

METHODS AND STORIES
FROM NINE CITIES

COMMON CRAFTS — COMMON LIBRARIES
Methods and stories from nine cities

This publication documents the regional program *Common Crafts – Common Libraries* of the Goethe-Institut in Europe.
The project was carried out in 2025 and 2026 by nine Goethe-Institutes and their local partners.
It is published on the occasion of the program's final conference in Athens, in November 2026.

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Wasteland
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Glitchcraft
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Library as Infrastructure
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COMMON CRAFTS— COMMON LIBRARIES

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Bettina Wenzel
Initiator of *Common Crafts – Common Libraries*
Goethe-Institut

BRINGING LIBRARIES AND CRAFT TOGETHER

For many people, libraries are primarily places of books. They are associated with collections of knowledge, shelves filled with media, and spaces where information is organized and made accessible. Libraries are all of the above. Yet anyone who enters a library today often encounters something more: an open environment for meeting, exchange, and collective learning. Libraries are no longer merely places where knowledge is preserved: they are places where knowledge is created.

This development also shapes the almost 90 Goethe-Institut Libraries around the world. As a cultural institute of the Federal Republic of Germany, the Goethe-Institut promotes international cooperation, dialogue between societies, and access to language, culture, and education. The Libraries of the Goethe-Institut have played a central role in this endeavor for decades. They create access to information and perspectives, provide spaces for encounter and civic engagement, and facilitate exchange across linguistic, social, and national boundaries. They are often the first place where visitors encounter the Goethe-Institut. Today, Goethe-Institut Libraries see themselves as transnational spaces for knowledge and the future, fostering cultural understanding, critical thinking, and social participation.

This is why the Goethe-Institut regularly initiates projects that rethink the role of libraries, strengthen international networks of librarians

and other experts, and create space to develop and experiment with new ideas in practice. *Common Crafts – Common Libraries* is one such project: its story begins with a conversation. As part of the Southeast European library project *Common Waste – Common Libraries*, I had the opportunity for the first time to work more closely with the curator of *Common Crafts – Common Libraries*, Ivana Borovnjak, who accompanied the project as a mentor. In our conversations, she spoke about her work with the design collective Oaza (Zagreb) and the *MADE IN Platform*, which she co-founded – both focus on craft, local production cultures, design, sustainability, and the question of how practical knowledge can be preserved and passed on to other communities.

I was fascinated by this approach. At the same time, a simple question came to mind: what role do libraries actually play in this context?

To my surprise, the answer was: very little so far.

And yet libraries have been engaged for many years with precisely those issues that now dominate discussions around sustainability, the commons, repair culture, and local knowledge ecosystems. They create makerspaces and learning labs, foster collaborative learning, support self-organized initiatives, and provide spaces where people do not merely consume knowledge but actively shape it.

The longer we talked, the clearer it became that libraries and craft have more in common than one might assume at first glance. Both concern forms of knowledge that cannot be fully documented or archived. This knowledge lives in experience, movement, materials, tools, and routines. It is perpetuated not only through reading, but above all through doing things together. It is embodied, practical, and often intergenerational knowledge.

From this observation grew the idea of bringing together libraries, craftspeople, designers, artists, and local communities to explore the role libraries can play in preserving, sharing, and further developing this knowledge.

For the Goethe-Institut, the project creates a productive connection between several themes that have shaped our library work for many years. It engages with questions of cultural education, sustainability, collaborative learning, and the development of libraries as vibrant community spaces. At the same time, it highlights these institutions as active contributors to social processes.

The project also exemplifies an understanding of international exchange that is fundamental to the Goethe-Institut's work. For us, knowledge transfer is never a one-way process. The libraries within our global network take up impulses from Germany and connect them with local experiences, needs, and perspectives. At the same time, the insights and

innovations emerging from our partner regions flow back into international and German professional discourses.

This is equally true for the themes explored by this project: makerspaces, community-centered library work, sustainability, the commons, circular economy, and the transmission of craft and cultural practices. Libraries in Germany are grappling with many of the same questions as libraries in Europe and other parts of the world. We therefore see the experiences of the nine participating Goethe-Institutes in Europe – not only as regional examples or inspiration for other libraries, but also as contributions to a transnational conversation on the future of libraries. They demonstrate how new forms of learning, sharing, and collaboration can emerge, and how important local experience and networks are in this process.

This publication documents the experiences of a shared learning process. It brings together methods, stories, and insights from nine cities. Above all, however, it shows what can happen when libraries bring together people with different skills, experiences, and perspectives. The projects presented here are highly diverse. What unites them is the conviction that knowledge is something living, something that can only fully unfold through exchange with others.

My heartfelt thanks go to the librarians, the many artists, designers, craftspeople, and partner organizations, as well as to the curator Ivana Borovnjak, who invested the project with her expertise, openness, and trust.

Perhaps this is the most important insight to emerge from *Common Crafts – Common Libraries*: libraries do more than provide access to knowledge. They create connections. And at a time when social cohesion, intercultural dialogue, and mutual understanding seem more important than ever, such connections are of immeasurable value.

Bettina Wenzel is Head of Information Services for the Region Middle East and North Africa at the Goethe-Institut in Cairo. In this role, she is responsible for the strategic direction and coordination of information and library work across the region. Her professional focus lies in developing formats and projects at the intersection of culture, technology, and libraries like *Common Waste – Common Libraries* or *EthicAI*. Before taking on her current position, Bettina was Head of Information Services for the Region Europe I at the Goethe-Institut in Athens, and previously worked in Ukraine, Serbia, Bulgaria, and Hungary.

Ivana Borovnjak, project curator

THE LIBRARY WE MAKE

What do crafts and libraries have in common? One works with the hands, the other with books; one produces, the other collects. But the title of this book also asks a second question: what the two might hold in common, as things shared, maintained, and passed on rather than owned. *Common Crafts – Common Libraries* is a regional program of the Goethe-Institut, developed by nine of its libraries in Europe. In 2026, nine libraries, in Athens, Belgrade, Bucharest, Istanbul, Kyiv, Sofia, Thessaloniki, Yerevan, and Zagreb, went looking for answers in practice, together with designers, artists, craftspeople, and local organizations. Their workshops, walks, and gardens kept arriving at the same discovery. Crafts and libraries are both forms of shared practice. A craft exists in the doing, and in the passing of the doing from hand to hand; a library is a library while a community uses it.

This book is a record of that year and a working tool for its readers. It is written first for librarians, and alongside them for the cultural workers, curators, and craftspeople they might invite in. Each of the nine case studies is built so that its method can be picked up and tested in another context: the sequence of steps, the materials, the setting, and an open reflection on what worked well and what could have worked better.

The clearest image of what the two share came during the initial meeting, in November 2025, when curator Eva Vaslamatzi led the

librarians from Omonoia Square through the Commercial Triangle, the historic merchant district of Athens, to a haberdashery on Agias Eirinis Square that has remained active since 1925. Wooden shelves climb to the ceiling, holding threads, ribbons, buttons, and needles in a coding system that finds any item in seconds, though the factories that supplied the shop are closed and most of the tailors it supplied are gone. In the conversation recorded for the walk, the owner is told her shop is a museum. “Exactly,” she replies, “a museum of its own field, of tailoring, thread, and needle.” The shop is not a ruin, though. It stands quietly resilient, its tools waiting for someone to reactivate the knowledge they hold and sustain. Eva calls such things *limbo* objects: materials still in circulation after the ecosystem that gave them purpose has gone. The image traveled home with everyone, because the haberdashery looked so much like a library – with its collection, its catalog, its expert who knows where everything is, and its audience that has almost disappeared. Crafts and libraries are both systems of knowledge care, and both face the same question today. What is a craft for, when industry produces objects faster and cheaper? What is the purpose of a library when any text is a click away?

Craft, in this book, means more than traditional handwork. It covers bookbinding and weaving, but also crochet cordmaking, linocut, ceramics, textile repair, carpentry, and gardening, and it reaches into digital fabrication, from generative code turned into embroidery to a plotter cutting Crimean Tatar ornament. What holds this range together is not a material but a relation: a form of knowledge that lives in the hands, is transmitted by doing, takes time, and resists the speed of replacement. Craft has returned to contemporary conversation for exactly this reason, as a way of thinking about ecology, repair, authorship, and attention, and as a counterpoint to a market logic that organizes even creative work around speed, scale, and instant availability. The library, for its part, is understood here not as a building with books in it but as infrastructure: a public, trusted, low-threshold place that increasingly carries work other institutions have dropped: informal education, social contact, memory, ecological literacy. When craft enters the library, the library stops being a place where knowledge is stored and becomes a place where it is practiced.

The Athens meeting of November 2025 was the project’s first step. For two days, librarians worked with invited experts from the fields of craft, design, heritage, and digital culture, and concluded on a shared set of principles for the libraries’ future programs: co-creation, participation, and circularity, and the intention to test them in practice. In the first months of 2026, each library studied its local craft ecosystem and proposed a pilot. The nine programs ran from early spring to early autumn. People of different generations took part, from a ten-year-old

boy learning to drill on a library terrace in Zagreb to a seventy-eight-year-old woman teaching art students to crochet in Bucharest. Each library documented its work in a shared format, so that what was learned can be tested in another context.

Two editorial decisions shape the book. The library is the protagonist, so each case study is told from the library's perspective, for other librarians, by the people who organized it. Process comes before results, so the photographs show hands, tables, and rooms rather than finished objects. In other words, each case study is organized around its method rather than around a finished work.

