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LIBRARIES AS FACTORS TO SUPPORT SOCIETAL SECURITY

Abstract:	*The link between culture and identity is a close one, being the identity card of each nation. Protecting a set of values, beliefs, traditions and characteristics gives rise to the concept of societal security and the dynamics of the concept at the level of society.* *On the one hand this paper focuses on the transformation that public libraries have undergone over time, precisely to ensure their continuity in the community. Libraries have adapted to the needs of the individual and the community they serve, becoming community hubs. At the same time, the work aims to explore the existing connections between libraries and the concepts of societal security, social inclusion and democracy.* *The relevance of the study consists in the analysis of the social and cultural performances achieved by the libraries in the activities carried out and the implications on societal security. The research methodology focuses both on the analysis of the available documents that give us an overview of library activities and the community's involvement in these activities, as well as on a quantitative survey method, which was applied to a sample of 54 public librarians from Romania, the respondents being selected both from urban and rural areas.*
Keywords:	**Culture; identity; libraries; societal security**
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Introduction

Today's global world opens the way to multiculturalism and diversity but creates the perception of altering what is known to the individual and what represents him. In this process of reinvigorating the elements of cultural identity, libraries join the mission of heritage conservation and valorization through interactive, diverse and accessible library services. in this way, libraries support the positive transformations of communities and prepare the individual to be able to achieve them through a bottom-up effort.

This paper focuses on the transformation that public libraries have undergone over time, precisely to ensure their continuity in the community. Libraries have adapted to the needs of the individual and the community they serve, becoming community hubs. At the same time, the work aims to explore the existing connections between libraries and the concepts of societal security, social inclusion and democracy. The relevance of the study lies in analyzing the social and cultural performance achieved by libraries. In an increasingly digital and undefined space, libraries manage to physically bring communities together and dedicate themselves to educating generations, albeit without much public talk about these initiatives.

The current study is based on consulted specialist literature, addressing several key terms such as societal security, culture, identity and the link between public libraries and social inclusion, democracy and cultural heritage. Of note are the limitations this study faced, as the research and accessible literature sources were mostly conducted in the United States. European research is limited or inaccessible, most resources being reports resulting from the activity of the International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions. Also, the present study

brings a current perspective of the situation of public libraries in Romania, in contrast to the existing specialized literature.

Starting from the research question "in what way public libraries in Romania represent support factors for societal security?", the research methodology focuses on document analysis connected with the quantitative method of the survey. The document review included academic studies, various library organization reports, and library web pages for consultation of library services and initiatives undertaken by them. Regarding the survey method, it was applied to a sample of 54 public librarians from Romania, the subjects being an equal number from both rural and urban areas. The applied questionnaire aimed to collect data related to the function that public libraries perform as a neutral space, for interaction and inclusion, being promoters of democracy and, finally, as important factors in the valorization and preservation of the heritage of the communities they serve. The primary data obtained with the help of the survey will be processed in the form of graphs or tables that will then be explained to fulfill the objectives of this study.

Concerns about the erosion of cultural identity and the loss of diversity are highlighted by the constant transformation of the evolution of globalization, a process that "extends borders but also weakens them"[1]. These dynamics become important in terms of security because, according to Arnold Wolfers and his perspective on the nature of security, it "can be understood as the preservation of the fundamental values of individuals in a group"[2]. Seen through a constructivist lens, today's societies are the result of a historical journey, of interactions and social constructions between individual consciousness, ideas and experiences. The traditional approach no longer met the current needs of society, which extended far beyond the military, economy and politics - society sought to shed light on the individual, his needs (how he lives, how he communicates, how he develops) and the environment in which he lives.

Societal Security

In the traditional approach, the state is characterized by a fixed territory, borders to be defended, an administrative body that manages the proper functioning of the state, the economy and the population inside and outside the physical borders. On the other hand, society is shaped by individuals' interactions, their belonging to a community and self-perceptions and the way of affirmation, because "the concept of organization in the societal sector is identity"[3].
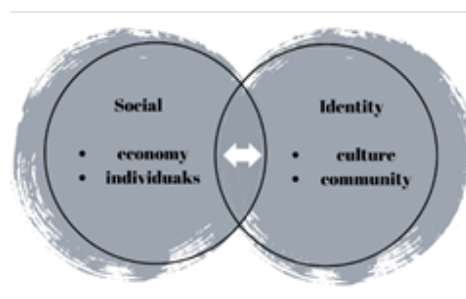

Figure 1. The elements of societal security[4]

Starting from Weaver's perspective on the interdependence between the individual – community – society[5], and how these elements support each other, societal security derives from the identity, linguistic and cultural

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[1] Victor D. Cha, *Globalization and the study of international security*, "Journal of Peace Research", Sage Publications/PRIO 6 Bonhill Street, London Vol. 37, No. 3, 2000

[2] Paul D. Williams, *Security studies: an introduction*, Third edition, Routledge, London, New York, 2018, p. 50

[3] Saleh, *Broadening the concept of security: identity and societal security*, 2011, "Geopolitics Quarterly", in Buzan, Barry, Weaver, Ole., De Wilde J., Security, *A New Framework for Analysis*, Lynne Rienner Publisher, London, 1998, p. 232

[4] Janusz Gierszewsk, Juliusz Piwowarski, *Theoretical basics of societal security*, "Security Dimensions International&National Studies", No. 18, 2016, p. 57

[5] Barry Buzan, *People, States and fear: An agenda for International Security Studies in the Post-Cold War Era*, Harvester Wheatsheaf, London, 1991, p. 233

practices of a group. Societal security becomes "a logical extension of state security"[1], but also a point of insecurity, because the key element refers to survival. Survival is what ensures the continuity of the elements of language, culture, customs, preferences, which shape the way individuals think and act. In this way, societal security can also be understood through the logic of social identity theory, which attests to the fact that "group membership satisfies basic cognitive and emotional needs"[2].

The connection between social identity theory and societal security manifests itself through the identification of a threat to the group's stability, and the response aims to give rise to the securitization process, to isolate the group and maintain external threats. The group's assertion becomes prominent, and actions respond to the need for security and strengthen "a society's ability to persist in its essential character under changing conditions and in the face of possible or real threats".[3] Threats are exclusively to identity so Theiler, Herd & Löfgren and Roe summarize that an important characteristic of societal security is that each identity community sets as its main goal the preservation of its own identity, and not the achievement of other goals through this means[4]. In another definition of the concept, Bailes and Sandö find relevant the overall appropriation of the term, referring to "the protection of society as a whole - with its own complex mechanisms, values and culture as the objective, rather than at physical borders or, as in human security, in the isolated individual"[5]. Hough also points out that societal security refers to "the ability of a society to preserve its essential characteristics in the face of changing circumstances and despite potential or actual threats".[6] By bringing societal security to the fore, societies seek to ensure their survival and of course, functionality. To achieve these vital needs, they use defensive mechanisms, in this case cultural means, especially referring to "myths and symbols"[7] and highlight elements of culture, language, history, traditions and customs. Thus, cultural factors shape society's attitudes towards security risks, influence the way individuals and groups perceive and respond to threats and affect how security measures and policies are implemented.

