management, governance, and funding models of library systems, as well as the existing architecture (services, data, infrastructure), from the perspective of the three library systems in use in Estonia – URRAM, RIKS, and SIERRA;
- To identify the most suitable library system architecture and governance model for Estonian libraries and their users.

Why?

The usability of library services has been in continuous decline over the past 8 years (both in terms of attendance and the number of loans). One of the reasons mentioned by users in their feedback is the inconvenience of library systems, the clumsiness of e-services, and the lack of functionality on mobile platforms.

Main Actors:

The National Library of Estonia

Investment Time frame: Completed in 2019

Funding:

European Regional Development Fund: Eur 50 000

13. Business Analysis of the National Bibliographic Service

Related SDGs: [4: Quality Education](#), [8: Decent Work and Economic Growth](#), [10: Reduced Inequality](#), [11: Sustainable Cities and Communities](#),

Objective: To design the most cost-effective and optimal business model and solution for providing the national bibliography service in the future, ensuring greater user satisfaction with the service and helping to increase the cross- and reuse of national bibliography data.

Why?

Problem description: The data model underlying the national bibliography and the technical solutions providing the national bibliography service are outdated. They do not ensure adequate protection of national bibliography data and do not allow flexible integration with other information systems to ensure the accessibility of Estonian publications in machine-readable format to other libraries and partners. They

also do not support the reuse and cross-use of data outside the library sector. The current information system does not allow the automation of processes related to the service, meaning that service provision still requires manual work in areas that could be done by machines in the future.

Main Actors:

The National Library of Estonia

Investment Time frame: Completed in 2020

Funding:

European Regional Development Fund: Eur 39 600 (through Ministry of Culture) and 33 660 (through Estonian Information System Authority)

Italy

Biblioteca Europea di Informazione e Cultura (BEIC)

Keywords

New building – Urban requalification – Social inclusion – Digital divide – Networking and Socialisation

Project Title: New Building for the Milan City Library

Project Context: This project is part of the National Recovery and Resilience Plan (PNRR) – Complementary measures under the Next Generation EU initiative.

Objective	SDG Alignment
Social inclusion	SDG 10: Reduced Inequalities
Enhancement of European heritage	SDG 11: Sustainable Cities and Communities
Creation of an integrated digital ecosystem	SDG 9: Industry, Innovation and Infrastructure
Advanced and personalized digital services	SDG 4: Quality Education
Management of physical and digital holdings through automation	SDG 9: Industry, Innovation and Infrastructure
Autonomous access to BEIC services	SDG 4: Quality Education

Funding:

- Total: €101,574,000.00 (NG-EU)
- National/Regional: [Percentage]

Investment Timeframe: 2021-2026

Main Actors:

- Ministry of Culture (NG-EU Funding Agency)
- Municipality of Milan
- BEIC Foundation

Expected Impact:

- Integration of analogical and digital services
- Sociality and public discussion
- Recentering urban planning
- Positive influence on urban mobility

- Social cohesion
- Self-learning and self-qualification

Links with Other EU-Funded Projects:

- Erasmus and regional vocational programs

New central Library of Turin

Objective	SDG Alignment
Social inclusion	SDG 10: Reduced Inequalities
City requalification	SDG 11: Sustainable Cities and Communities
Building Sustainability	SDG 9: Industry, Innovation and Infrastructure
Advanced and personalized digital services	SDG 4: Quality Education
Management of physical and digital holdings through automation	SDG 9: Industry, Innovation and Infrastructure

Project Context: This project is part of the National Recovery and Resilience Plan (PNRR), specifically Measure 5, Component 2, Investment 2.2, under the Next Generation EU initiative.

Overall Objective: To improve the quality, accessibility, and effectiveness of the Turin library network, fostering social inclusion and urban regeneration.

Project Description: The project includes a series of interventions aimed at revitalizing neighborhood libraries, expanding services, and enhancing accessibility to public spaces. Actions were selected based on social and material vulnerability indices and accessibility to the existing library system.

Main Interventions:

- **Renovation of 18 neighborhood libraries:** Modernization of interior spaces, equipment, and energy efficiency.
- **Construction of a new library in Via Viterbo:** Creation of a new cultural hub in the neighborhood.
- **Public space improvements:** Revitalization of green areas, pedestrian paths, and surrounding streets.
- **Expansion of the Bibliobus service:** Introduction of new vehicles and stops to reach peripheral and underserved areas.
- **Community engagement activities:** Organization of events, workshops, and initiatives to promote library use and social integration.

