EUROLIS SEMINAR 2026



Innovative and Less Conventional Libraries

In a world of constant change and emerging challenges, how can libraries adapt to the evolving needs of their communities?

From integrating AI into library systems and building multidisciplinary teams to addressing climate change and adapting collections to reflect shifting borders, changing national identities and languages – or even countries that no longer exist – libraries are rethinking their roles and exploring new ways to serve their communities.

This year's Eurolis Seminar will explore how libraries across Europe are responding to these challenges, showcasing unconventional approaches, innovative projects and forward-thinking practices that are reshaping the future of libraries.

This year's Seminar is an in-person event at **Europe House** in London (32 Smith Square, London, SW1P 3EU) on **Friday 20th of November 2026**, from 10.00 am to 4.30 pm. This event will be conducted in English.

Attendance is free and booking is required. To reserve your spot, click on the link ahead:

HERE

This project is co-organised by the European Parliament Liaison Office in the United Kingdom and EUROLIS, an association of librarians and information professionals from Austria, Greece, Italy, France, Poland, Portugal, Spain and the UK from the European Cultural Institutes based in London. Founded in 2002, Eurolis believes that libraries and information services are vital for building an educated and open society, based on the idea of a free Europe that flourishes through its diversity and tolerance of other cultures. This collaborative project is created by trust and cooperation between its members, emphasising that the whole is greater than the sum of its individual parts.


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PROGRAMME AND SPEAKERS

This year's Seminar is an in-person event at Europe House in London (32 Smith Square, London, SW1P 3EU) on Friday 20th of November 2026, from 10.00 am to 4.30 pm. This event will be conducted in English.

This year's topic is "Innovative and Less Conventional Libraries "

09.30 Arrival and check-in

10.00 Welcome by Dr Fabia Jones, First Counsellor at the European Parliament Liaison Office in the United Kingdom and by Anabel Lopez, representing EUROLIS.

10.10 Introduction of Chairperson, Praveen Manghani, Senior Strategic Leader and Library and Information Professional



Praveen is a senior strategic leader and library and information professional with over 30 years public library and local government management experience.

He has an extensive knowledge of the current developments, trends and issues in libraries, heritage, archives and wider culture & council services. Praveen has been managing Library & Heritage services in Southwark Council since 2016, with previous roles including Head of Libraries in Lambeth Council, Strategic Libraries Manager in Sutton Council and Reading Development roles in Meron and Richmond.

In addition to library work, Praveen also runs a community arts organisation specialising in poetry, music and cabaret performance.

10.15 UK - Emily Jewell (Strategic Lead for Libraries and Heritage), and Maria Reguera (Development Librarian, Vision Redbridge Culture & Leisure), London Libraries AI Group
Followed by Q & A



Transforming Library Services with AI: Insights from Across London Public Libraries and Redbridge's Marley the Mammoth

As AI continues to shape how people access information and services, public libraries have an important role to play in exploring its potential, improving digital inclusion and supporting communities to engage confidently with emerging technologies.

As members of the London Libraries Public Libraries Network AI Group, the presenters will highlight AI-related initiatives taking place across the London public libraries sector. This includes their work with Marley, an AI agent in Redbridge designed to encourage non-readers and lapsed readers to develop better reading habits, while helping to alleviate some of the pressures experienced by front-line staff. They will also discuss a European-funded Meet and Code project, which offered hands-on AI activities for young people.

Emily Jewell joined Lewisham Council in September as Strategic Lead for Libraries and Heritage. Previously, she was Head of Culture and Libraries at Vision Redbridge Culture and Leisure and was seconded to Arts Council England's (ACE). At Arts Council England, she worked with Heads of Library Services across London as part of the National Library Team and contributed to several national task forces. Emily is currently studying for a Master's in Senior Leadership in Arts and Culture and serves as Vice Chair of London Libraries Connected.

Maria Reguera is Development Librarian: Digital Services and Innovation at Vision Redbridge Culture & Leisure, where she leads Library Labs and its makerspaces, Lab Central and Lab FX. She develops hands-on programmes exploring coding, robotics, virtual reality, 3D design and artificial intelligence. Maria is particularly interested in how public libraries can make emerging technologies accessible and understandable, giving communities opportunities not only to use new tools, but also to explore how they work and understand their possibilities and limitations.