Culture and Identity

Culture represents the baggage of experiences, feelings and customs built over time and then transmitted from generation to generation. Orlando Patterson describes culture as an acquired or learned process; "a social repertoire"[8], which traces a modus vivendi of the individual. Clifford Geertz presents it as "a deep description"[9] of society which, at its core, turns to human interactions, values, practices and symbols. The "social repertoire" is transformed not only through individual experiences, but also through interaction with the external environment, through geographical, political manifestations and historical consequences. Culture sums up a set of shared behaviors, beliefs, values and landmarks, such as art, religious customs, clothing, music, traditions, that define a group, community or society. Understanding how groups express themselves results in an appreciation of diversity, and a promotion of respect between different identity categories.

According to Daniel Patrick Moynihan, "culture is what determines the success of a society"[10], because it can self-preserve and put up a certain resistance in the face of change and identified external dynamics. Culture makes a significant connection with economic progress and democracy, connections that are then expressed at the level of societies. The World Values Survey (WVS), through the Cultural Map of the World, made by political scientists Ronald Inglehart and Christian Welzel (Figure 3) argues how cultural models, acquired or learned by individuals, outline economic progress, the support and development of democratic institutions, the achievement of certain

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[1] Tobias Theiler, *Societal security and social psychology*, "Review of International Studies", Vol. 29, No. 2, 2003, Cambridge University Press, p. 250

[2] *Ibidem*, p. 264

[3] Mark Rhinard, *Societal security in theory and practice*, "Nordic Societal Security", Routledge, 2020, p. 22

[4] *Ibidem*, p. 24

[5] *Ibidem*, p. 26; A.J.K. Bailes, *Societal Security and Small States*, in C. Archer, A.J.K. Bailes, A. Wivel (Eds.), *Small States and International Security,* Routledge, London, 2014, pp. 66–79

[6] Branka Panić, *Societal security–security and identity*, "Western Balkans Security Observer", English Edition, No. 13, 2009; Hough, P. *Beogradski centar za bezbednosnu politiku*, "Understanding Global Security", Routledge, New York, 2004, p. 31

[7] Alam Saleh, *Op.cit.,* p. 235

[8] Lawrence E. Harrison, Samuel P. Huntington, *Culture matters: how values shape human progress*, Basic Books, 2000, p. 208

[9] *Ibidem*, p. XV

[10] *Ibidem*, p. XIV

standards high in gender equality or the effectiveness of governments. Political scientists highlight two paths that a society can follow, through a series of values and attitudes. Thus, if society adopts an individual, self-specific mode of expression through "own values of expression," then it tends to support the consolidation of democratic regimes, unlike societies that adhere to a series of measures and "survival values"[1]. More specifically, the map exemplifies how, following an increase in the standard of living and the transformation from a developing country through industrialization to a post-industrial knowledge society, a country tends to move from the lower left corner (reduced capabilities) to the upper right corner (increased capacities), indicating a transit in both dimensions, diagonally.
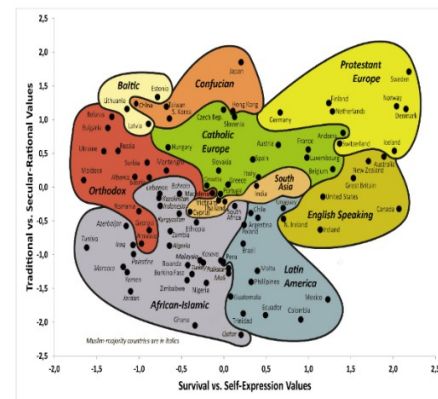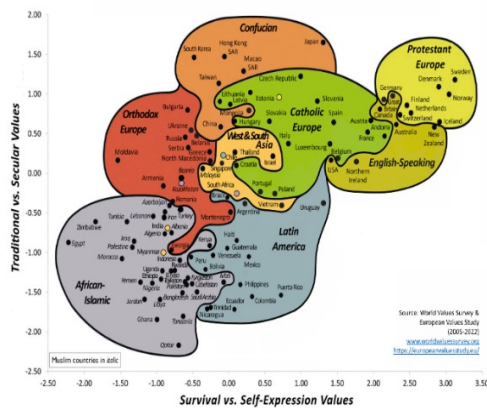

Figure 2. Cultural map of the world, Inglehart-Wezel, 2023[2]

Figure 3. Cultural map of the world, Inglehart-Wezel, 2010-2014[3]

The interdependence between economic progress, the growth of the service industry and the power of self-expression values is felt through the behavioral imprint of individuals. Those with higher incomes, higher education, and positions in the service sector tend to prioritize self-expression ideals more strongly than the rest of their countrymen, ranking higher and to the right of them on this map, as can be seen in Figures 3 and 4.

The concept of identity does not only refer to the relationships that appear at the internal level of the group, respectively communities. If at the internal level the interactions outline principles of similarity between members, at the external level the interactions focus on differentiation, on the identification of others and their cultures. Consequently, cultural identity becomes much stronger and firmer when we define our 'self' in relation to a cultural 'Other'[4]. We can refer to the concept of identity from two perspectives: individual identity and state identity. When we refer to the identity of the individual, it can be categorized as an act, when supporters of common values have "the ability to support the narrative about themselves as a collective self", but also as a structure, where the story is what facilitates the identity construction of individuals. But identity is always "a narrative, an active process" of individuals, because it is dynamic and in continuous evolution, depending on the environment and the present influences[5].

Cultural identity narratives are those that ensure communication through stories told within and outside the group to shape perceptions of how we see "ourselves" and how "others" see us. All this takes place within a continuous process of choices and social interactions that contribute to the formation and consolidation of everyone's identity. Transposed to the next level, the values and beliefs assimilated by individuals are manifested through national identity, through a social space and a delimited territory, through which communities identify themselves. Starting from Smith's perspective, the main elements that characterize and stabilize the identity of the

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[1] *Ibidem*, pp. 81–82
[2] http://www.worldvaluessurvey.org/ (20.04.2025)
[3] *Idem*
[4] Simon Clarke, *Culture and identity*, "The SAGE Handbook of Cultural Analysis", Sage, London, 2008, p. 511
[5] Branka Panić, *Societal security–security and identity*, "Western Balkans Security Observer", English Edition, No. 13, 2009; Hough, P. *Beogradski centar za bezbednosnu politiku*, "Understanding Global Security", Routledge, New York, 2004, p. 35

state are "historic land, common historical myths and memories, common culture, common rights and duties for all members of the community, and common economy with territorial mobility for all members"[1].