The nine case studies are grouped into three chapters, not by geography but by the topics they share. Each chapter opens with a text that places its topic in a wider context. Two of them, written by Eva Vaslamatzi and by Fabian Hesse and Mitra Wakil, grew directly out of the Athens meeting. The third, written by Shannon Mattern, predates the project (2014), and is reprinted here because the meeting kept arriving at its ideas. The three are deliberately different kinds of text – a sound-walk script, an artist duo's reflection on postdigital making, and a scholarly essay – and each is placed beside the practice it speaks to.

"Living Archives: Place, Memory, Transmission" opens with Eva Vaslamatzi's "Wasteland," the script of the sound walk in Athens, where the voice of the haberdashery's owner, the history of the surrounding merchant district, and fragments from Richard Sennett's *The Craftsman* alternate. It asks what it means to hold material memory in a living form rather than a preserved one, and the three programs that follow answer from inside the library. In Athens, Greece, a bindery visit and a collective bookbinding workshop turn participants' pages into a single book, and a participatory performance turns the practice of binding into movement. In Vratsa, Bulgaria, teenagers carve linocuts from a book of local legends published by the regional library and illustrated by Todor Vakov. The workshops took place in a school, as the library building was under renovation – a fact that only proved that a library travels with its collections and its people. In Thessaloniki, Greece, weaving returns to a region once defined by cotton and silk, through workshops, a display of looms, and a walk through the city's textile history.

"Hybrid Craft: Old Hands, New Tools" is introduced by Fabian Hesse and Mitra Wakil's "Glitchcraft," a text written around their sculpture *Schmelzer:innen*, cast for the mining town of Freiberg, refusing the myth of the machine that can do everything. The machine does not replace the hand, they write; it widens the space in which decisions become material. The three programs test this in three directions. Belgrade, Serbia, runs three projects at once. Young designers embroider generative code by hand and by machine, and find that the hand's imperfections add value to the algorithmic pattern, while the machine's constraints spark a discussion on authorship; an embroidery circle welcomes the vendors of a street magazine; and photo-transfers make lossiness part of their meaning. Bucharest, Romania, brings women who crocheted *mileuri* in the 1970s and 1980s together with textile students, and films their hands so that the movement – not only the pattern – survives in an online forum. Kyiv, Ukraine, under conditions of war and displacement, works with the NGO Alem to cut Crimean Tatar *Ornek* ornament on a digital plotter, so that a visual language inscribed by UNESCO as intangible heritage is interpreted rather than reproduced.

"The Expanded Library: Ecology, Repair, Commons" is framed by Shannon Mattern's "Library as Infrastructure," reprinted here because its question – how far the public library can stretch as social, technological, and intellectual infrastructure – kept resurfacing in Athens, where librarians described their institutions as relational infrastructures and commons. Mattern's plea for the library as a "space of exception," where people are slowed down rather than made productive, is what the three programs put into practice. In Istanbul, Turkey, a repair café with Onaranlar Kulübü treats visible mending as a way of thinking about consumption. In Yerevan, Armenia, children and teenagers translate the country's endangered wildflowers into ceramics after a visit to the botanical garden, photographing instead of picking. In Zagreb, Croatia, students of architecture and design develop a concept for a garden on the library terrace through a democratic process, and the public then builds it, one raised bed after the other.

If one word ran through all nine cities, it was care: for materials that are no longer made, for people who had never been invited into a library, for plants, for garments, for a craft a grandmother practiced in a time that offered few other choices. The book closes with an index of methods, because its most practical hope is a simple one: that a librarian in another city reads a case study, borrows its sequence and its materials, and makes the library we make their own.

Ivana Borovnjak is based in Zagreb and works at the intersection of visual culture, material practices, and critical engagement. She is a founding member of the Oaza Art and Design Collective and a graduate of the Design Academy Eindhoven (2007). From 2013 to 2017, she led the Croatian Designers Association, shaping numerous cultural, educational, and curatorial initiatives. Her work spans independent and collaborative projects, including the platforms MADE IN, focused on crafts and local production, and Oaza Books, focused on independent publishing in art and design.

FINAL CONFERENCE, ATHENS
all nine library teams;
presentation of this book

REGIONAL MEETING, ATHENS
librarians from twelve institutes
with invited experts – lectures,
public panel, sound walk

THESSALONIKI
Woven Worlds

SOFIA / VRATSA
From Collective Memory
to Personal Narrative

ATHENS
Binding the Common

BELGRADE
Soft Systems / Inclusive Embroidery /
Photo-Transfer

KYIV
Pattern Culture Lab: Ornek

2025 2026

NOVEMBER | DECEMBER | JANUARY | FEBRUARY | MARCH | APRIL | MAY | JUNE | JULY | AUGUST | SEPTEMBER | OCTOBER | NOVEMBER

Libraries study their local craft ecosystems
and develop pilot proposals

YEREVAN
From Observation
to Form

ISTANBUL
Café Reparo

BUCHAREST
Mileu 2.0

ZAGREB
Modular Urban Garden

PROGRAM
HYBRID CRAFT
LIVING ARCHIVES
THE EXPANDED LIBRARY

LIVING ARCHIVES: PLACE, MEMORY, TRANSMISSION

A bindery in Athens still folds and sews books by hand, in a trade that automation has made rare; a regional library in Vratsa keeps a book of local legends cut in lino by a printmaker born in the same city; a library in Thessaloniki sits in an area whose cotton and silk once dressed half the Balkans, and whose looms have almost vanished from daily life. In each case, the knowledge is not lost, but it remains suspended, present in objects and in a few pairs of hands, without the community that once kept it moving.

The three programs in this chapter ask what a library can do with such knowledge that a museum cannot. Their aim is not to preserve it, which would be to accept that it has stopped, but to keep it in use: to bind it, print it, weave it, and leave behind a bound book, a set of linocut blocks and a collection of weaving frames that stay on the shelves for the next group. In Athens, bookbinding becomes a metaphor for collective authorship, extended into a performance; in Vratsa, adolescents use inherited legends to think about their own lives; in Thessaloniki, a knitting circle that had already formed in the library grows into a weaving community with a city walk behind it.

Eva Vaslamatzi's "Wasteland," the script of the sound walk that opened the project in November 2025, sets the tone. Weaving the shop owner's words with the history of the surrounding merchant district and phrases inspired by Richard Sennett's *The Craftsman*, it listens to a place that has become an archive of a disappearing craft and proposes that such places resist not through spectacle but through persistence. The libraries that follow take up that persistence as a method.

Memory Situated knowledge Intergenerational exchange

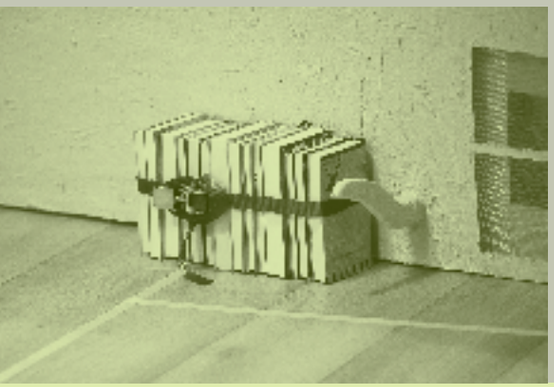


← *Bezesteni*, a 15th-century covered market in the center of Thessaloniki, where fine textiles and valuable goods are still traded. *Woven Worlds – Library and Textile Art*, city walk with Dot2Dot, GI Thessaloniki, May 2026. Photo: Johanna Papagiannis

1, 2 *Binding the Common*, *ENGAGÉ* performance with Collectif MASI, GI Athen, October 2026. Photos: Vangelis Patsialos

3, 4 *Woven Worlds – Library and Textile Art*, workshop series, GI Thessaloniki, April–May 2026. Photos: Melanie Kadau, Georgia Tsitsiona, and Helga Vranos

5, 6 *From Collective Memory to Personal Narrative*, linocut workshops with the Regional Library "Hristo Botev," Vratsa, GI Bulgarien, June 2026. Photos: Yordan Nedyalkov



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Eva Vaslamatzi

WASTELAND



At the edge of a rapidly gentrifying city center, the continued existence – and quiet resistance – of an old haberdashery warehouse feels like a time capsule. Located in a square that once formed part of Athens's commercial heart and is now increasingly occupied by cafés, hotels, and spaces of consumption, the shop persists in a different rhythm. Founded in 1925, it is one of the oldest suppliers of sewing materials in central Athens, stocking both imported and locally produced goods.

As much a storage warehouse as a shop, the space resembles a forgotten library. Monumental wooden shelving climbs the full height of its high ceilings, lining three walls from floor to roof. Each shelf contains a distinct category of objects related to a vanishing craft – threads, ribbons, needles, buttons, lace – organized through a coding system that allows the workers to trace and retrieve the products. These materials, once in constant circulation, have gradually ceased to leave their designated places. Today they remain where they have always been, witnesses to a profound transformation. Their diminishing use traces the erosion of particular forms of labor, repair, and commerce, while their continued presence quietly resists the accelerated cycles of replacement and urban renewal unfolding outside.

The text that follows was written for a sound walk leading from Omonoia Square to this warehouse in Agias Eirinis Square, culminating in a conversation with its owner, Ms. Maria Angelopoulou, for the Goethe-Institut Athen, in November 2025. It weaves together fragments of that conversation with historical references to the commercial life of central Athens, phrases inspired by *The Craftsman* by American sociologist Richard Sennett, observations gathered during repeated visits to the shop, and reflections on material memory, maintenance, and the changing economies of the city. Rather than mourning disappearance, it proposes listening to these residual landscapes as active archives – sites where resistance is enacted not through spectacle, but through continuity, stillness, and the refusal to be entirely absorbed into the new urban order.