Organised and supported by the International Library and Information Group of CILIP.

10.45 FRANCE - Guillaume Gast, Director at the Frida-Kahlo Library
Followed by Q & A



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Why Build a Library Today? Rethinking the Public Library for a changing World and a changing profession

Almost everyone now has access to the Internet, digital formats are steadily replacing physical media across the cultural industries, individualism is reshaping society and climate change is affecting attendance at public buildings. So why build a library today? And yet, the Eurometropolis of Strasbourg chose to do exactly that by creating the Frida-Kahlo Library in Schiltigheim. Drawing on the experience of this new library, which opened in 2024, Chief Curator Guillaume Gast will examine the key decisions that shaped the project: adapting services to users' evolving needs, redesigning the organisation to reflect changes in the library profession and creating a building capable of meeting the challenges of global warming.

After completing a degree in Contemporary History, Guillaume Gast managed the digital projects of the Archives (*Département du Bas-Rhin*) from 2003 to 2007. He then joined the André-Malraux Library in Strasbourg, where he headed the Arts and Comics Department as well as the Illustration Centre from 2008 to 2016. Following an 18-month training program at the National Institute for Territorial Studies (INET), he qualified as a Curator in 2018. He subsequently led the development and construction project for the Frida-Kahlo Library, which he has directed since its opening in 2024. Strongly committed to international cooperation, he is a member of the International Committee of the French Library Association (ABF) and represents France on the Executive Committee of EBLIDA (European Bureau of Library, Information and Documentation Associations).

Organised and supported by the Institut français du Royaume-Uni.

11.15 Interval for tea & coffee

11.45 ITALY - Paolo Martinelli and Alessandra Di Tella, *Archilabò Soc. Coop. Soc.*
Followed by Q & A




Books, Bits and Belonging: Reimagining Literacy in the Contemporary Library

For several years, *Archilabò* has been designing and developing innovative school and public libraries, rethinking them as inclusive spaces for learning, participation and creativity while keeping books and reading at their core. Our talk will present *Archilabò*'s approach through the example of Liquid Lab, a hybrid environment that brings together a library, a fab lab and a video game archive within a single flexible space. By combining STEM and the humanities through hands-on, cross-disciplinary activities, Liquid Lab enables people of different ages to explore digital culture while preserving the central role of books as tools for knowledge, imagination and discovery. This experience illustrates how *Archilabò* works with schools and local communities to create libraries that connect reading, technology, culture and community engagement.

Paolo Martinelli is President of *Archilabò* and teaches Semiotics at the University of Bologna and at NABA in Rome. He is a consultant to the Department of Public Administration at the Presidency of the Council of Ministers.

Alessandra Di Tella is a Project Manager at *Archilabò*, where she coordinates funded education and training projects. She holds a PhD in Literary and Philological Studies from the University of Bologna, with a research focus on digital libraries and new media.

Organised and supported by the Italian Cultural Institute in London.

12.15 Lunch

13.15 SPAIN - Luis Martínez-Uribe, Director of the Library and Research Support Centre at the Fundación Juan March in Madrid
Followed by Q & A



AI in the Library: Practical Lessons from the Fundación Juan March

Artificial intelligence is no longer a future prospect for libraries — it is already reshaping how we work. At the Fundación Juan March, one of Spain's private cultural foundations, we have been integrating AI tools into our daily library processes. This talk presents a frank, ground-level account of that journey: what we set out to solve, the tools we chose, the unexpected challenges, and the concrete results. Rather than theoretical frameworks, we offer hands-on examples drawn from real workflows and honest reflections on what AI can and cannot yet do for a cultural institution.

Luis Martínez-Uribe is Director of the Library and Research Support Centre at the Fundación Juan March in Madrid, where he also leads the DataLab, a unit dedicated to digital curation and data analytics applied to library and archival collections. A mathematician by training, with a Master's in Information Systems (LSE) and a PhD in Sociology (University of Salamanca), he has worked for over two decades at the intersection of libraries and data science, including at the LSE, the University of Oxford and the Australian National Data Service. He sits on the IFLA Information Technology Section Standing Committee.

Organised and supported by the Instituto Cervantes Londres.