Culture and identity influence each other, especially because the formation process of an individual can be shaped by the cultural patterns in his environment, and identity can exert its influence on the way culture is understood and assimilated. Culture is dynamic, fluid, and individuals can add value to known cultural diversity and expression, enriching the cultural landscape through the uniqueness of their own actions and experiences. In short, culture provides the framework for the manifestation of identity, and this fills the gap with traits and values that attest to how culture is interpreted. It is also important to mention how culture is not only under the umbrella of societal security, in the idea of protecting the identity values that define groups and communities. Cultural factors, either acquired or learned by individuals, can shape the social and political dynamics of the societies of which they are a part. Cultural factors can also shape the way a group of people perceive and respond to security risks, through a positive or less positive change in attitudes. More specifically, cultural factors can influence the effectiveness of security measures and policies, for which it is necessary to consolidate and assimilate a security culture. The need to educate the population in support of ensuring the security of the state is fundamental for a modern society.

Libraries in Overcoming Social Divides, Reducing Inequality and Promoting Citizen Interaction

In 2022, according to the Library Map of The World[2], 2.8 million libraries were registered globally, of which 410,297 were public libraries. In 2016, a study by the European Parliament mentioned that there are 65,000 public libraries in the European Union[3]. A report of the Public Libraries 2030[4] initiative shows that in 2019, there were 9497 libraries in Romania. With a population of 19 million, the report shows that one library serves 2,047 citizens.

Since ancient times, libraries have been the result of the interaction between individuals and communities, a mélange of perspectives, personal experiences and the world of ideas. If at the beginning they maintained the function of the space, that of being a shelter for books and knowledge, with the progress of society, the services offered by libraries have folded to the demands of users. They became a point of connection between the exchange of information and knowledge, which then underpins a common culture. In essence, libraries were shaped around the idea of community, being "that homogeneous construct, equated with the formless public"[5].

Libraries are institutions that have evolved around communities, the latter benefiting from resources, guidance, and above all, socialization and interaction. The evolution adopted by libraries has been driven by the changing needs and interests of local communities. Important to note is the fact that there was a continuous exchange between libraries and users, because once the institution made available to the public new materials and topics to exploit, individuals could deepen their understanding and expand their horizons of knowledge. It was accessibility that brought citizens together, regardless of socio-economic background and other individual characteristics. The finality of this cultural exchange was manifested by the promotion of literacy and education to all social classes. The effort to reduce inequality and promote interaction between citizens could only be manifested through a library whose services were adapted to the interests of the community. A culturally refreshed space would only mean increased curiosity on the part of groups of individuals and moreover, these spaces were able to fulfill a number of roles in strengthening the community, such as: 1) a comfortable, quiet space that offers safety; 2) a non-commercial and accessible space; 3) a space where you can be with and interact with other people (known or not), in a cultural environment, focused on learning; 4) a space of opportunities for learning, research and recreation; 5) a space of choice, where library services respond to the user's profile or seek to improve according to requests.

[1] *Ibidem*, p. 32

[2] IFLA Library Map of the World, https://librarymap.ifla.org/ (06.05.2024)

[3] Barbara Lison, German Library Association, *Research for Cult Committee - the New Role Of Public Libraries In Local Communities*, Policy Department for Structural and Cohesion Policies, 2016, p. 9, https://www.europarl.europa.eu/committees/en/supporting-analyses/sa-highlights (06.05.2024)

[4] *EU Library Factsheets Public Libraries 2030,* https://publiclibraries2030.eu/what-we-do/eu-library-factsheets/, (06.05. 2024)

[5] Bharat Mehra, Ramesh Srinivasan, *The Library-Community Convergence Framework for Community Action: Libraries as Catalysts of Social Change*, "Libri", Vol. 57, No. 3, 2007, p. 10, https://www.degruyter.com/document/doi/10.1515/LIBR.2007.123/html (06.05 2024)

In short, at the community level, libraries have become "a common good, both intellectual and social"[1.] At the same time, given the social nature that these institutions fulfill, they also become a space of gender, ethnic, racial, civic, community representation, precisely because "a community within a community" was created[2]. Inequality felt in other social environments was here excluded by common cultural interests that led to socialization, free expression and empathy. The social function found within libraries highlights a place of equal opportunity, where opportunity and knowledge are for everyone. Every individual who is in the library can enjoy activities that involve collective actions of communication and knowledge, through innovative educational methods.

Furthermore, libraries are defined as a "third space" of knowledge that individuals - children or adults - frequent most of the time. Here they have access to material and digital resources, but learning can also be from individual to individual, through a transfer of information, experiences and skills. The "third space" derives from a ranking of the places where groups spend most of their time, the first position being occupied by the home, followed by schools and other educational institutions. For libraries to function and bring a change within the communities, they set a series of objectives which, then are achieved by putting into practice various methods and approaches that follow the particularities of proximity. Proactive community action from libraries brings individuals closer not only to knowledge but also to socialization in a space for knowledge. In this context we can recall the concept of "social capital", being the resource created through formal and informal relationships between people in a community[3]. In essence, social capital materializes in the form of the relationship between the interactions of human capital in a space – such as that of the library, using varied material capital. The formula of social capital is subsequently identified by the level of prosperity of the communities.

To ensure the long-term prosperity and development of communities, IFLA, the International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions supports the United Nations Agenda 2030 initiative, "no one is left behind" and recognizes libraries as a particularly important pillar in achieving the SDGs - Goals of Sustainable Development. Libraries are de facto the right environment for social, economic and environmental growth, because "increasing access to information and knowledge throughout society, assisted by the availability of information and communication technologies (ICT), supports sustainable development and improves the quality of life of individuals"[4]. The United Nations' 2030 Agenda underlines the universality of the organization's commitment to achieving its goals. Putting them into practice, with the help of libraries, brings us back to the definition of today's global, interconnected and ever-changing world. Missionaries of knowledge, libraries act as catalysts to promote education for everyone, at a high quality, so that the inequities identified in society are gradually diminished through the individual's own forces, but with specialized, inclusive help.