– Η δύναμίς του δεν είναι αυτό που φαίνεται.
Η δύναμίς του είναι στο σύνολο.
Το όλον είναι τεράστιο.

– Λοιπόν, πρέπει κατά κάποιο τρόπο να εξαντλήσουμε ό,τι μπορέσουμε να εξαντλήσουμε.
Και μετά να πούμε: ρε αδερφέ, δεν βαριέσαι, ας χαθεί και ένα...
Αλλά τώρα, στη φάση που είναι, δεν μπορούμε.

– Βέβαια η Ελλάδα, άμα δεν είχε γονατίσει, να μην παράγει τίποτα όπως σήμερα, εμείς θα το είχαμε τελειώσει. Λογικό. Γιατί θα είχαν συνεχίσει τα εργοστάσια να κατασκευάζουν, εμείς σαν πρώτη ύλη θα το είχαμε διοχετεύσει. Σταμάτησαν αυτοί, η Ελλάδα δεν παράγει τίποτα. Κατεβήκαμε πάρα πολύ σε κατηγορία. Βέβαια, και οι λίγοι που υπάρχουν πάλι εδώ απευθύνονται. Τι να σου κάνει τώρα το ένα ή το δύο τοις εκατό. Τότε που ήτανε…
– Παλιά μού λέγατε ότι υπήρχαν ουρές κάθε μέρα…
– Ασφαλώς.

– Its strength is not what it seems.
Its strength lies in the whole.
The whole is enormous.

– So, we have to exhaust whatever we can possibly exhaust.
And then say, "Well, brother, if we lose a little, so be it." But at the stage we're at now, we can't do that.

– Of course, if Greece hadn't been brought to its knees and stopped producing anything, like it has today, we would have finished it by now. Makes sense.
The factories would have kept manufacturing, and we, as the supplier of raw materials, would have kept feeding them. But they stopped, and Greece doesn't produce anything anymore. We've dropped significantly in rank. Even the few that are still around come here. But what can one or two percent really do? Back then…
– You told me that there used to be queues every day…
– Absolutely.

She's narrating the story of the shop where she grew up.
Fabrics, threads, buttons – passing endlessly before her eyes.
Numbers, product codes, yelled across the counter,
they made her dizzy as a child.

Here, in this shop, materials had no names –
only numbers.
A code, a logic of order,
so that everything could be categorized, archived, and found again.

What we miss as humans is being engaged; being engaged in the process, to materials, to repetition; not being afraid to create a codependent relationship. The practice of a craftsman seems close to that.

The shop stands on Agias Eirinis Square,
in the city's Commercial Triangle –
the historic heart of Athens.
A triangle shaped by three squares:



Omonoia, Syntagma, Monastiraki.
They rose after the Greek Revolution,
when the new city was imagined and drawn.
Already in the plans of architects Stamatis Kleanthis and Eduard Schaubert, back in 1833,
this area was the meeting point
between the old and the new.
Its final form was born from resistance –
the anger of property owners who opposed
the expropriations and new streets that cut through their homes.
The compromise led to Leo von Klenze's plan,
and the city split in two distinct patterns.
The first: the "inner triangle,"
between Athinas, Ermou, and Praxitelous Streets.
A labyrinth of streets,
a medieval fabric still breathing the Ottoman past.
The second: from Omonoia to Evripidou and Dragatsaniou Streets.
A rational grid
dreamed by Kleanthis and Schaubert
as a suburb embracing the old town.
Then came Ermou. Then Aiolou.
Their cutting lines opened the medieval body of Athens.
Through them, the neoclassical city was born.

Along their sides gathered the first modern shops
the beginning of the Triangle as we know it today.
Here, trade has always found its place:
the fabric shops on Kalamiotou,
the packaging stores on Kairi and Theseos,
the paint and hardware shops on Vissis,
the lighting stores on Praxitelous,
the hat shops on Voreou,
and the tool stores on Athinas.
The Commercial Triangle holds within its streets
the full character of the Athenian marketplace.

Tourists are shifting landscapes with their presence, transforming any territory they pass through, in their quest for purity and authenticity. That's where nostalgia grows.

Είναι η πρώτη αποθήκη και χρονολογικά και σε δύναμη – και δυναμικά δηλαδή.
Η πρώτη αποθήκη σε αυτήν εδώ την χώρα με εισαγωγικό εμπόριο, τα πάντα.
Το μόνο που έρχεται τώρα, καμιά έλλειψη σε κλωστή, κανένα βασικό χρώμα –το λευκό ή το μαύρο– αυτό θα το φέρουμε.

It is the first warehouse, both chronologically and in terms of its strength and capacity.
It was the first warehouse in this country to operate through imports, supplying everything.
The only things we bring in now are items that are in short supply – thread, for example, or essential colors such as white or black. Those are the only things we still import.

She says the shop once supplied all of Athens.
Everyone passed by there.
They brought everything from great European factories –
factories that no longer exist.
This store was the mother of the crafts,
the provider, the one that fed them all.
Now, the provider still stands,
trapped in a neighborhood of cafés and Airbnbs,
where no queues form anymore in front of it.

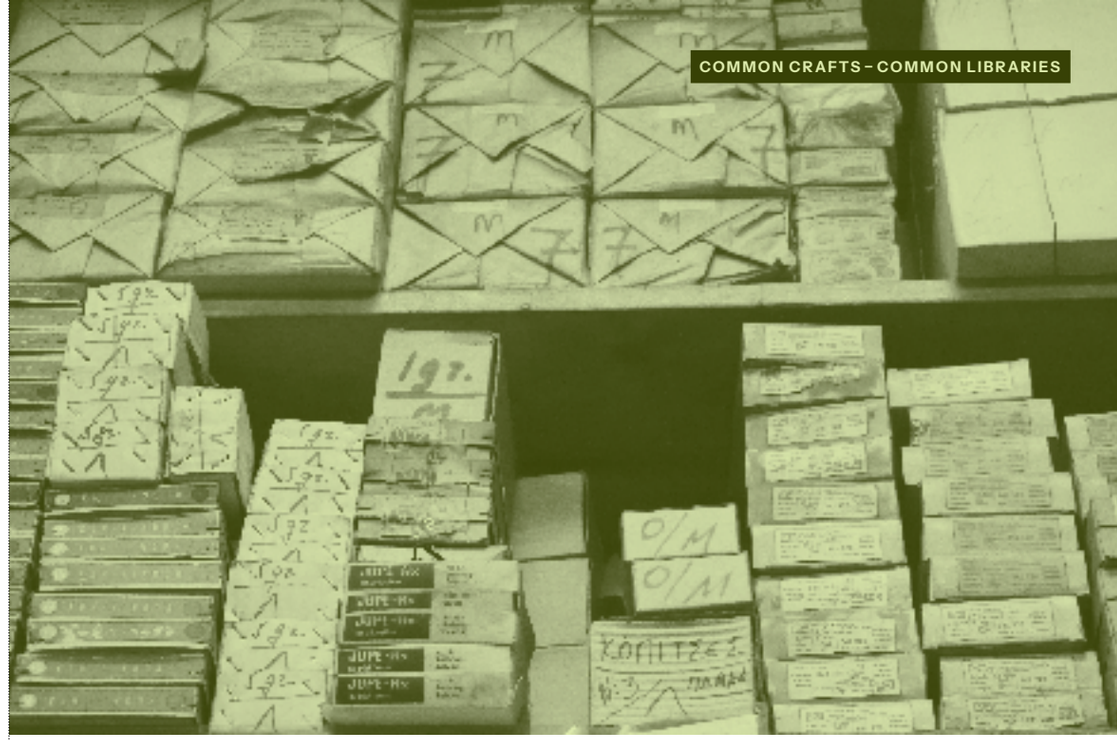
Skill, an inherent quality in the craftsman's activity, is not always attuned to the instantaneity of inspiration.

When I first entered this space, I was impressed by its infrastructure and the absence of a renovation – a common Greek practice that erases any traces of the past. The shop opened in 1925, a century ago. To me, it looks like a library: instead of books, there are products – the categorization, the order, the system, the codes, the use of "crafted" databases that function as an intermediary between the clients and the stock. It's like the archive of a dead craft, proof that it once existed, with all the excess materials from the production line. This space is trapped in limbo, as most factories that supplied it are closed and most clients are gone.

As *the world disappears, only tourists recognize the value of what will be lost and are eager to save any possible traces. That makes them superior to the local population.*

– Ορίστε, καθόλου μαλλιά. Δυστυχώς... μόνο τα δικά μας. Λοιπόν, εδώ δεν έχουμε μαλλιά και υφάσματα, ευτυχώς, γιατί αν είχαμε και αυτά...
– Δεν φέρνετε άλλα πράγματα πια.
– Μα δεν κατασκευάζονται πια. Αυτά που έχουμε εμείς εδώ μέσα, εάν ως διά μαγείας θεωρητικά τα εξαντλούσες σήμερα και έλεγες «ξαναφέρνω», δεν υπάρχουν για να φέρεις. Εδώ είναι αυθεντία. Όστρακο κουμπί; Μιας που είπες τώρα για κουμπιά. Φιλντισένια κουμπιά. Όπου να πεις ότι έχεις δει φιλντισένιο κουμπί, θα σου πουν «στον ύπνο σου κοιμήθηκες και το είδες;». Τι να φέρεις; Τα τωρινά που είναι κινέζικα και πλαστικά και συνθετικά; Αποκλείεται. Αποκλείεται. Διά ροπάλου. Αυτά εδώ είναι του 1821. Έπρεπε να υπάρχει μέσα σ' ένα μουσείο και όχι εδώ.
– Μα αυτό είναι *μουσείο.*
– Βεβαίως, είναι μουσείο του τομέα του, της ραπτικής, κλωστή-βελόνα.