Expected Outcomes:

- Increased library usage and membership.

- Improved quality of life for residents in targeted neighborhoods.
- Enhanced accessibility for people with disabilities.
- Strengthening of Turin's role as a cultural and educational center.
- Contribution to the city's sustainability goals.

Alignment with the Next Generation-EU / NRRP: Measure 5.2.2, which aims to promote integration between city services and Turin's civic libraries.

Performance Indicators:

- Number of library visits
- Number of new members
- Percentage of residents living within a 15-minute walk of a library
- User satisfaction surveys

Partners:

- Municipality of Turin
- Turin Civic Libraries

Budget: The project is funded by the PNRR for a total amount of € 113,395,160.11.

Timeline: 2021-2026

Notes: The 36 project actions are distributed across over 70 areas of the city and were selected based on a thorough analysis of neighborhood needs.

Observations:

- **Focus on social inclusion:** Emphasize the project's aim to reduce inequalities and improve access to culture for all citizens.
- **Link to the territory:** Highlight how actions were selected based on specific characteristics of each neighborhood.
- **Sustainability:** Emphasize the project's commitment to environmental sustainability, energy efficiency, and sustainable mobility.

New Civic, Cultural and Innovation Centres – Rom Library System

Project Context: This project is part of the National Recovery and Resilience Plan (PNRR), specifically Measure 5, Component 2, Investment 2.2, under the Next Generation EU initiative.

Overall Objective: Libraries, as “anchor” institutions for the communities they serve, promote the cultural, social and economic development of local communities. They repair social unbalances as third place between the home and working place; they create a harmonious environment where daily life, sociality, cultural growth and economic development are combined.

Project Description: The project includes a series of interventions aimed at creating 9 new civic, cultural and innovation centres in areas where there is no library infrastructure and revitalizing the current network of 21 libraries. Activities are based on the social vulnerability Index. Particular attention is paid to children areas and green spaces.

Budget: The project is funded by the PNRR for a total amount of € 50,000,000.

Timeline: 2022-2026

Biblioteca Malatestiana (Cesena)

Restructuring the Malatestiana Library

With an enlargement over 1,000 more square metres, the Malatesta Library is now an even more modern and contemporary place of culture, thanks to a brand new gaming and video gaming area with gaming stations and consoles, new reading areas and study spaces, and a new soundproofed 50-seat projection room.

With over 380 thousand volumes and audiovisuals, and one million photographs, the Biblioteca Malatestiana, the oldest library in Emilia-Romagna, can now offer almost 100 thousand titles, half of which are distributed in the new spaces.

Total expenditure for the works: € 2,806,715.02 of which € 1,200,00.00 of European contribution POR FESR 2014-2020 managed by the Emilia-Romagna Region.

Great encounters

The 'Magnifici incontri' (Great encounters) project in which the Malatestiana is indirectly involved, is a project that the Region finances for Enaip funded by the ESF+. It is oriented at people with special needs and deals with reading education, self-esteem, self-fulfilment, and development of special abilities.

Region Puglia

Project Title: Puglia's Knowledge Infrastructure: Building Libraries through ESIF

Project Context: This project is part of the Puglia Region's strategy to enhance its knowledge infrastructure using European Structural and Investment Funds (ESIF). The project aims to revitalize library services, improve accessibility, and promote cultural development in the region.

Keywords

New building – Urban requalification – Social inclusion – Digital divide – Networking and Socialisation – Access to information and knowledge -

Objective

Social inclusion

SDG Alignment

SDG 10: Reduced Inequalities

Building Sustainability

SDG 9: Industry, Innovation and Infrastructure

Enhance educational opportunities and skills development

SDG 4: Quality Education

Management of physical and digital holdings through automation

SDG 9: Industry, Innovation and Infrastructure

Objectives:

- Create a network of modern, accessible libraries throughout Puglia.
- Promote cultural heritage and local development.
- Enhance educational opportunities and skills development.
- Foster social inclusion and community engagement.

Activities:

- **SMART-IN action:** Implementation of a region-wide initiative to support cultural heritage, libraries, and territorial resilience.
- **Library revitalization:** Renovation of existing libraries, introduction of new technologies, and development of sustainable management models.
- **Community Library program:** Launch of a funding program to support the creation and improvement of community libraries.
- **Innovative management models:** Experimentation with new approaches to library management and operation.