As "local gateways" to knowledge, libraries contribute to meeting the goals of the 2030 Agenda through access to information that builds skills and educational opportunities that improve the lives of individuals. In the medium and long term, these services that involve and bring together mean literacy, informed decisions that reduce poverty and improve quality of life. The quality of life is constantly improved through public access to information from various fields that serve the integration of the individual in society, but also through interactions with other citizens, professionals in the field, educational institutions and local authorities. Remembering the role of libraries as a neutral, safe space, meetings are held here in a framework that supports gender equality, investing at the community level in programs for citizens regarding entrepreneurship, ICT, health and more. The inclusion and integration of citizens also results through the social infrastructure that libraries offer, such as the help given by the staff of the institution in accessing the Internet, free of charge, guidance on applying for a job, a place of recreation, of all types of education (formal, non-formal, informal) and freedom of expression and trial, both in urban and rural environments[5].

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[1] Sam Demas, *From the Ashes of Alexandria: What's Happening in the College Library?,* "Library as Place: Rethinking Roles, Rethinking Space", Council on Library and Information Resources, 2005, p. 27

[2] Matthew R Griffis, *Space, Power and the Public Library: A Multicase Examination of the Public Library as Organization Space*, Electronic Thesis and Dissertation Repository.1103, 2013, pp. 10–11

[3] Barbara J Snyder, *How the public library contributes to community building: a case study*, Theses and Dissertations. 846, 2007, p. 8

[4] Irina V. Gayshun, *Access and Opportunity for All. How Libraries Contribute to the United Nations 2030 Agenda*, "Bibliotekovedenie. Library and Information Science", Vol. 65, No. 4, 2016, p. 3

[5] *Ibidem*, p. 5–13

The attributes of libraries address the extended network at all levels, from the local level to the global level, because they can be the holders of the skills and resources necessary for progress. "Libraries have the skills and resources to help governments, institutions and individuals communicate, organize, structure and use information effectively for development"[1]. The mission that libraries fulfill, both intellectually and socially, has materialized by transforming their own physical space into a space with symbolic resonances. The library, as a space, brings people and groups together and becomes a kind of community agora, a social, political and information center, where groups can freely express themselves and manifest, and the value of everyone is appreciated. Libraries thus become "shelters", because they guarantee the user a protective and safe space, which emphasizes a greater openness to the exposure of curiosity and interpersonal connections. On the other hand, Lawson highlights the influence the quality of the space in which groups find themselves has on human behavior. He argues that "people communicate more through their 'inherent spatiality' than through any other form of language".[2] Libraries ensure continuity, the continuity of knowledge for communities, but also of a decent life that every individual deserves. In 2022, 28 years later, the Public Libraries Manifesto is renewed in a note that emphasizes the integration of technology in all aspects of everyday life, but does not depart from the fundamental vision of the project: "The public library, the local gateway to access to knowledge, (...) provides publicly accessible space for the production of knowledge, sharing, exchange of information and culture, but also the promotion of civic engagement"[3].

Starting from the eleventh point of the 2030 Agenda of the United Nations which mentions, among other things, the need for human settlements to be sustainable. Achieving this goal starts with the local actions that libraries take, focusing a good part of their activity on protecting, conserving and raising awareness of neighborhood heritage and connecting it to a national network. Any action to preserve material or immaterial heritage is dedicated to the knowledge and creation of a chronology of events, useful to today's citizens, but also to future generations. So, by definition, cultural heritage means "cultural capital that has been inherited from previous generations and that can be passed on to future generations"[4]. Knowing one's identity and shaping a sense of belonging, by connecting to future generations, makes libraries become supporters of the concept of cultural sustainability. According to Farsani et al., by cultural sustainability we mean "the concept of recovery and protection of cultural identities"[5].

Libraries become factors of societal security through library services that shed light on the particularities and generalities of the community, movable and immovable heritage, resource citizens and all the elements that make it possible to know what was before. Public libraries in Romania have many concerns in the field of cultural memory and local knowledge, which consider the requirement at the national level for all public libraries, expressed by IFLA, UNESCO and the Library Law no. 334 of 31/05/2002. The requirement is aimed at increasing concern for the preservation and promotion of local heritage, supporting oral tradition and ensuring access to information concerning the community. Public libraries have the obligation to fulfill and develop their role of 1) community information centers; 2) storage of community memory. For this purpose, public libraries have an obligation to develop, regardless of their support (paper, audio, video, digital, etc.), genealogy and local history collections. Here we mention books, periodicals and serials, manuscripts, archival documents, films, photographs, postcards, biographical sheets, etc., relating to the localities or counties of which they are a part.

Fundamental elements of societal security are achieved by public libraries through the following directions of action: 1) encouraging the idea of local community, family and local history; 2) development of activity in the field at the level of any public libraries; 3) active continuation of research and documentation in archives, museums, libraries, identification of new information, references, images; 4) collection and purchase of documents related to the past and present of the community (village, commune, city); 5) organization, structuring of information

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[1] *Ibidem*, p. 16

[2] *Ibidem*, p. 4

[3] *IFLA/UNESCO Public Library Manifesto: renewing the 1994 common commitment between UNESCO and the International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions (IFLA) - UNESCO Digital Library*, https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000377426 (06.05 2024)

[4] Katriina Soini, Inger Birkeland, *Exploring the scientific discourse on cultural sustainability*, "Geoforum", Vol. 51, 2014, p. 216

[5] Farsani N. Torabi, C. Coelho, C. Costa, *Geotourism and geoparks as gateways to socio-cultural sustainability*, "Qeshm Rural Areas", Vol. 17, No. 1, p. 48

regarding the history of institutions, families, buildings, minorities, the environment, etc., from the respective locality; 6) promoting the cultural heritage of the place through traditional and modern means; 7) digitization of collections (transposition of existing collections on traditional or analog support, in digital format); 8) preservation and conservation of electronic documents and collections in the field to ensure access to information for future generations; 9) increasing the involvement of citizens in the creation of community memory, digital resources accessible to all, the training of volunteers to collect documents on local history; 10) promoting cooperation between libraries, museums, archives and other institutions.

Fundamental to preserving local memory are the articles published by people of culture in local culture magazines, being the result of research and documentation activities in various fields. Most of the libraries have created, over time, documentary funds that preserve and develop monographic or local research works, profiles of local personalities that are constantly updated. Specific or distinctive identity elements are enriched and reorganized according to each library service[1] [2].

An example regarding the involvement of libraries in preserving local memory and history is the creation of the website www.istorielocala.ro, created at the initiative of five libraries from all over Romania: "Gheorghe Şincai" County Library Bihor, "Panait Istrati" County Library Brăila, the County Library "Octavian Goga" Cluj, the County Library "Antim Ivireanul" Vâlcea and the Bucovina Library "I.C. Sbierea" Suceava. The cultural objectives that formed the basis of the project are: 1) capitalizing on traditional collections of documents on history and, in general, local knowledge, the initiative also having the role of preserving information, to avoid their degradation/disappearance together with the physical support; 2) creating such a possibility for other partners - libraries or other hoarders of such documents (archives, museums, etc.); 3) making available online, free of charge, to all those interested, the content of information on traditional media existing in our libraries or in places that are accessible to us.