– There you are: not a single strand of hair. Unfortunately... only our own. So, we don't have hair or fabrics here. Luckily, because if we had those as well...
– You don't bring in those kinds of things anymore?
– They simply aren't produced anymore. Everything you see here – if, by some miracle, you exhausted all of it today and said, "I'll just order more" – you couldn't. They no longer exist to be ordered. What we have here is unique. Mother-of-pearl buttons, for example. Since you mentioned buttons... If you told someone you'd seen a genuine mother-of-pearl button, they'd say you must have dreamed it. What could you possibly bring in now? The ones they make today are Chinese, plastic, synthetic? No. Absolutely not. Out of the question. These date back to 1821. They belong in a museum, not here.
– But this is a museum.
– Exactly. It's a museum of its own field – of tailoring, of thread and needle.



She says, “You hear the word ‘needle’ and imagine one single thing, but here there are so many different kinds of them, and this is the case for most of the products.”

My words mix with her words.
Her words mix with the shop’s words.
This place is me, she says.



Eva Vaslamatzi is a curator, editor, and writer based in Athens. Her practice focuses on new commissions and collaborations with visual artists, often through engagement with archival material, institutional and private collections, and the site-specificity of exhibition spaces. She works across formats to explore curatorial methodologies that respond to pressing issues in contemporary art and cultural production. Vaslamatzi has collaborated with a range of institutions to conceptualize exhibitions and residency programs, as well as editorial directions for publications associated with festivals, collections, and funding entities. Her research practice spans various media and outputs, including exhibitions, creative writing, publications, text-based artworks, photography, and film. She has been awarded the ARTWORKS Fellowship in Curating (2019) and has participated in research residencies in Athens, Paris, and Istanbul, engaging deeply with local art scenes.

All photos: Interior of the warehouse in Agias Eirinis Square.
Photos: Eva Vaslamatzi

GOETHE-INSTITUT
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FORMAT
Bindery visit, bookbinding workshop, participatory performance

CONCEPT AND CURATION
Eva Vaslamatzi, curator

ORGANIZATION AND COORDINATION
Nikoletta Stathopoulou, Dr. Myrto Provida (Goethe-Institut Athen)

BINDING THE COMMON

Bookbinding as craft and metaphor for collective processes: a bindery visit, a collective publication workshop, and a participatory performance binding individual contributions into a shared narrative in the library.

Bookbinding Co-creation Belonging Situated knowledge

EXPERTS
Thaleia Michelaki, bookbinder
Madlen Anipsitaki and Simon Riedler, artists (Collectif MASI)
Eva Vaslamatzi, curator

PHOTOGRAPHER
Vangelis Patsialos

TIMEFRAME
October 2026

One-day program:
book bindery visit (1 h)
bookbinding workshop (3 h)
ENGAGÉ performance (1 h)

PARTICIPANTS
Invited and selected via open call:
general public, students, artists, educators, cultural workers, library users

Visit and workshop: 18 participants

Performance: open to the public

Context *Binding the Common,* conceived and curated by Eva Vaslamatzi, included the workshop *Things That Hold Together* and the participatory performance *ENGAGÉ*, in an attempt to explore bookbinding as both a craft and a metaphor for collective processes.. Rather than treating bookbinding solely as a technical skill, the program approaches it as a way of connecting materials, stories, and people. It asks how individual contributions can be assembled into a shared narrative, and how the physical act of binding can illuminate the social and symbolic ties that shape communities.

The choice of bookbinding stems from its unique position at the intersection of manual knowledge, tradition, and the world of books. It is a craft that makes visible the labor behind reading: the stitching, folding, gluing, and assembling that transform scattered pages into a coherent whole. Working with bookbinder Thaleia Michelaki in her historic Exarchia bindery, active since the late 1960s, grounds the program in a local context where craft, neighborhood history, and cultural memory converge. Participants encounter tools, materials, and techniques from different periods and traditions, gaining insight into the material life of books and the embodied knowledge of the craft.

The Goethe-Institut library serves as the second anchor of the program: a public space dedicated to reading, learning, and exchange. By activating the library through hands-on making and collective experimentation, the program reimagines it as a site of shared creation rather than passive consumption. The audience includes people interested in craft, collaborative artistic practices, and participatory performance, as well as visitors who wish to engage directly in shaping a temporary collective space.

Artistically, the program investigates how binding can be translated from object to body and space. The performance *ENGAGÉ* by Collectif MASI expands bookbinding into a spatial, choreographic practice: large papier-mâché surfaces act as pages and thresholds, forming a shifting environment through movement, connection, and disconnection. Socially, it aims to cultivate collaboration, negotiation, and co-presence. Educationally, it introduces participants to bookbinding techniques while inviting them to experience collective authorship as a form of learning.

Overall, *Binding the Common* situates craft within a broader inquiry into how communities are formed, how narratives are shared, and how libraries can become active sites of making, knowledge exchange, and collective life.

Methodology

Program Sequence

1 **Preparation and coordination** Defining the program structure (bindery visit, collective publication, performance); coordinating between the curator, the bookbinder, and the performance artists; setting a closed group of up to 20 participants for the workshop, with open access for the performance; preparing a call for participation asking attendees to bring 3–5 pages from personal archives, books, magazines, or other printed materials.

2 **Introduction and contextual framing** Presenting the day's aims at the Goethe-Institut (bookbinding as craft, metaphor, and collective practice; the link between the bindery, the library, and the local context; the role of participants as co-authors) and outlining the schedule and basic safety and handling instructions for tools and materials.

3 **Visit to the bindery** Touring the bookbinder's historic bindery in Exarchia, where she presented the history of the workshop, demonstrated different binding techniques and showed tools, presses, threads, and examples of bound books; observing and asking questions, focusing on how scattered pages become a coherent volume.

4 **Assembling the collective book** Spreading out the participants' materials and additional pre-selected pages back at the Goethe-Institut; deciding collectively on a loose thematic thread through guided discussion; assembling individual materials onto larger sheets that would form the pages of the collective publication; sequencing pages, proposing connections, and designing the structure of a single collective book in small groups; observing the final binding process, which was carried out by the bookbinder, who demonstrated the techniques and decisions involved while participants followed the process and discussed the construction of the publication.

5 **Transition to performance** Introducing the participatory performance by the artist collective as an expansion of bookbinding principles into body and space; inviting the workshop group and wider public to stay and join, with a short briefing on participation, consent and movement in the space.

6 **Participatory performance** Moving, holding, connecting and reconfiguring large papier-mâché surfaces that acted as pages and doors, following the artists' simple, rhythmic instructions; creating a temporary spatial "book" echoing the earlier collective binding process.

7 **Reflection and closure** Closing with an informal conversation in the library, reflecting on craft, collaboration, and the library as a shared space; gathering feedback on how manual work and collective decision-making changed perceptions of books and of one another.

Methods

Guided tour of a craft space Contextual introduction to the bindery's history, tools, and techniques.

Object-based storytelling Using participants' own pages as entry points for sharing personal narratives and negotiating a common theme.

Co-curation Collective sequencing and structuring decisions that turn authorship into a shared, negotiated process.

Demonstration-based bookbinding The final binding of the collective publication was carried out by the bookbinder as a live demonstration, allowing participants to observe the process, ask questions, and gain insight into professional bookbinding techniques.

Participatory performance with choreographic prompts Artists led movement-based tasks that translate binding into spatial and bodily connections.

Group reflection circle Open discussion on experience, learning outcomes, and the role of the library.

Materials and Tools

Bookbinding tools Presses, awls, needles, bone folders, cutting mats, rulers, knives, glue, threads, cloth, leather, boards.

Paper and printed matter Participants' pages (personal texts, images, clippings), pre-selected pages, and blank sheets for inserts or notes.

Performance materials Large papier-mâché surfaces functioning as movable pages/doors.

Audio resources Recorded sounds from the bindery (tools, materials, gestures) used as soundscape during the performance.

Setting and Layout

Bindery setting Gathering participants around workbenches for demonstrations in a working bindery, with tools and machines in situ.

Workshop setting Arranging tables in islands for small-group work, with a central table for collective sequencing of pages and a display of tools and sample bindings.

Performance setting in the library Clearing an area for movement; placing papier-mâché surfaces so they can be carried, tilted and rearranged; inviting the audience to stand, move, and join.

Outcomes and Reflections The visit to Thaleia Michelaki's bindery generated considerable interest. For many participants, it was their first time inside a working bindery, and the history of the workshop, its tools, and the techniques demonstrated by the bookbinder made visible the often-invisible labor behind the making and care of books.

The collective publication workshop was marked by openness and trust. Participants brought family photographs, drawings, poems, journal pages, and printed fragments, shared the stories behind them, and through discussion identified recurring themes: migration, family histories, personal memories, urban life, and everyday experience. By organizing the materials into thematic clusters, they turned a diverse collection of individual pages into a single narrative structure.

The participatory performance *ENGAGÉ* extended this process into space and body. Participants and audience members handled large papier-mâché surfaces that acted as pages, thresholds, and connective

elements, accompanied by a soundscape recorded in the bindery – tools at work, pages turning. Through spoken prompts and choreographic instructions, the artists turned binding techniques into shared actions that reflected the collaboration built up over the day.

The main challenge was time. Participants brought so much material and spent so long discussing themes and sequence that there was no time left for them to bind the book themselves, so the bookbinder completed the binding as a demonstration. In the future, asking each participant for only one or two pages would leave room for hands-on binding.

The collectively authored book remains in the library of the Goethe-Institut Athen.

