



**democratic
society**

Europe Challenge Pilot Edition 2021 - 2022

**democratic
society**

demsoc.org

Acknowledgements

Aarhus Public Library - Aarhus, Denmark

De Krook - Ghent, Belgium

OBA-Amsterdam - Amsterdam, The Netherlands

Kranj City Library - Kranj, Slovenia

Valmiera Library - Valmiera, Latvia

Sant Boi de Llobregat - Barcelona, Spain

Zentral-und Landesbibliothek Berlin - Berlin, Germany

Thank you to the libraries who not only took part, but made each step so interesting, challenging and above all enjoyable. Each set out and completed the journey so far, which is a huge achievement given the pandemic context we were working in together. Thank you for bringing your individual flare, commitment, and culture with you, as part of the fun.

Also, huge amounts of gratitude to everyone at European Cultural Foundation and to Olga Alexeeva and Nicola Mullenger in particular, for bringing Demsoc to the party.

Photo Credit: Kranj City Library – Living Library event

The Democratic Society Ltd., is a non-profit company limited by guarantee, registered in England with number 5785839.
Registered office 28 Fourth Avenue, Hove.

UK postal address: The Old Casino, 28 Fourth Avenue, Hove, East Sussex, BN3 2JP



Europe Challenge Year 1 Report

"Library is a place where people can build the future together"¹

One year on from inception in early 2021, we are immersed in the prototyping phase of the Europe Challenge, on range of diverse topics with widely differing communities.

Seven libraries in seven cities are making progress in their dialogue with communities, keeping momentum as they work to complete their Europe Challenge journeys.

This report outlines what has happened in that time, how key objectives have been met and outputs so far.

What we did

Key Objectives

1. To support the participating libraries - depending on their needs - in defining a local challenge that is pertinent to their specific context and which is relevant for their local communities but will also be relevant in the overall framework of the Europe Challenge 2021

Our journey started with an online kick-off meeting to bring all seven libraries together. This was an opportunity to share the timeline, ambition, and core principles within the Europe

¹ De Krook Library, Ghent

Challenge. Learning together, using an iterative approach were key messages in this session, emphasising that we wanted libraries to take an active role in defining what the Europe Challenge is, and how it can develop.

Design thinking for Libraries² was our starting point, using a design thinking methodology that is specific to the needs and culture of this sector.

However, this is a toolkit that asks library staff to identify a challenge problem or something they want to change in their libraries – it doesn't address our core mindset of starting with citizens and communities first. This was integral to our design, and one of the main shifts of thinking that libraries struggled with throughout their journey.

As a result, several tools and templates were designed to support the overall framework of the programme. We included creative tools and methods on Miro and Jamboard to unlock and share ideas, alongside more standard templates for planning outputs and outcomes.

Each of the seven libraries sourced communities and arrived at distinct challenges, based on;

- Access to knowledge & digital transition
- Active citizenship
- Public health & technology
- Inclusion & equal rights
- Environmental sustainability of urban areas
- Women & technology
- Democratisation of our public space

While each library worked at a different pace, outputs were generated and saved in a shared drive.

"We [community] try to focus on rethinking the way people interact with health, and how that can be done (even) better in the future. This challenge is not necessarily about physical public space, but about the space that a citizen occupies in the medical system of the city."

Citizen - De Krook, Ghent Library

This work coalesced into a microsite³, as a platform to capture, store and share content in a more visually and dynamic format.

The microsite brought the programme to life and showed both progress and differences in how the libraries were tackling the overall Europe Challenge. It creates a framework that is

²<http://designthinkingforlibraries.com>

³<https://sites.google.com/demsoc.org/europe-challenge-draft/home>

easy to build and change, in a way that is relevant for people to understand and access the programme.

2. To support the participating libraries - depending on their needs - in the design and implementation of a series of actions/events/activities that address their identified local challenges, inspire the libraries' communities, and mobilize citizens in shaping European public space

Taking inspiration from Design thinking for Libraries⁴, we shaped an initial session taking individual library teams through the process of co-design training. Here, we included bespoke design thinking tools, methods, and templates. For example, a logic model helped libraries define and articulate their context and explore which communities they might aim to reach.

Given the impact of the pandemic, delivery of events online was necessary for many libraries. We included training and a range of tools for online participation to support this element.

Linking thinking and learning back into the overall Europe Challenge has been a key feature of each template, so libraries were focused on European values and how their results would inform a broader European audience.