Funding:

- **2017-2020:** €125.5 million
- **2021-2027:** €55 million

Results:

- Establishment of a network of modernized libraries.
- Increased access to cultural resources and services.
- Improved educational outcomes and skills development.
- Enhanced social inclusion and community engagement.

Lessons Learned:

- Importance of strategic planning and clear objectives.
- Effective use of ESIF funding to support local development.
- Need for data-driven decision-making and evidence-based approaches.
- Value of community involvement and participation.

Diversity of Projects: The funded projects cater to a variety of needs, including:

- Child-focused activities and learning through play.
- Social inclusion for marginalized groups such as immigrants, people with disabilities, and the elderly.
- Cultural activities like workshops, exhibitions, and events.

Future Plans:

- Continuation of the library revitalization strategy in the 2028-2035 programming cycle.
- Building on the successes and lessons learned from the current projects.
- Alignment with evolving European trends and planning.

Additional Information:

- The project has been instrumental in addressing educational poverty and promoting cultural development in Puglia.
- The use of ESIF funding has enabled the region to invest in infrastructure and services that would not have been possible with domestic resources.
- The project has contributed to Puglia's efforts to become a more knowledge-based and innovative region.

Region Emilia-Romagna

Funding Call for Digitalizing Cultural Heritage in Emilia-Romagna

Background The European Union has recognized the significance of digital cultural heritage, acknowledging that digital assets hold immense value in preserving and promoting our cultural heritage. The Emilia-Romagna region, in alignment with this European perspective, has initiated a funding program to accelerate the digitalization of its cultural assets.

Objective	SDG Alignment
Social inclusion	SDG 10: Reduced Inequalities
Building Sustainability	SDG 9: Industry, Innovation and Infrastructure
Enhance educational opportunities and skills development	SDG 4: Quality Education
Management of physical and digital holdings through automation	SDG 9: Industry, Innovation and Infrastructure
Enhancement of European heritage	SDG 11: Sustainable Cities and Communities

Objectives The primary goal of this funding program is to enhance the accessibility, preservation, and understanding of the region's cultural heritage through digital technologies. Specific objectives include:

- **Digital preservation:** Safeguarding cultural assets by converting them into digital formats.
- **Accessibility:** Making cultural heritage more accessible to a wider audience through digital platforms.
- **Innovation:** Fostering the development of innovative digital tools and applications for cultural heritage.
- **Research:** Supporting research in digital humanities to deepen our understanding of cultural heritage.

Funding Availability A substantial €14,000,000 has been allocated for projects that align with these objectives. The funding is divided into two categories:

- **Public institutions:** €11,000,000
- **Private entities:** €3,000,000

The region has indicated that the total funding may be increased, depending on the quality and number of applications.

Time frame:

ERDF: 2021-2027

Alignment with Broader Strategies This funding initiative is closely aligned with regional, national, and European strategies aimed at promoting innovation, digitalization, and cultural heritage. Specifically, the program supports:

- **Regional development plans:** The initiative contributes to the region's overall economic and cultural development goals.
- **European digital strategies:** The call aligns with EU efforts to promote digitalization and the use of digital technologies in various sectors.
- **Sustainable development goals:** The projects funded through this call are expected to contribute to the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals.

In essence, this funding call represents a significant opportunity for organizations and individuals in Emilia-Romagna to contribute to the preservation and promotion of the region's cultural heritage. By supporting innovative digital projects, the initiative aims to ensure that future generations can continue to appreciate and learn from the region's rich cultural history.

Poland

Modernization of the National Library of Poland

1. <https://bn.org.pl/projekty/nowa-biblioteka-rzeczypospolitej/english-version>

In 2017, the National Library started a new stage of modernization works in the main building with changes in the common spaces of the library as well as reconstruction of the internal systems of the building installations.

New reading rooms, spaces for library collections and design of interiors, where the four patios were arranged to become an oasis of trees, flowers and grass, all available to the readers.

Simultaneously, rooms for a bookstore and a café.

For the implementation of Part I of the project, i.e. in the area of bookshops, the National Library received funding from the Minister of Culture and National Heritage in the amount of PLN 700 thousand (162,000 Euro) within the Infrastructure of Culture Programme from the Fund for the Promotion of Culture.

On 21 May 2019. The National Library signed with the Ministry of Culture and National Heritage an agreement no. 00488/19/FPK/DEK for co-financing of Part I of the task within the framework of the Cultural Infrastructure Programme from the funds of the Minister of Culture coming from the Fund for the Promotion of Culture for the years 2019–2020.