BIOGRAPHIES

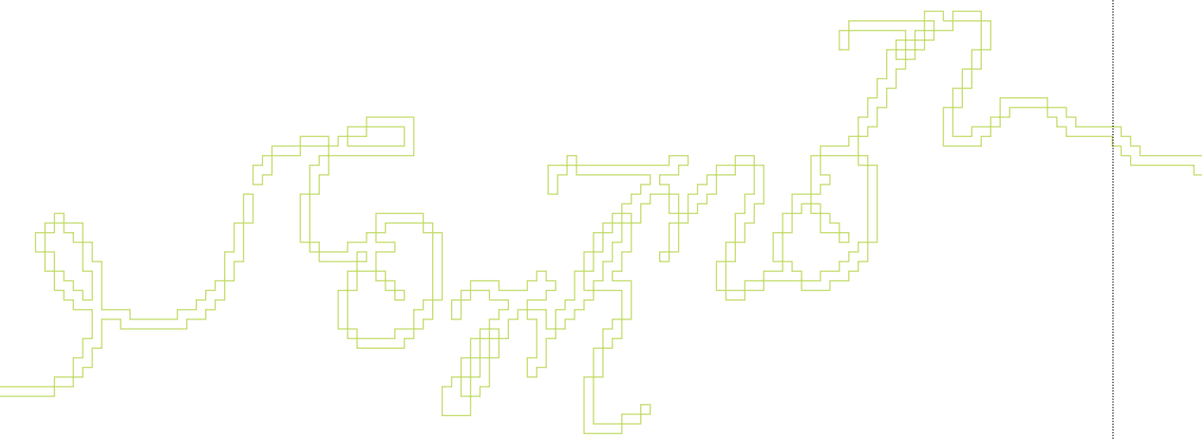
Eva Vaslamatzi is an Athens-based curator and writer whose work engages with archival material, site-specificity, and collaborative commissions. She develops exhibitions, residencies, and publications that respond to contemporary cultural and artistic challenges.
onassis.org/people/eva-vaslamatzi

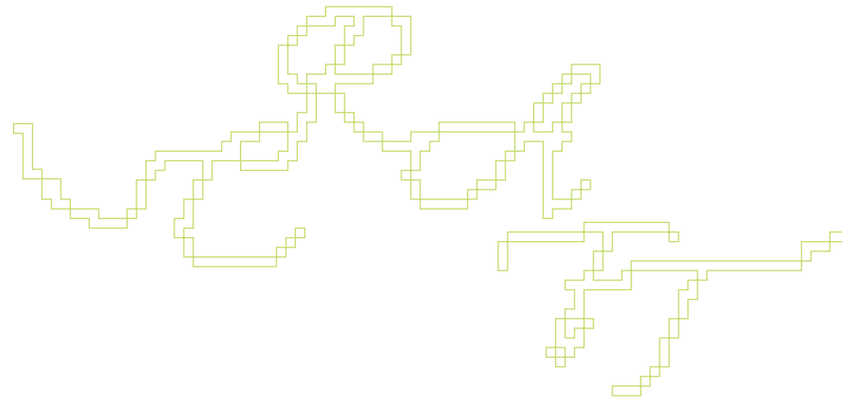
Collectif MASI was founded in 2018 by Greek architect and urban scenographer Madlen Anipsitaki and French sociologist Simon Riedler. Exploring the interdependence between people and their environment, they treat a given space, and the possibilities it offers, as their primary material, focusing especially on the relationships that can be formed within it. This practice of social sculpture in public space gives rise to an evolving archive, exhibited internationally.
collectifmasi.com

Thaleia Michelaki is a bookbinder and book conservator. In her Athens-based bookbindery, "Thaleia's Bookbindery," she combines traditional bookbinding, restoration, and the creation of artistic book objects. Through workshops, she shares the art of handmade books and promotes appreciation for traditional craftsmanship.
FB Thaleia's Bookbindery **INSTA** @thaleiasbookbindery **BEHANCE** thaleiasbookbindery

Nikoletta Stathopoulou has headed the Information and Library Department at the Goethe-Institut Athen since 2020. Her work focuses on literature, education, sustainability, library development, and international collaboration. She initiated Athen's first Library of Things and the regional project *Common Waste – Common Libraries*, connecting Goethe-Institutes across Europe and strengthening libraries as spaces for sustainability and informal learning.

Dr. Myrto Provida works in the Library department of the Goethe-Institut Athen. She holds a PhD from the University of Waterloo focusing on the portrayal of women in contemporary German cinema and she has published on global women's cinema practices as well as open educational resources. At the Goethe-Institut, she co-organizes local and regional library projects while also disseminating the library's local and online media offerings.





GOETHE-INSTITUT
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FORMAT
Workshop series

CONCEPT
Yanina Taneva (Ideas Factory Association)
Doroteya Vladova and Kalina Todorova
(Regional Library "Hristo Botev," Vratsa)
Mariya Georgieva (Language High School
"Yoan Ekzarh," Vratsa)
Ruslana Stefanova, head of Library
(Goethe-Institut Bulgarien)

ORGANIZATION AND COORDINATION
Ruslana Stefanova (Goethe-Institut Bulgarien)
Doroteya Vladova, librarian
(Regional Library "Hristo Botev," Vratsa)

FROM COLLECTIVE MEMORY TO PERSONAL NARRATIVE

Exploring the library as a third place through local heritage and linocut printmaking.

Linocut printmaking | Memory | Identity | Situated knowledge

FACILITATORS
Yanina Taneva, artist and art therapist
Inna Pavlova, illustrator and art therapist

EXPERTS
Kalina Todorova

PHOTOGRAPHER
Yordan Nedyalkov

PARTNER INSTITUTIONS
Regional Library "Hristo Botev" in Vratsa,
Ideas Factory Association,
Language High School "Yoan Ekzarh," Vratsa

TIMEFRAME
June 2026; three workshops (3 × 3 h)

PARTICIPANTS
46 students aged 14–16,
in three groups of ~15,
working with librarians, a local historian,
two artist-facilitators and teachers

Context This case study presents a series of experimental workshops co-created by the Regional Library in Vratsa, Ideas Factory Association, the Goethe-Institut Bulgarien Library, and the Language High School "Yoan Ekzarh," Vratsa, within the *Common Crafts – Common Libraries* project. The workshops explored how a public library can act as a *third place* (Ray Oldenburg): a civic space that extends beyond its traditional functions of preserving and providing access to knowledge, becoming instead a place for creativity, dialogue, and community participation.

The central question was not simply how to engage young people with local cultural heritage, but whether local heritage could become a meaningful resource through which adolescents might reflect on their own lives. Rather than presenting heritage as historical knowledge to be learned, the workshops invited participants to encounter it as something living: a shared cultural memory capable of generating new personal meanings.

The process was built around *Kral-Bair: Legends and Traditions from the Vratsa Region*, a collection of local legends researched, preserved, and published by the Regional Library in Vratsa in the early 2000s. The book itself already embodies a dialogue between storytelling and traditional craft. Its illustrations were created as original linocuts by Todor Vakov, one of Bulgaria's most respected printmakers and a native of Vratsa, making the publication an ideal point of departure for introducing participants both to local narratives and to the graphic tradition of linocut.

The Library collection was therefore approached not simply as documentary material but as an active participant in the workshops. The book, the stories it contains, and the knowledge carried by librarians and the local historian together became the starting point for artistic exploration and dialogue.

Although the workshops were initiated by the Library, renovation works made it impossible to use the Library building. The sessions therefore took place at the participating school. Rather than limiting the project, this circumstance unexpectedly reinforced one of its central ideas: the library as a third place is not defined solely by its physical location, but also by the relationships, knowledge, and forms of participation it creates. In this sense, the library traveled with its collections, its professionals, and its methods.

Methodology

Program Sequence

1 **Preparation and local partnership building** Establishing collaboration between the library, local educational institutions, cultural organizations, and facilitators; defining shared objectives, identifying participants, preparing the venue and materials, and adapting the implementation to the specific conditions of the library as a community third place.

2 **Activating local knowledge** Introducing participants to stories, legends, memories, or other forms of local intangible heritage through collaboration with historians, librarians, researchers, or community members, positioning the library as a space where local knowledge is shared, interpreted, and preserved.

3 **Introducing the creative medium** Presenting the selected artistic technique through examples and a practical demonstration, ensuring that participants acquire the basic skills needed to transform cultural narratives into creative expression.

4 **Personal engagement with heritage** Inviting participants to select a character, place, symbol, or episode from the local narratives that resonated with their own experiences, encouraging individual interpretation and emotional connection to shared heritage.

5 **Creative development** Supporting participants in translating their ideas into visual form through sketching and transferring the composition onto the chosen medium.

6 **Collaborative making** Facilitating the production process through shared tools, peer interaction, and technical guidance, using the library environment to encourage informal learning, exchange of knowledge and collaborative creativity.

7 **Reflection and community dialogue** Concluding with a facilitated discussion in which participants reflect on the relationship between personal experience, local heritage, and the creative process, reinforcing the library's role as a third place for participation, dialogue, and collective meaning-making.

Methods

Interpretation of local cultural heritage Encountering local legends as living material rather than historical knowledge.

Object-based learning Working from a library publication and Todor Vakov's original linocut illustrations.

Traditional linocut printmaking Sketching, carving, and printing an individual motif.

Facilitated group reflection Connecting collective memory with personal experience in closing discussions.

Expressive arts practice and group dynamics Facilitation by two artists who also work as art therapists, creating conditions in which making and conversation support one another (not therapeutic in a clinical sense).