The adoption of technology as a library service has facilitated not only human interaction, external connection with the audience, but also the transmission of knowledge. Even though there were countless discussions about the loss of physical libraries, the existential threat was transformed into an opportunity. One of the traditional missions of public libraries is to bring individuals into the library and improve their knowledge of who they are and what is happening around them. By connecting to international trends, these cultural institutions have continuously evolved and sought the best solutions for the growth of the communities they serve. A much closer connection with the cultural element of identity was also achieved, precisely because the fear of technology, increasingly present in the daily activity of the individual, led to a revival of local history and memory. Before we do, we need to know. And the public libraries put at the disposal of every user's necessary resource for personal development. Opportunities facilitate the integration of the individual in the world of culture and popular arts, and librarians give him guidance to use and put into practice what he has learned.

Case Study. Romania

The following questionnaire was applied to 54 individuals, library staff, who come from both rural and urban areas. Questioning considers the way in which the transmission of local memory and history is carried out at the community level, and finally, the extent to which public libraries maintain their role as a space of connection, of safety, where users learn through the accessibility of resources, but also of the experiences shared by other users. Public libraries still fulfill their traditional function of book repositories and other educational materials in physical format, but they have transformed themselves along with technological progress, using different methods and resources, according to Figure 4. Not to end up with a sort of "abandoned libraries", librarians sought to adapt to the new demands of users, to ensure the continuity of library activity. Completing traditional information sources with online ones provides much more suitable learning and development support for the nowadays user; documentation that until now required a considerable amount of time can now be easily completed in a few hours[3].

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[1] *Memorie şi Cunoaştere Locală Biblioteca Judeţeană Panait Cerna Tulcea*, https://tulcealibrary.ro/portal/memorie-si-cunoastere-locala/ (06.05 2024)

[2] *Portalul Comunităţii*, https://www.bjvaslui.ro/portal/ (06.05 2024)

[3] G.T. [3] Freeman, *Library as Place: Rethinking Roles, Rethinking Space*, Council on Library and Information Resources (CLIR 129), 2005, p. 5

"The library, which is still a combination of the past (print collections) and the present (new information technologies), must be viewed with a new perspective and understanding if it is to be it to realize its potential to add value to the advancement of the academic mission of the institution and to move with it in the future" - Geoffrey T. Freeman, „Library as Place"
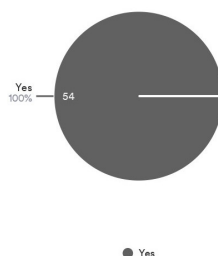
Figure 4. Public libraries within the technological progress[1]

The equal representation of the two distinct areas (rural, urban), as shown in figure 5, illustrates a comprehensive perspective on how librarians perceive the link between practice, the cultural institution and societal security. Similarities and differences between the two environments can be identified, as well as particularities and personal perspectives on the assimilation of the concept of security in library services.
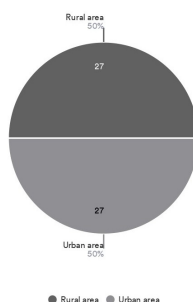
Figure 5. Representation of the areas (rural, urban)[2]

To the question "How would you define the notion of 'identity' of a community in the context of a library", subjects gave a variety of answers. These included:

How would you define the notion of "identity" of a community in the context of a library?
The library should provide a meeting place for reading, but at the same time, it should be a place where everyone can freely access information and spend their free time. The library plays an important role in the life of the community in economic, educational, cultural and social, as well.
In the context of a library, the notion of a community's "identity" refers to the distinctive features, values, interests and experiences that members of that community share and define as a group within the library. Community identity can be reflected in many aspects, including book collections, activities and programs offered, events organized, and target audiences. Here are some ways in which a community's identity can be expressed in a library: • Collection of books and resources: The library may have a selection of books and materials that are relevant to the specific interests and needs of that community. It may

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[1] *Idem*
[2] *Idem*

include books on local history, culture, traditions or other topics relevant to the community; • Programs and events: The Library may organize programs and events that reflect the interests and values of the community. These may be workshops, conferences, presentations, book clubs or other activities that promote and celebrate specific aspects of community identity; • Collaboration with local organizations: The Library may collaborate with local organizations and institutions to support and promote community identity. This may include partnerships with museums, schools, cultural groups or other organizations relevant to the community; • Community Participation and Involvement: The Library may encourage and frame the participation and involvement of community members in library activities. This may include soliciting suggestions and feedback, organizing working groups or advisory councils made up of community members to ensure that the library meets their needs and preferences; • Physical space and design: The design of the library space can be designed to reflect and represent the identity of the community. It may include design elements that fit the culture, history, or themes relevant to the community. It is important that the library is open and receptive to the diverse needs of the community, a place that encourages inclusiveness and values the diverse cultural, ethnic, linguistic and social identities of its members. By promoting community identity, the library becomes a vital space where people can connect, learn and share experiences, thereby contributing to the development and strengthening of the community itself.
Libraries, along with museums and archives, are the places that keep some of the most valuable documents from both a cultural and historical point of view. The main challenge of these institutions is to preserve the information as best as possible for future generations, but also to find practical methods to make it accessible to the public. In a broad sense, identity represents the feeling of belonging to a social group with which the individual shares a series of feelings. The feeling of belonging can be manifested about family, country, people, ethnicity, ideology, professional group, etc. When we talk about cultural identity, we especially think about language, culture, cultural heritage, traditions and religion, libraries being among the most important institutions, along with schools, that contribute to the heritage unaltered preservation, especially in rural areas.

**Table 1. Defining the notion of "identity" of a community in the context of a library
(answers of respondents to the survey)[1]**

Considering the origin of the subjects, in both contexts the library space is one that allows access to universal knowledge, but also to local history and memory. Community identity is recognized through the space of connecting individuals, building a sense of belonging, which leads, in the future, to the preservation and transmission of knowledge about what we were.

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[1] Based on the author`s research

How do you think digital platforms have influenced cultural production and consumption?