13.45 AUSTRIA - Johanna Baumgartner, Director of the Dornbirn Public Library in Austria
Followed by Q & A


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Built on Openness: How Architecture, Team and Programming Drive Innovation in a Small Library

Six years ago, Dornbirn Public Library moved into a new building designed as a parabola – a deliberate reference to Lessing's Ring Parable, translating openness and equal communication into physical space. This spirit is embodied by a team with diverse professional backgrounds, often from outside the library sector and a dynamic programme blending innovative literacy promotion with various formats for democratic dialogue and multilingual events. It is this synergy between architecture, people and programming – rather than the collection alone – that defines the library's unconventional nature, creating a distinctive atmosphere of genuine encounter: a "third place" where people feel safe to experiment, engage and simply belong.

Johanna Baumgartner is the director of the Dornbirn Public Library in Austria. With a background in the cultural sector, she brings a fresh perspective to the field. She is deeply committed to low-threshold access and equity, seeing libraries as dynamic spaces for participation, exchange, and belonging.

Organised and supported by the Austrian Cultural Forum London.

14.15 Interval for tea & coffee

14.45 PORTUGAL - Filipa Barros, Coordinator at the Belém Public Library, Lisbon Public Libraries Network
Followed by Q & A



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The Time Bank at Belém Public Library: How to Connect Strangers and Make Communities Stronger

The Time Bank at Belém Public Library was founded one year ago. The library has always been open to its community and to the projects and organisations around it. The Time Bank grew out of this closeness: a member of the community challenged the library team to set up a Time Bank where people exchange their time rather than money. Slowly but surely, library users, local residents and other organisations began joining the Time Bank. During its first year, all kinds of time were exchanged: language sessions, piano and sewing sessions, book readings, historical walks, help with fixing things at home and even haircuts. Strangers became neighbours. The Time Bank is a safe, beautiful and lively place where people can connect, give their time, ask for time, or sometimes simply have a chat and a cup of coffee.

Filipa Barros works at Belém Public Library in Lisbon, Portugal, alongside an amazing and generous group of people. She studied documentary filmmaking and library science and has developed educational projects in rural northern Portugal, at the Lisbon Opera House and at the Museum of the National Library of Spain. When she began working in public libraries, she started exploring the potential of going out into the streets, getting to know and working with the neighbours and communities around the library. In both her everyday life and her work, she seeks to foster respectful connections inside and outside the library. Intersectional feminist knowledge, ethics and action inspire both her practice and her life.

Organised and supported by the Camões, Instituto da Cooperação e da Língua, Portugal.

15.15 POLAND - Barbara Baj Wójtowicz, East, Central and South-East European Librarian at the Bodleian Libraries, University of Oxford
Followed by Q & A



Libraries Without Borders? Collecting a Europe That Refuses to Stay Still
East, Central and South-East European Collections at the Taylor Institution Library

What happens to a library collection when countries change their borders, names and languages – or disappear altogether? The Taylor Institution Library preserves the histories of regions repeatedly reshaped by collapsing empires, shifting borders, migration, exile and changing identities. Through selected books from the Bodleian's collections, this talk explores the challenges of collecting a Europe that refuses to remain geographically, linguistically or culturally stable.

It considers how categories such as "Polish", "Ukrainian", "Yugoslav" or "Central European" change over time and asks how periods of geopolitical turbulence reshape not only collecting priorities but the library's responsibility for preservation and access. In an age of war, displacement and threats to cultural heritage, preservation increasingly extends beyond the physical conservation of books. Digitisation, digital preservation and distributed access can become strategic tools for safeguarding vulnerable cultural heritage and ensuring its survival and accessibility beyond national borders.

Barbara Baj Wójtowicz is the East, Central and South-East European Librarian at the Bodleian Libraries, University of Oxford. She is responsible for the development and management of collections across a broad range of disciplines, including history, languages, literatures and the social sciences. Her work focuses on developing and preserving collections that reflect the complex cultural, linguistic and historical landscapes of East, Central and South-East Europe. Her research interests include agroforestry, migration and the relationship between cultural heritage, collections and changing geopolitical contexts.

Organised and supported by the Polish Cultural Institute in London.

15.45 Plenary Session with all speakers led by the Chairperson
Followed by Q & A

16.15 Summary, thanks and closing


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