Narrative identity approach (McAdams) Experienced through artistic practice and shared reflection rather than explicitly discussed.

Materials and Tools *Kral-Bair: Legends and Traditions from the Vratsa Region* (Regional Library in Vratsa), reproductions of Todor Vakov's original linocut illustrations, lino blocks, linocut carving tools, water-based printing ink, rollers, printmaking paper (minimum 50% cotton), A4 sketch paper, pencils and tracing paper, cleaning and protective materials.

Setting and Layout Rearranging the classroom before the practical work begins: replacing conventional rows with a circle of desks and placing the printing tools and materials on a shared table at the center of the room.

This seemingly simple intervention shaped the rhythm of the workshops. Participants moved freely between individual work and collective conversation, returning to the central table whenever they needed materials, technical support, or simply an opportunity to observe one another's work. The physical organization of the space reflected the workshop's broader intention: to create a temporary learning community rather than a conventional classroom.

Outcomes and Reflections One of the most significant observations concerned participants' relationship to cultural heritage. Initially, the legends were often perceived as stories belonging to the past, part of local

history rather than everyday life. Through the creative process, many participants began to approach them differently: the resulting prints became less about representing folklore and more about connecting collective memory with individual experience. Cultural heritage gradually shifted from being historical content to becoming a language through which participants could think about themselves. Although anecdotal, one observation emerged repeatedly across the groups: the workshops opened a type of reflective space largely absent from the participants' everyday educational experience. In one case, the artistic process also opened a quiet, supportive dialogue with a participant that might not have emerged through words alone.

The workshops should be understood as an exploration rather than a finished model. Approximately three hours proved sufficient to establish trust, introduce the craft, and initiate reflection, yet many conversations seemed only to begin as the sessions were ending. A series of connected workshops would allow relationships, technical confidence, and personal reflection to develop more fully over time. The participants' linocut prints remain tangible outcomes of the program.

For several participants, the workshops appeared to shift their perception of the library itself: from a place associated primarily with books and school assignments to one where they could create, experiment, and encounter their own community in new ways. Although rooted in the specific cultural landscape of Vratsa, the model can be adapted in other regions. Its essential components are not the particular legends themselves, but the collaboration between libraries, schools, local historians or ethnographers, artists, and facilitators working with locally meaningful collections and traditional crafts.

BIOGRAPHIES

Yanina Taneva is the co-founder of Ideas Factory Association in Sofia and BABA residence, a program for cultural innovations in rural areas. She is a consultant, researcher, strategic communicator, and facilitator with over 15 years of experience in leading group processes for social innovation through interdisciplinary work.

Inna Pavlova is an illustrator and visual artist based in Sofia. Her work combines illustration, graphic design, printmaking, and contemporary art, with a focus on visual storytelling and interactive experiences. A co-founder of Nishka Collective, she has created books, posters, and installations, exhibiting and collaborating on cultural projects in Bulgaria and internationally.

Kalina Todorova is a long-time local historian at the Regional Library "Hristo Botev" in Vratsa. She is the author of the ancestral publications *Native Land* and *Heritage*, related to the rich cultural and historical heritage of the Vratsa region. Kalina is one of the compilers of the influential book collection *Kral-Bair: Legends and Traditions from the Vratsa Region*. Part of her mission is the popularization of the project *Map of Time: The Digital Archive of the Vratsa Region, 20th century*.

Doroteya Vladova is a librarian at the Regional Library "Hristo Botev" in Vratsa. She graduated in Cultural Studies from Sofia University "St. Kliment Ohridski" and continued her education as a librarian. Her interests include preserving the cultural heritage of Bulgaria and its continuity across generations. Communicating with young people inspires and encourages her to improve the connection between traditions and the digital world.

Mariya Georgieva has a master's degree in graphic design and has been working as a graphic designer for over ten years in Canada. Since 2022, Mariya has been a graphic design teacher at the Language High School "Yoan Ekzarh" in Vratsa. She is committed to using alternative education methods, and dedicated to developing creativity and design thinking with the students and to inspire them to find their talents.

Ruslana Stefanova has headed the library of the Goethe-Institut Bulgarien since 2021. Her main areas of focus are literature and philosophy, as well as developing formats for young audiences. The library has become a popular meeting place – both for the well-known event series "Philosophical Evenings" and for new, creative formats such as crime-themed dinner events, along with various other initiatives including craft workshops and quiz nights.

GOETHE-INSTITUT
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FORMAT
Workshops, exhibition, guided city walk

CONCEPT
Helga Vranos, head of Library
Ulrike Gasser, director (Goethe-Institut Thessaloniki)

ORGANIZATION AND COORDINATION
Helga Vranos, Goethe-Institut Thessaloniki

FACILITATORS / EXPERTS
Georgios Drabas, textile engineering specialist
Vasiliki Kartsiakli, Christina Vraka
and Magda Chatzinaki (Dot2Dot)

PHOTOGRAPHERS
Melanie Kadau, Georgia Tsitsiona,
Helga Vranos (Goethe-Institut Thessaloniki),
Johanna Papagiannis, cultural volunteer

WOVEN WORLDS — LIBRARY AND TEXTILE ART

Weaving as a shared cultural practice, linking the textile heritage of Northern Greece with the library as a communal space for learning, creativity, and exchange.

Weaving · Co-creation · Intergenerational exchange · Memory

PARTNER INSTITUTIONS
Dot2Dot, Experiential Tourism Office: a Thessaloniki-based company specializing in thematic city walks

TIMEFRAME
April 2026:
workshop for children and young people aged 10+ (2 h)

May 2026:
four-session workshop series for adults (4 × 2 h)

May 2026:
guided thematic city walk (2 h)

PARTICIPANTS
Workshop for children and young people:
18 participants aged 10–17

Workshop series for adults:
20 women aged 20+, of diverse professions and backgrounds, both Greek and German

City walk: 25 participants of mixed ages

Context *Woven Worlds* builds on the rich yet increasingly invisible tradition of textile craftsmanship in Northern Greece. Numerous techniques, above all weaving, have shaped the culture of this region, known for centuries for cotton cultivation and silk production, but are gradually being forgotten and disappearing from everyday life.

The program brings this knowledge back into view and creates opportunities for it to live on within the library. At its core lies the question of how craft practices can remain accessible as cultural knowledge, and what role the library, as a public space for learning and encounter, can play in this.

The motivation arises from several developments: younger generations are increasingly losing access to craft skills, regional textile knowledge is fading, and at the same time the need for community is growing. In parallel, handicrafts are experiencing a renewed surge in popularity, and since 2025 a steadily growing knitting and crochet community has formed within the Library, clearly expressing a desire for shared creative practice.

As a complement, the program includes a thematic city walk that highlights selected sites of Thessaloniki's textile history and places them within a broader historical context shaped by multiculturalism, experiences of displacement, and the role of women and women's work. This contextual grounding deepens the understanding of the cultural significance of textile work without becoming the program's main focus.

The Library proves to be an ideal setting. As an open, low-threshold space, it enables learning, exchange, and cultural participation regardless of age, background, or prior knowledge. Through workshops, collaborative making, and the creation of a shared materials collection, it becomes a place where textile techniques can be explored, shared, and further developed. The integration of modern technologies in the makerspace opens up additional possibilities for repair, upcycling, and hybrid learning formats.

In this way, *Woven Worlds* connects local cultural history with contemporary educational practice and establishes a creative meeting space that strengthens community, fosters intergenerational exchange, and anchors craft knowledge as a living practice within the library.

Methodology

Program Sequence

1 **Research and mapping** Gaining an overview of craft traditions in Northern Greece through research and interviews with experts in Thessaloniki; identifying museums, artisans, and initiatives; visiting markets and events to understand contemporary practices; selecting textile craftsmanship, above all weaving, as the central focus.

2 **Deepening the focus** Exploring local perspectives, historical contexts and potential collaborations, with particular attention to silk production, trade history, and regional weaving traditions.

3 **Developing formats** Designing program formats that connect textile heritage with the possibilities of the library, taking the existing knitting and crochet community as the starting point for accessible, community-oriented activities.

4 **Selecting workshop leaders** Choosing facilitators who combine expertise in textile crafts with teaching experience.

5 **Workshop for children and young people (2 h)** Weaving a bookmark using different colors and simple patterns.

6 **Workshop series for adults (4 × 2 h)** Producing an individual woven piece with a variety of colors, patterns, and fringes; overview of materials, techniques, looms, and pattern design.

7 **Accompanying exhibition** Displaying sample weavings and loom models throughout the workshops.

8 **Thematic city walk (2 h)** Leading a guided tour of selected sites of Thessaloniki's textile history.

Methods

Hands-on weaving practice Each participant working on an individual pre-warped frame.

Demonstration and overview Introduction to materials, techniques, looms, and pattern design by the workshop leader.

Exhibition-based learning Sample pieces and loom models on display during the workshops.

Guided city walk Placing textile heritage in its historical and urban context.

Materials and Tools

Pre-warped weaving frames, shuttles, yarns, weaving combs, scissors; sewing machine; sample weavings and loom models for display.

Setting and Layout

Holding the workshops in the makerspace and the central library space; giving each participant their own table with an individual pre-warped weaving frame; arranging the tables into two larger group settings to encourage collaborative work; providing all tools and materials through the workshop leader; displaying sample pieces and loom models throughout the workshops.

Outcomes and Reflections

Woven Worlds successfully created a space in which textile knowledge could be rediscovered, shared, and practiced collectively. Participants of different age groups actively engaged with weaving techniques, materials, and design processes, each producing their own woven piece. For the younger participants in particular, concentration, precision, and perseverance proved to be real challenges to overcome. The workshops therefore not only conveyed practical skills but also raised awareness of the cultural significance of textile traditions in Northern Greece.