On 06.06.2019 within the framework of the implementation of the project for Parts I and II, a contract was signed with the Contractor of construction works – PROCHEM S.A. company.

The new NL spaces are environment friendly and a new energy system was set up - insulation, ventilation and lighting systems to reduce energy consumption.

The estimated total cost of the project is 16 550 418,22 zł (€3,830,000) while the subsidy of the European Union Funds is assumed in the amount of 9 453 261,85 zł (€2,188,000).

2. <https://bn.org.pl/en/news/3840-three-million-objects-have-been-made-available-in-the-national-digital-library-polona.html>

In December 2019, the number of objects made available on POLONA (polona.pl), Poland's most modern digital library, run by National Library of Poland (BN), reached 3 million. One million of them are the outcome of the "Patrimonium" project, carried out by the BN in cooperation with the Jagiellonian Library, the largest and the oldest academic library in Poland. POLONA is currently one of the biggest digital libraries all over Europe. Every day as many as two thousand new objects are scanned and uploaded to its collection. POLONA digital library provides gratuitous and extensive access to high-quality digital objects.

<https://bn.org.pl/en/news/4095-new-digitisation-grant-for-national-library-of-poland-and-the-jagiellonian-university-library-in-cracow.html>

<https://mapadotacji.gov.pl/projekty/747556/?lang=en> (prima edizione)

Project value: 81 744 261,41 zł (18,921,425.93 Euro); Co-financing from the EU: 69 102 052,71 zł (15,995,000 Euro)

Operational Program Digital Poland action - 2.3. Digital availability and usability of public sector information Fund - European Regional Development Fund

<https://mapadotacji.gov.pl/projekty/1179473/?lang=en> (seconda edizione)

Name of the beneficiary: NATIONAL LIBRARY

Project value: PLN 33,604,886.59 (7,778,000 Euro); Co-financing from the EU: PLN 28,439,815.34 (6,582,000 Euro)

Voivodeship nationwide project. County program: Operational Program Digital Poland action 2.3. Digital availability and usability of public sector information fund European Regional Development Fund

3. <https://mapadotacji.gov.pl/projekty/747500/?lang=en> (ExLibris library system ALMA)

Name of the beneficiary: BIBLIOTEKA NARODOWA

Project value: 33 471 732,44 zł (7,747,000 Euro); Co-financing from the EU: 27 954 097,07 zł (6,470,000)

Voivodeship nationwide project. County program Operational Program Digital Poland action 2.1. High availability and quality of public e-services fund European Regional Development Fund

4. Setting up the Academica interlibrary loan system, providing access to **3 782 552** publications from all fields of knowledge, including the newest ones, protected by copyright.
<https://mapadotacji.gov.pl/projekty/734673/?lang=en> (versione attuale)

Name of the beneficiary: National Library

Project value PLN 34,687,846.81 (8,029,230.59 Euro); Co-financing from the EU PLN 29,408,555.03 (6,807,227.64 Euro)

Voivodeship Masovian Voivodeship County capital city Warsaw program Innovative Economy Operational Program action 2.3. Investments related to the creation of IT infrastructure for science fund European Regional Development Fund

<https://mapadotacji.gov.pl/projekty/1686813/?lang=en> (2021-2027)

Name of the beneficiary: National Library

Project value: PLN 29,882,486.34 (6,916,929.00 Euro); Co-financing from the EU: PLN 23,819,329.85 (5,513,000 Euro)

Voivodeship nationwide project County program European Funds for Digital Development 2021-2027 action 2.1. High quality and availability of public e-services fund European Regional Development Fund

5. <https://bn.org.pl/projekty/pelna-czytelnia-rzeczypospolitej> The “Full Reading Room of the Republic”

The “Full Reading Room of the Republic” project, as a continuation of previous projects, focuses on securing the National Library's most valuable collections, improving conditions for their preservation and processing, as well as making them accessible.

The project includes adaptation and arrangement of selected rooms of the library's main building, as well as energy efficiency improvements. 1. it is planned to equip the rooms with the necessary furniture - manuscript storehouse and workshop, Multi-Function Rooms etc. , with multimedia systems and systems / equipment for audiences with special needs. In addition, the project will include activities aimed at improving the competence of the staff - a total of 22 training courses, professional courses and postgraduate studies will be conducted in 4 blocks for 400 employees of the National Library.

Funding for the project will amount to a total of PLN 33,282,350 (7,703,898.84 Euro), which consists of funding from the European Union in the amount of PLN 26,196,537.69 (6,063,738.78 Euro) and funding from the Ministry of Culture and National Heritage in the amount of PLN 7,085,812.31 (1,640,160.06 Euro).