Increasing the diversity and accessibility of cultural content
58%

33

7
I'm not sure
12%

10
7

Both increased diversity and a consolidation of power
18%
Consolidated power and limited diversity in cultural production
12%

● Increasing the diversity and accessibility of cultural content ● Both increased diversity and a consolidation of power ● Consolidated power and limited diversity in cultural production
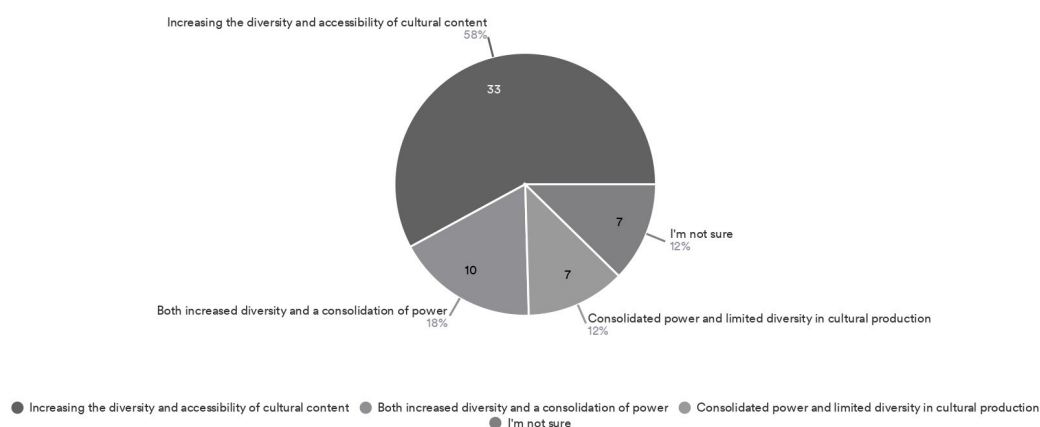● I'm not sure

Figure 6. Digital Platforms and Cultural Production and Consumption[1]

More than half of the subjects identify the impact of digital platforms on culture as positive, which means varied cultural content, while users can enjoy a diversity of cultural options, depending on their areas of interest and preferences. The second option points out the cultural diversity the user faces, but the power and influence of some individuals or groups can alter the character of these elements through monopolization. However, platforms can play an important role in limiting access to and production of cultural products.

Figure 7 illustrates the perspective of the 54 librarian subjects on how libraries contribute to the overall societal security of the community. Libraries determine the societal security of communities through all the variants mentioned. It is about the complex role that a library plays in ensuring the element of identity and sense of belonging in the community it serves. The responses highlight the journey of public libraries from a traditional institution of storing books to a point of reference in promoting the cultural values of the community.

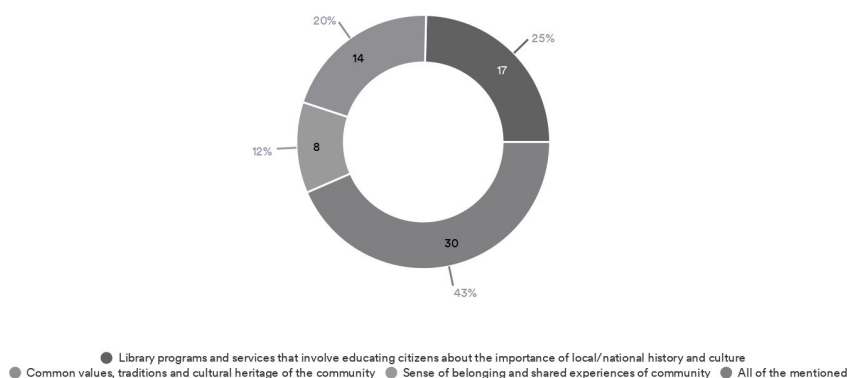How do libraries contribute to the societal security of the community?

20%
25%

14
17

12%
8

30

43%

● Library programs and services that involve educating citizens about the importance of local/national history and culture
● Common values, traditions and cultural heritage of the community ● Sense of belonging and shared experiences of community ● All of the mentioned

Figure 7. Libraries and Societal Security

According to figure 8., it is understood that public libraries' commitment to cultural heritage is fulfilled in several ways. For sure libraries provide a place for interaction and cultural diversity, through events, preservation of collections and archives, and collaboration with experts in the field. All these actions strengthen the link between library, culture and community. On the other hand, access to local, governmental or European funds necessary for

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[1] *Idem*

the implementation of cultural projects is not high, which can be explained by insufficient information about the process of obtaining funds and the benefits and impact of such action, either limited resource, strict eligibility criteria and fierce competition for funds.

How do libraries actively preoccupy with the cultural heritage and history of the community to promote a sense of belonging and safety among community members?
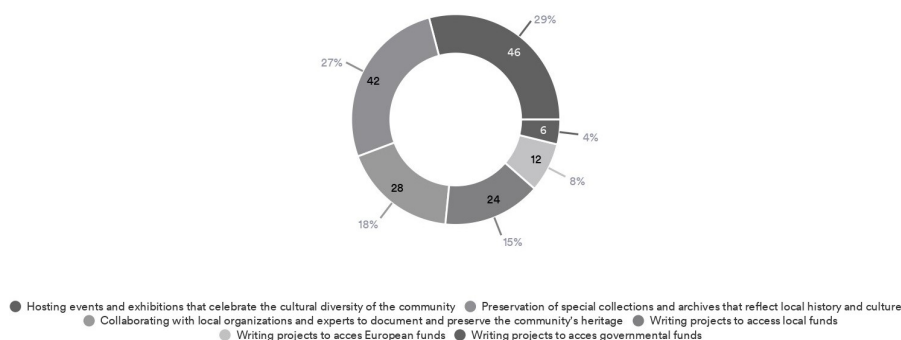

● Hosting events and exhibitions that celebrate the cultural diversity of the community   ● Preservation of special collections and archives that reflect local history and culture
● Collaborating with local organizations and experts to document and preserve the community's heritage   ● Writing projects to access local funds
● Writing projects to acces European funds   ● Writing projects to acces governmental funds

Figure 8. Libraries, belonging and safety[1]

The next question looked for specific initiatives or strategies that have been particularly successful in strengthening the link between the public library and community identity. Some of the answers can be consulted in Table 2.

Have you noticed initiatives or strategies that have been particularly successful in strengthening the link between your library and community identity? What would these be?
"Preserving old family photographs in the library collections as a local memory", project about promotion and support of ethnographic and folklore values (including Hungarian), the project on the Jewish community of Turda, the project on audio books for visually impaired citizens, activities with members of Roma communities, with special education students from the Poiana Special School and the SAMUS Special School, the production of digital stories, documentary films and photographic documents, very popular in kindergartens and schools.
"The dowry of the maidens" - a project to preserve local identity through service-learning techniques, a project through which young women from the village of Pietrari, Valcea county, discovered - from books, from their grandmothers' folk shirts, from the museums they visited, the mysteries contained in the stitches and needle pricks, mysteries that were beautifully crafted on the traditional blouses kept in the coffers. The patterns we discovered were collected, digitally processed and gathered in the first collection of folk motifs produced and preserved both in the classic paper format and online, thus preserving our sources over time, so that they do not somehow get lost in the way fickle times.
The establishment, within the library, of a small museum of the village, which reconstructs (with the help of original pieces), the life of the ancestors, their occupations, crafts, traditions and customs.