Support continued in Learning Exchanges and case clinic meetings through the year to make sure libraries had what they needed for their delivery phase and track progress. Coaching was used to unlock thinking and motivate individuals to try new approaches.

Some degree of provocation was needed for most of the libraries, in how to shift their mindset away from traditional service delivery to the empowerment of communities. Putting citizens in the driving seat was a theme we constantly revisited. How well *citizens have been mobilised in shaping European public space* will be a key criterion in how we measure success at the end of the pilot phase when we ask libraries to feedback on impact.

3. Organise and design specific (online and offline) meetings with the participants/libraries

A timetable of regular project management check-ins, seven Learning Exchanges and seven one-to-one co-design sessions and seven one-to-one coaching sessions were delivered. We tested bringing small groups of libraries together to discuss similar themes or difficulties they

were experiencing. As the prototyping phase started, we added weekly 'case clinic' slots for libraires to drop in, share issues, successes, or even just hang out to hear what others were up to.

Each of these meeting formats have developed in style and purpose, as we've tested what works best for an eclectic group of cultures. The most significant shift has been from leading and guiding to encouraging libraries to take ownership of their learning and get more involved in shaping and leading the agenda. While they haven't been fully empowered to co-design the Europe Challenge, each library has had input in shaping its direction and how it can develop.

4. To share and evaluate the learnings from the Europe Challenge 2021

Evaluation has been ongoing, through the Learning Exchanges using tools including Jamboard and templates to populate fields in the microsite. This feedback was used iteratively to develop our practice as the pilot year unfolded. For instance, libraries raised the need for additional support. They requested Learning Exchanges every month to come together and collectively learn together in more depth and breakfast meetings to share progress. They were also very clear on when they didn't need support – during the summer vacation, they were upfront that very little progress would be made.

Reflective learning from one-to-one sessions is captured in airtable, with interesting themes and patterns emerging (see learning section).

Most of the libraries experienced varying amounts of challenge in unlearning thinking attached to their library service provider role. This was evident in the struggle that almost of the libraries demonstrated in passing leadership and power to communities. Many were not comfortable 'holding the question' as they are conditioned or used to providing answers. Stepping back and creating conditions for communities to define challenges, problems, issues and arrive at solutions which could be tested, was a huge challenge and learning curve for libraries.

Linked to this, several libraries came up with tools before connecting with communities to define the topic. This meant assumptions were built into the approach and methodology. Consequently, significant time was redirected to support libraries in addressing and redesigning their processes.

Identifying a 'community' was problematic, both in how communities are identified, and with pressures of reaching people during lockdown. This also impeded progress, with staffing changes which in turn affected project continuity.

"Our overall challenge is how we can use design thinking methods to engage with groups of people who do not use the libraries and together with them develop inclusive democratic library activities." (This included citizens who experience homelessness and have problems with drugs, alcohol, or mental health issues). **Dokk1/Aarhus Public Libraries**

What came out

Project outputs

February – April 2021: facilitation and support of the design of the general framework of the Europe Challenge 2021, the local challenges, and the local programme of activities (the design phase included both joint online collaborative sessions and individual sessions with libraries and ECF):

- Kick-off slide deck
- Miro board template
- Outputs/outcomes planning template
- Challenge Big Ideas Poster

9 May 2021: support of the launch of the Europe Challenge 2021
Chaired by Demsoc's Anthony Zacharzewski

May-December 2021: support, monitoring & evaluation, and feedback on the local programme activities, to feed into the final report and overall programme evaluation; participation in several meetings with the participating libraries:

- Check-in one-to-one meetings
- Evaluation through Learning Exchange Progress form
- Microsite development
- Coaching/group coaching
- Learning Exchange sessions
- Case clinics
- Programme development and future design work

What we learned

Key insights so far

Themes that emerged through one-to-one meetings were captured and banded in airtable.

1. Europe Challenge isn't a one size fits all programme

Adaptable methods were highlighted as the most important element by libraries, for supporting them through the Challenge journey. The programme design was adapted constantly to meet a different pace, level of experience and varying mindsets of libraries, particularly as they in turn were working to engage with a range of communities. Here, it was recognised by ECF that sensitive facilitation was needed, to adapt to each culture, ways of thinking, need and situation.