A key outcome was the strong interest in collaborative creative work and the visible growth of a community within the library. The existing knitting and crochet group was strengthened and expanded through new participants, while the program increased awareness of the Goethe-Institut's offerings and reached new target groups. Many participants expressed a clear desire for the continuation and long-term establishment of such activities.

The accompanying exhibition of sample weavings and loom models, together with the thematic city walk, deepened the participants' understanding of textile heritage and its historical context. In reflection, it became especially clear how effective the combination of hands-on practice, cultural context, and open accessibility can be.

The program also leaves a tangible foundation: an established pool of materials, including weaving frames, a sewing machine, yarns, and needles, which will enable ongoing use, independent work, and the continued development of textile practices within the library.

BIOGRAPHIES

Dot2Dot is a social cooperative enterprise, active in the fields of experiential tourism, culture, research, and education since 2013. Dot2Dot actions include the design and implementation of experiential thematic tours, educational activities for schools and educational institutions, as well as adult education seminars, the organization of cultural events and the development of research programs.

WEB dot2dot.gr

Georgios Drabas is a textile engineer educated in Italy, with more than 40 years of professional experience in the textile industry. Until his retirement, he managed a company specializing in weaving, Jacquard fabrics, and production consulting. He is currently active as a lecturer and as a facilitator of seminars and workshops.

Helga Vranos is a librarian at the Goethe-Institut Thessaloniki and serves as head of Library. Her focus lies in literature events and children's programming. She studied Italian and Modern Greek Philology in Munich. She worked at the Bavarian State Library and various university libraries. Fascinated by Greece's traditions, she is interested in sustaining creative practices in libraries.

HYBRID CRAFT: OLD HANDS, NEW TOOLS

When does a digital tool extend craft knowledge and when does it flatten or replace it? The three programs in this chapter do not settle the question: they tackle it from three different perspectives. In Belgrade, young designers write generative code in Processing, then embroider the result by hand and by machine, and eventually discover that the hand's imperfections add value to the algorithm whereas the machine's limits articulate an argument about authorship. In Bucharest, women who crocheted *mileuri* in the decades when there was little else to decorate a home with teach textile students their technique, while a digital team films their hands so that the movement, not just the pattern, survives in an online forum. In Kyiv, the Crimean Tatar ornament *Ornek*, a visual language inscribed by UNESCO as intangible heritage, carried through deportation and renewed displacement, is cut on a digital plotter and pressed onto T-shirts, so that participants interpret its symbols rather than copy them.

What the three share is a refusal to treat the digital as either threat or savior. The tool is useful exactly where it keeps the body in the loop: a photograph of hands, a pattern chosen for its meaning, a stitch that resists the file. Fabian Hesse and Mitra Wakil's "Glitchcraft," which opens the chapter, gives this position its vocabulary. The text grows out of their sculpture *Schmelzer:innen*, three figures cast in aluminum for the mining town of Freiberg, their garments carrying reliefs from a metallurgical handbook of 1556, and it follows the whole postdigital chain from 3D scanning and motion capture to the foundry. Postdigital craft, they write, arises wherever the machinic signature remains visible and is at the same time shaped by human decisions; the machine does not replace the hand but widens the space in which decisions become material. The question of who owns a scanned form or a shared pattern, the commons, runs underneath all three programs. Their essay carries it to the library itself, asking whether libraries might become places where the provenance of shared forms is documented, access is negotiated, and new kinds of collective authorship are explored.

Hybridity Co-creation Embodied knowledge

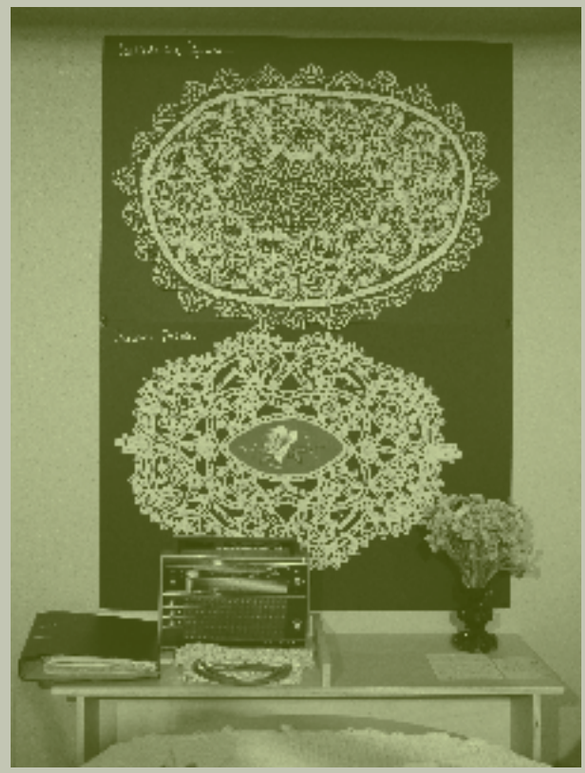


← Detail of a handmade mileu (traditional Romanian lace doily) in progress. Mileu 2.0: When the Cord Meets the Algorithm, workshop, GI Rumänien, June 2026. Photo: Alexandra Ivan

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1, 2 *Mileu 2.0: When the Cord Meets the Algorithm*, workshop series, GI Rumänien, June–July 2026. Photos: Alexandra Ivan

3, 4 *Pattern Culture Lab: Ornek*, workshop, GI Ukraine, July 2026. Photos: Oleksandra Barbados

5 *Photo-Transfer: The Sun Will Continue to Shine on Earth for Billions of Years*, exhibition in the Menjačnica gallery, GI Serbien, June 2026. Photo: Selman Trtovac

6 *Inclusive Embroidery*, workshop series, GI Serbien, May–June 2026. Photo: Selman Trtovac



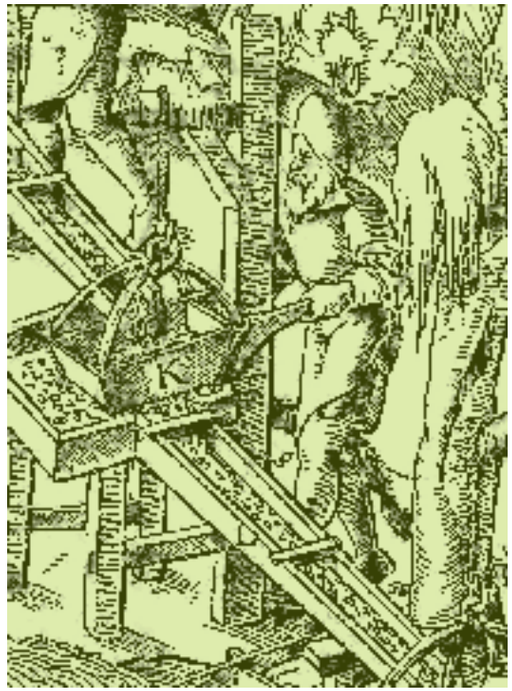
Fabian Hesse & Mitra Wakil

GLITCHCRAFT

Schmelzer:innen and the Politics of Postdigital Production

← Hesse Wakil: *Schmelzer:innen*, material sample with relief in cast aluminum, 2025





↑ Hesse Wakil: AI-generated 3D model based on illustrations from Georgius Agricola's work *De re metallica*

↑ Illustrations from Georgius Agricola's work *De re metallica*, 1556

Re-mining Identity: Digital Materialities, Hybrid Bodies, and Post-Industrial Heritage

How might a metallurgical handbook of the sixteenth century be made (un)productive as a score for the present? Our art project *Schmelzer:innen* (English: Smelters) poses its question in the space between craftsmanship and industrialization, between (de)colonial entanglements, live-action role-playing, and digital appropriation, asking how a local identity might be preserved and transformed.

At the center of our artistic practice stands an engagement with the materialities of the digital: with processes of translation, with the glitch, and with the question of how technology might be democratized and made accessible. We use modes of alienation as speculative forms of world-building in sculpture, installation, and performative scenarios. From the Middle Ages to the present, industrialization and progress have been shaped by the extraction of scarce raw materials and by shifting relations of human labor and technology. As artists, what interests us most is intervening critically in these histories.

The site of all this owes itself to a rumor. In 1168, so the story runs, carters on the road to Bohemia are said to have gathered silver-bearing ore from the ground, and the news – the first *Berggeschrey*, the first great cry of the mountains – traveled like wildfire. For eight hundred years thereafter silver ore was raised in the region around Freiberg in Saxony, latterly lead and zinc, until the work ceased to pay and was abandoned in 1968. What remains are the shafts, the poisoned soils, the oldest surviving academy of mining sciences in the world, and a well-appointed memory furnished with museums, miners' parades, ceremonial dressing, and reenactment.

This historical mining heritage still forms a cornerstone of the city's contemporary identity – an observation reflected in its public art programs, during which the sculpture *Schmelzer:innen* was completed.

On the square before the mining museum stands the silvery sculpture: three figures merging into one another, slightly over life-size, cast in aluminum from a 3D print. A historical smelter, a female smelting worker, and a third figure calculated in 2022 by an impoverished, low-performance AI based on historical woodcuts, and which has for that reason never depicted anyone at all. Set upon their garments are relief appliqués drawn from Georgius Agricola's *De re metallica*, that compendium of mining and metallurgy published in 1556. From it we have taken up those images in which women become visible as participants in the manifold labor processes surrounding the extraction of ore – a historical

presence that has until now been granted little weight and remains only faintly anchored in public consciousness.