Table 2. Link between the public library and community identity
(answers of respondents to the survey)[2]

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[1] Idem
[2] Based on the author`s research

In addition to the responses highlighted in Table 2, 30 librarians generally mentioned activities involving learning and promotion of cultural heritage, through workshops, sewing, collection of local stories, folk costumes and traditions. 14 of them either did not notice or are not aware of initiatives and strategies, or did not provide an answer that would answer the given question. In some areas, the library has become a catalyst for the relationship between the individual and the cultural identity of the community. As for librarians who are not aware of initiatives and strategies to promote societal security, the need for an informative, best-practice intervention by the network of librarians at national level can be identified.

To the question "how did you bring the notion of "cultural identity" closer to the library users, respectively to the community?", the subjects offered a series of specific answers, applied to their community level, as can be seen in the Table 3.

How did you bring the notion of "cultural identity" closer to the library users, respectively to the community?
Through cultural activities (traditions - sewing, weaving, painting icons on glass), courses, performances (Romanian, Hungarian, Roma folklore), literature contests (including students of special schools), festivals, establishment of the collection "Turda Fund", with books written with and about Turda and Turda inhabitants (from the area of the former Turda-Arieş county), promotion of old photographs, illustrating the history, traditions of the place, contests and exhibitions (of photographs, tourist promotion of the area) etc.
Through projects aimed to preserve local identity, financed by European funding, thematic exhibitions of books, folk objects, photographs, workshops of folk sewing, participation in the "Traditional Clothing Hora", a traditional local event, participation in cultural commemorative events, presentations of local specificities, writing and editing volumes of local monographs.

Table 3. The notion of "cultural identity" (answers of respondents to the survey)[1]

Cultural identity has been brought into library services through initiatives and projects aimed at preserving it. By bringing together and involving all age groups in activities concerning knowledge of cultural heritage, public libraries have become increasingly aware of their role in integrating societal security as a reference point for community development. The stimulation of libraries as cultural centers is achieved through a range of cultural activities. All of these indicate the interest of librarians in connecting local groups with the concept of cultural identity.

As for the librarian's vision regarding the future role of libraries in promoting and preserving the identity of communities, in an increasingly interconnected world, Table 4. exemplifies a series of demonstrative responses.

How do you envision the future role of libraries in promoting and preserving the identity of communities in an increasingly digital and interconnected world?
The future means digitization. Consequently, the organization of a set of events related to the community in the online environment, the preservation of photographs, manuscripts in special collections and their value, making them known to the public, the promotion of local values (writers, artists, athletes etc.)
Improving and preserving the identity of the community in and through the library can be achieved through face-to-face activities, indoor and outdoor, with the help of new technologies, in order to strengthen the bases of information held by the library. Cultural, social and educational library activities play a very important role in the development of communities, due to legitimacy upon citizens and the types of services and programs the library offers, which often go far beyond what might be considered traditional library services. Through its activities, the library develops innovative practices and becomes a catalyst for the community.

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[1] Based on the author`s research

The key word remains "adaptation"... It's the term that has accompanied me throughout my career. By adapting and learning, library projects can have online components, digitize local heritage collections, and bring to light gems that might not otherwise be known to the public. Also, much easier collaboration with other libraries, associations, foundations (online, but also here at home, when possible), writing projects with funding dedicated to education and development of local communities, will ensure the future of libraries in Romania.

Table 4. Future role of libraries in promoting and preserving identity
(answers of respondents to the survey)[1]

By using tools like social networks, blogs, websites, apps, public libraries can get closer to the users. Bringing traditional collections and resources into a digital form will facilitate the sharing of cultural identity not only locally, but to a wider audience. The role of public libraries in the long term is adjusted to the level of innovation these institutions demonstrate to remain flexible and responsive to the users' needs, to arouse their interest, but there is still reluctance to digital libraries.

When asked about their library's reflection of community diversity, responses varied: 43% said it's moderately good, indicating ongoing efforts but room to improve. 37% found it quite good, meeting cultural goals. 15% said very good, showing effective cultural programs. However, 4% said very poor and 2% said it was poor, possibly due to resource gaps or a need for more initiatives
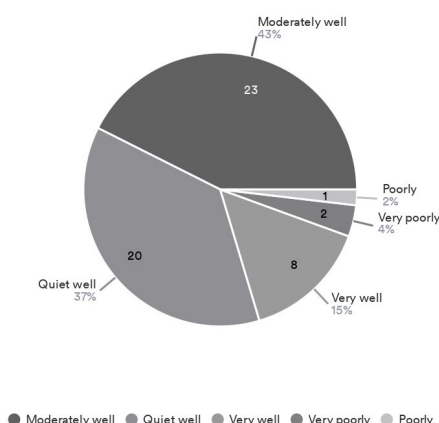

Figure 9. Library's reflection of community diversity[2]

According to Figure 10 we can identify the effectiveness of libraries as a meeting space that promotes social interaction. For more than half of the librarians, libraries are those meeting spaces, highlighting the function of a space of social connection, through the success of implementation of library services. The less positive answers suggest a lack of success in providing communities with a space for dialogue and human connection.

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[1] *Idem*
[2] Freeman, G.T. *Library as Place: Rethinking Roles, Rethinking Space*, Council on Library and Information Resources (CLIR 129), 2005, p. 5

How effectively does your library serve as a meeting space that promotes social interaction and community involvement?
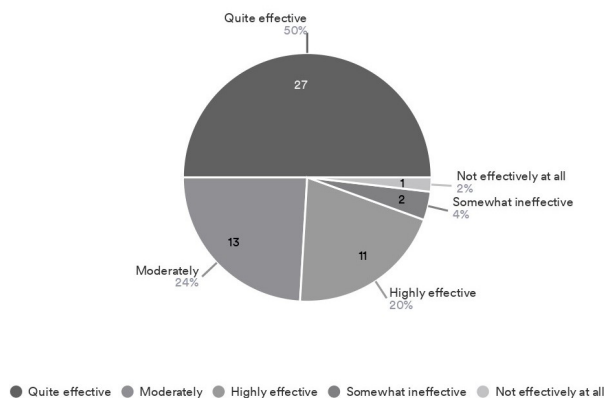

Figure 10. Effectiveness of libraries as a meeting space[1]

Librarians were asked how they rate the library's cooperation with local schools, educational institutions and youth organizations to support learning and cultural identity development among the younger generation. Effective cooperation means continuity, quality results over time and future functional adults of society, with a sense of belonging and with a moral, appreciative duty to local memory and history. But certain limitations can be inferred in the long-term completion of educational and cultural initiatives and programs. These gaps in cooperation between institutions mean, in the medium and long term, a series of vulnerabilities for the individual, but also for society.