The "Full Reading Room of the Republic" project is implemented from the European Funds for Infrastructure, Climate, Environment 2021-2027 Program, within the framework of action FENX.07.01 Cultural infrastructure and cultural tourism priority FENX.07 Culture.

<https://mapadotacji.gov.pl/projekty/1690173/?lang=en>

Name of the beneficiary

Project value

PLN 39,992,715.00 (9,257,153.73 Euro) Co-financing from the EU: PLN 26,196,537.69 (6,063,738.78 Euro)

Voivodeship Masovian Voivodeship. County capital city Warsaw program
European Funds for Infrastructure, Climate, Environment 2021-2027 action
7.1. Culture and cultural tourism infrastructure fund
European Regional Development Fund

6. Modernizing the Czartoryski Library in Cracow

<https://mapadotacji.gov.pl/projekty/1690169/>

Princes Czartoryski Library - expansion and reconstruction of a branch of the National Museum in Krakow
beneficiary name: National Museum in Krakow
project value: PLN 56,194,788.50 (13,007,463.89 Euro)

EU funding PLN 37,181,150.41 (8,606,358.07 Euro)

Voivodeship Lesser Poland Voivodeship County m. Kraków program
European Funds for Infrastructure, Climate, Environment 2021-2027 action 7.1. Culture and cultural tourism infrastructure fund
European Regional Development Fund perspective 2021 - 2027

After renovation, the building will be available again early 2028.

<https://mnk.pl/en/branch/mnk-the-czartoryski-library/information>

7. University library of Śląsk

<https://mapadotacji.gov.pl/projekty/695472/>

Scientific Information Center and Academic Library Revitalization

Beneficiary name: University of Silesia in Katowice
Project value: PLN 77,260,822.05 (17,883,639.74 Euro)

EU funding: PLN 52,675,483.45 (12,192,846.83 Euro)

Voivodeship Silesia County city Katowice program
Regional Operational Program of the Silesian Voivodeship action
6.1. Strengthening regional growth centers fund
European Regional Development Fund perspective 2007 - 2013

<https://ciniba.edu.pl/historia/>

The Library was inaugurated on October 12, 2012

8. "Biblioteka Skawina" station - restoring the building of the railway station in Skawina to its historic value with the purpose of using the building for public purposes

<https://mapadotacji.gov.pl/projekty/761939/>

Culture and art; environmental protection
Beneficiary name: SKAWINA MUNICIPALITY
Project value: PLN 7,295,093.79 (1,688,602.65 Euro)

EU funding: PLN 2,818,770.36 (652,463.59 Euro)

Voivodeship Lesser Poland Voivodeship County (Krakow program)
Regional Operational Program of the Małopolska Voivodeship for 2014-2020 action
DEVELOPMENT OF CULTURAL AND NATURAL HERITAGE fund
European Regional Development Fund, 2014 – 2020, The 19th-century railway station in Skawina.

Appendix 2 Some ESIF-funded library Projects in countries other than Estonia, Italy and Poland

Bulgaria and Romania

What's the goal? Overall project objective is encouraging joint conservation, protection, promotion and development of the written intangible cultural heritage of the RO–BG CBC region through diversification of tourist services and literary tourism development, as a major factor for using and exploiting common advantages and potentials, and overcoming discrepancies.

What's the budget? 486 028.75 euro, out of which 413 124.43 euro ERDF

Who is doing it? Global Libraries Bulgaria Foundation, Alexandru & Aristia Aman Dolj County Library (Craiova, Romania), Lyuben Karavelov Regional Library (Rusi, Bulgaria)

When is it happening? 2018-2021

How is it going to happen?

- A new integrated tourist product Lower Danube Cross-border Destination for Literary Tourism (Lower Danube CBDLT)
- Two pilot modern and innovative for the whole region literary tourist attractions will be created in the libraries in Ruse and Craiova, based on the newest digital technologies,
- At least 5 literature tourist packages and 5 tourist routes will be created in the cross-border region
- Two international literary festivals.
- An Integrated Development Strategy of Lower Danube CBDLT worked out with the active participation of all kind of stakeholders in the CBC region;
- A Three Year Action Plan for Management of the New Lower Danube CBDLT;
- A Strategic plan for Cross-border network of stakeholders development will be prepared
- An Innovative Marketing strategy for internationally promoting the new image of Lower Danube CBDLT.