Another factor that supported delivery of the Challenge was the ability of a library to embed the programme into their core library business. An example given was hardwiring of Europe Challenge into local weekly meetings, helping to keep it 'alive' for delivery teams. Also, embedding the Challenge into library programming and thinking.

2. The relationship between local and European is central to the journey

Maintaining **European relevance** was cited as important by three of the libraries, in relation to drawing out learning from a European angle throughout the programme. This links with the European values we tracked at an early stage, which will be revisited at the programmes' ending. Libraries stated an awareness of scalability, with potential for other libraries to learn from and implement Challenge models.

3. The Europe Challenge brings libraries closer to communities

Increase in participation was valued as a primary output. Frequently, libraries showed innovation in their delivery methods to reach and engage with communities, including events hosted outside the libraries or in local parks, plus specific workshops in-house or online. Building relationships was vital. A principle spotlighted by one library was making sure community voice is protected and not drowned or improperly influenced by the organisations involved.

"... [I was] Surprised to see that workshops with the community worked quite well - despite the assumed lack of experience and expertise in involving communities." **Kranj City Library**

4. Making sure people are in the driving seat isn't easy

Learning attached to **power transference** was significant for libraries. We constantly questioned how citizens were framing the challenge, how they were taking their ideas in their

chosen direction, how they owned their challenges, rather than being led by libraries. This insight connects to assumptions libraries held about communities, such as how to best to reach and engage with them. Their efforts didn't always work, for instance the length of time to reach groups through 'gatekeepers,' only to find closed doors. It also overlaps with the deep learning libraries have experienced on how to collaborate with communities, working together in developing an honest relationship with emphasis on empowerment.

Contributing factors to community empowerment are:

- Safe spaces for collaboration, that are well-planned, and function well
- Small steps which gather momentum

Libraries were encouraged to start small, keeping their approach loose with community groups who in turn are encouraged to make major decisions about their prototypes.

5. Clarity is key

Throughout the months of input and support, we found that libraries valued **Clarity on what the Europe Challenge is - and isn't**. As they took steps forward, some libraries got confused about their role and purpose. Factors contributing to this were changes in staffing, pandemic related issues, online fatigue, and day-to-day pressure of workload. The need to make Challenge progress visible was evident, as libraries engaged with citizens and events were held. Setting up an 'Evidence Lab' to host photos, press releases and evaluation meant we were able to transfer data onto the microsite. This action helped everyone see where individual libraries were at in their Challenge and added a complete element which helped us nudge people along.

Other areas of learning

Learning from failure can be as important as success, was critical learning for us all throughout the process. Therefore it was important to adapt the programme and support package as we went along. Many libraries adapted their methods or changed direction completely. This was influenced by change in conditions or circumstances. The luxury of being in pilot phase is that we were all able to test, learn and try again.

Values

European values identified by libraries in the early part of their Challenge work are summaries as:

- Active Civil Society
- Citizen Engagement
- Democracy
- Diversity

- Emancipation through Knowledge Sharing
- Embedding inclusive citizen engagement in systems and processes
- Equality
- Fairness
- Freedom
- Gender Equality
- Human Dignity
- Internationalism
- Local Identity
- Open and Honest Working
- Openness
- Partnership and Collaborative Working
- Rule of Law
- Social Inclusion
- Solidarity



Of these, Citizen Engagement came out the most, particularly in relation to being actively involved in democratic processes.

"Public Space goes beyond specific local areas. Libraries can bring together communities from the new region and encourage people to share opinions and stories. Building relationships and conversations will help find solutions and define the needs of the community.

Conversations and improved participation will strengthen European values and democracy. Active citizens and local initiatives lay the foundation for a broader understanding of each person's significance in shaping the future for the nation and Europe." **Valmiera Library**

In summary

The Europe Challenge pilot year has enabled rich learning and diverse results in the journey of co-design. This is both between libraries and the communities they have enlisted, and between us as a project team with the libraries we have supported to complete the Challenge.

We have been inspired by how libraries have shifted their skills and mindsets, towards closer collaboration with communities. We have also been shown how libraries and their communities can use co-design to tackle pressing issues. They have redesigned how to encourage more women into technology, develop more relevant communication for health messaging, create safer, more dynamic environments for discreet communities to explore identity. There is more to come.

Our pilot year has demonstrated how libraries support citizens in rethinking democratic spaces and how communities are active in addressing European Challenge. Importantly, this year's learning gives us vital experience, upon which we will build and scale the full edition of Europe Challenge 2022 – 2023.