How does your library collaborate with local schools, educational institutions and youth organizations to support learning, education and community identity development among younger generations?
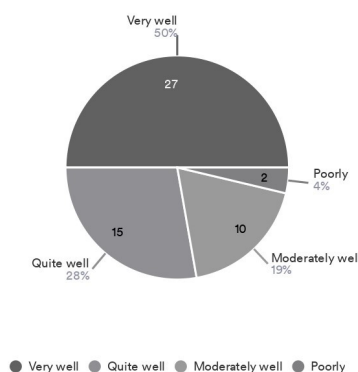

Figure 11. Library's cooperation with local institutions[2]

In the end, subjects were asked about their views on the importance of the role of libraries in providing access to information and supporting lifelong learning for users of all ages.

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[1] *Idem*
[2] *Idem*

In your opinion, how important is the role of libraries in providing access to information and supporting lifelong learning for users of all ages?
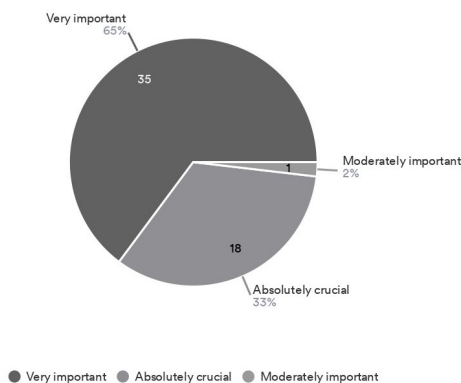
Figure 12. The role of libraries in providing access to information[1]

We can conclude that 98% of the subjects attach substantial importance to shaping the public libraries as mechanisms that address all age groups which aim a lasting link between library resources, the user and knowledge. Even if 2% of the subjects do not consider the role of the library important in providing lifelong learning, the value of public libraries to the community is substantial.

Conclusions and Recommendations

Culture is one of the variables individuals and society exploit to ensure affirmation. Each individual attaches particular importance to a set of characteristics with which it identifies, and manifests then manifest a specific cultural identity. Starting from this set of distinct characteristics, groups begin to either relate or compete. It means growth, community development, while competition leads to the identification of a series of risks and threats to the survival of the individuals and the elements that define them. Thus, the concept of security becomes an umbrella to how the individual lives, communicates, develops himself and how it projects them to society. Societal security's cultural patterns emphasize a branch of security that focuses on the concept of individuals' identity and the communities they belong to. Libraries are essential factors in securing and perpetuating identity factors in communities, as they are usually mirrors of their realities. The traditional mission of public libraries has been to provide opportunities for all to know and interact with the world ideas, and over time it has become a catalyst for learning about the history of the individual: where they come from and where they are going to. Access to information, educating groups through books and direct interaction have led, over time, to the idea that libraries are spaces of dialogue, safe spaces of expression that give democracy a voice, apply it and offer equal opportunities to all who cross the threshold of the institution, as far as possible. The issue is the small number of libraries globally. Other impediments may arise from geographical space, material resources and human resources, which make it difficult to bring knowledge and culture to the beneficiaries. In Romania, public libraries that are still active in the service of the community aim to reconnect with the community and the groups that make it up, becoming factors of societal security through cultural initiatives carried out within the library. Librarians have put new life into the old one - they have integrated technology into traditional library activities and digitally transferred elements of cultural identity in a playful way to people of all ages.

Libraries can truly assume their fundamental role in preserving the cultural identity of the communities they serve, because the library's services are now adapted to acknowledge and promote values and local heritage. They adapt to the group needs they interact with and look for innovative ways to make libraries perceived as safe spaces for meeting and growing future citizens. In this way, most librarians educate themselves first, enhance the skills needed by the contemporary and set in motion initiatives to promote the societal security, resilience, and confidence

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[1] *Idem*

that is at the heart of the foundation of personal progress. Librarians facilitate dialogue with other cultural institutions, organizations and local authorities to create new partnerships and collaboration. Overall, the opening to the digital space has brought new lines of affirmation and funding for libraries, such as the Erasmus+ and European Solidarity Fund programs. But there is reluctance and barriers to a deeper integration of modern technology with the traditional library's mission, which over time means gaps between the social capital of the communities concerned. Public libraries are continuously transforming, with many seeking to respond to the needs of users in ways that are as authentic as possible, collaborations and opportunities that rekindle the interest of citizens of all ages to find themselves, learn about their past and grow. Public authorities should pay even greater attention to these institutions, precisely because libraries are the past and the future at the same time. And, more recently, these are social hubs that bring communities together.

Based on the aforementioned considerations, librarians can support strengthening the link with the cultural heritage of the community through developing a heritage collection at the library, in cases where local heritage items such as old photographs, documents, local newspapers, audio and video recordings, folk costumes, icons, postcards, coins or even stamps cannot be properly preserved and there is a risk of degradation or destruction (especially in rural communities, where based on the loss of older generations, local heritage items are neglected). Librarians have the knowledge and skills to manage heritage objects, are respected in the community, and can be entrusted with such objects. By collecting these materials, the library becomes a custodian of local memory, giving back to the community what has been given to it and being able to enhance this local treasure. Library collections can be presented as online museum exhibitions, which can increase their visibility and increase access to heritage items. Then, an important aspect is related to connecting the community's generations through "modern sittings", where seniors are invited to share stories, traditions and personal experiences.

Nowadays, these stories can be saved in written or electronic form, which helps individuals learn about local history and the particularities of the area, experienced in an original way by each subject. In ethnically diverse communities, libraries can reinforce the need for an inclusive space for every citizen, in a setting that presents the diversity of the local community in a broad geographic and historical framework. Another important aspect to follow is that related to collaborations with other NGOs and institutions as well as attracting funding. More precisely, it is important to pursue opportunities in order to attract funds, development of projects and collaborations with non-governmental organizations or other national and international cultural institutions or entities, that would allow for recurrent education of librarians on how to draw community attention to the subject and to develop plans and strategies that can be implemented at community level. And last but not least, it would be useful to consider expanding the network of libraries with the national chain of museums and to elaborate learning techniques that would enable the librarian to preserve local heritage and also to provide the funding and tools for self-preservation.

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