The three are time travelers and appear doubly estranged: once translated into the coarse strokes of the woodcut, and a second time into the layer lines of the 3D print by which we reconstructed them, that pattern of ridges which arises whenever a body is built up out of nothing, stratum upon stratum. Digital fabrication lays bare its own manner of making. What stands there is a postdigital artifact that interweaves historical reconstruction with speculative invention, folding distinct times, bodies, and modes of craft production into one another.

De-coding / Re-coding

The city's bond with its historical identity also finds expression in an astonishingly active live-action role-playing scene. We captured several of the LARP performers – posing in historical uniforms and ceremonial dress – in a 3D scanning session and rendered them as digital twins.

This digital doubling into a three-dimensional data model carries the real object into a shape that is alterable and experimentally accessible; we would rather understand it as a test subject than as a portrait, and the relationship between the original image, the representation, and the new creation is no longer a linear sequence.

Modeling, Commons, Estrangement

In manual digital modeling processes, we further refine the models generated from scanning and reconstruction; using manipulation and estrangement tools, we correct or accentuate certain errors that arise during scanning and modeling. Perhaps the digital avatar requires, for a particular expression, a remix of new shoes, a garment, or even another body altogether. Which other figure might lend it all those things?

In this way, we enrich the models with fragments from digital archives and collections of objects that can be understood as new forms of the commons. Platforms such as Printables or Sketchfab make three-dimensional data sets accessible on an unprecedented scale; designers share their models there for further use, according to license, while reworkings can be fed back into the same circuit as remixes. Out of individual files arises an ongoing process of shared alteration, in which objects appear not as concluded property but as provisional states within their own continued revision.

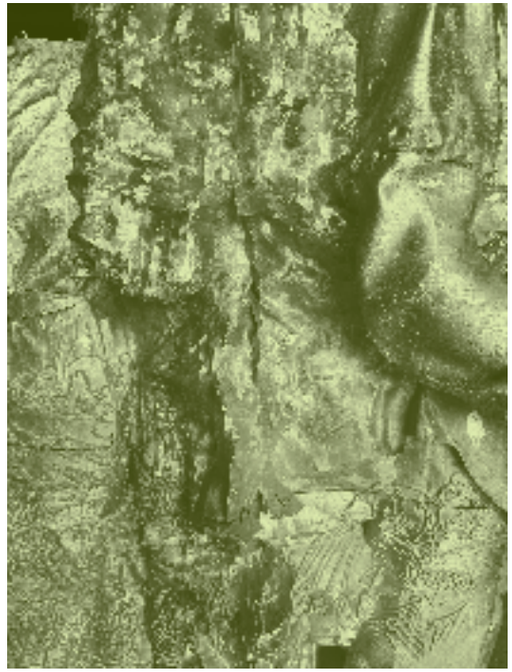
However, it is precisely the ease with which this circulation takes place that makes the question of who owns knowledge and creative expression – and from which cultural contexts the circulating forms originate – all the more pressing. Technical reproducibility and general availability do





↑ Hesse Wakil: *Schmelzer:innen*, rendering, 2025.





↑ Hesse Wakil: *Schmelzer:innen*, 2 × 2 × 1 m, partially recycled aluminum, 2026.

not suspend these contexts but sharpen the responsibility owed to what others have made. Where provenance becomes invisible and cultural forms appear indiscriminately as available resources, digital platforms and their users can also perpetuate colonial patterns of appropriation.

Digital commons should therefore not be determined solely by open access and ownership status, but also by the social and political conditions under which they are shared, modified, and disseminated.

The handling of cultural assets takes place within a tension between isolation and unrestricted accessibility. What is needed are practices of responsible sharing that enable interpretation and further development while setting limits on exploitative forms of appropriation.

The focus is thus on questions regarding the distribution of benefits, care work, recognition, and decision-making power: Who benefits from circulation? Who takes on the work of preservation? Who receives recognition, and who controls the infrastructures that make sharing possible in the first place?

At this point the library comes into view, an institution that has for centuries collected and ordered knowledge in the form of books and made it accessible to a public under historically shifting conditions. Might this specific lived experience be carried over in the future into the realm of digital commons, so that libraries become not merely their repositories but places in which provenance is documented, forms of access are negotiated, infrastructures are maintained, and new forms of collective authorship are explored?

Sign Systems of Hybrid Bodies

The traditional Freiberg mining dress that we recorded digitally is, beyond its function as historical outfitting, a complex system of signs. In its cuts, colors, attributes, and the overall assignment of individual garments, gender, rank, and function are made visible upon the body; the clothing thus carries with it those severe social hierarchies and designs of identity out of which it emerged. We understand our continued manual modeling, accordingly, not as a reconstruction but as an intervention into this inherited vocabulary of forms. By displacing proportions, recombining individual elements, and dissolving their unambiguous assignment to male or female dress, we attempt to carry that historical severity over into a more mobile form and to extend it in a spirit of play.

Hybridity serves here not as mere admixture but as a process of reinterpretation. In the hybrid Hyperdress, fragments of masculine- and feminine-coded clothing encounter one another without resolving into a

new and unambiguous identity. The resulting form remains connectable to the local pictorial tradition while at the same time withdrawing itself from that tradition's order. It is precisely this tension between recognition and redefinition that is decisive for us: how far can the historical motif be altered without losing its reference, and how much recognizability is required for the deviation to be legible as such at all, so that the inherited order might be renegotiated?

From Static Parade to Motion Capture

How might this choreography be opened, and how might a rigid order be carried over into improvisation and playful movement?

Where reenactment and LARP reach back to inherited garments, formations, and gestures, historical belonging is produced not only through visible signs but also through the disciplining of bodies. The ceremonial parade, in particular, follows a choreography of repetition: bearing, step sequence, and spatial order insert each individual into a collective image that presents rank, gender, and social function as apparently stable identities. We were interested in how this embodied order might be loosened without making its historical signs unrecognizable, and whether a different legibility of the figures could emerge from the tension between their traditional appearance and a movement foreign to it.

From public archives we selected open-source animation rigs bearing movement sequences that belong nowhere in the ceremonial repertoire of the miners' parade. We transferred these onto the digitally reconstructed figures, varying the sequences and developing improvised movements from them, cut to the measure of each figure. The clothing and its historical attributes remain recognizable, yet the bodies loosen from the static order of the group portrait and begin to carry their forms otherwise, stepping out of the poses that history intended for and handed down to them. Motion capture becomes in this way a procedure of transformation, one that sets inherited identities into motion.

Retargeting and the Ethics of Transferred Movement

When we apply the motion rig of one body to the digitally scanned form of another, a series of critical questions arise. At first, it seems astonishing, absurd, and funny to switch between salsa, hip-hop, and kung fu with a few clicks. These are nevertheless no neutral vocabularies of movement but specific Afro-Caribbean, Black US-American, and Chinese traditions, each with its own history of suppression and commercialization. How were these freely available "open source" rigs produced – which bodies were recorded, and to whom do the rights of use or of commercialization in these dances and movement sequences belong? How (un)equally are

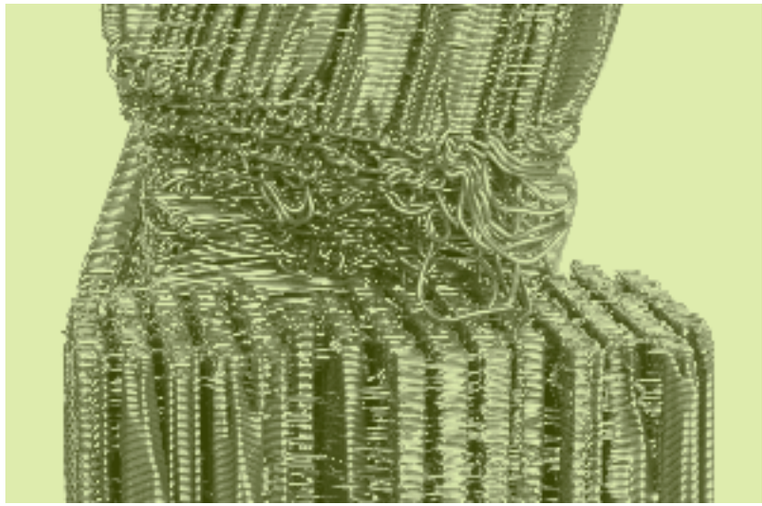


↑ Hesse Wakil: *Schmelzer:in*, preliminary study in hyperdress T-Pose, 2025



↑ Hesse Wakil: Open-source motion-tracking rigs on construction worker, 2025





↑ Hesse Wakil: Fidget Spinner Egocentric
Video footage (AI-generated), 2026

Fabian Hesse: (un)fused filament fabrication
Glitch Print, 2014

the possibilities of participation distributed, and who profits from this openness? Where does the boundary run between artistic freedom and cultural appropriation? For *Schmelzer:innen*, we decided to apply an interpretation of the idle pose, that fluid and unhurried manner of resting – a ground position lying beyond both labor and representation, and from which a great many other movements remain possible.

From Woodcut to 3D Printing

The 3D model of our figural design *Schmelzer:innen* was cut into several parts and prepared for printing. In the printing processes familiar from make- and hackspaces, bioplastic filaments are heated and laid down layer upon layer along calculated paths, so that a digital data set, at first wholly ungraspable, gradually takes on volume, surface, and weight, in the course of several hours. It's a fascinating passage to see how they grow from digital coordinates to a physically present form.

The coarse notches of the woodcut twist, entangle, and blur themselves into the grooves and stratifications left by the printer's nozzle, and a new relief grows out of the form.

Craft After AI: Machines That Can Do "Everything and Better"?

Following traditional methods, the foundry craftsmen transform the 3D-printed model into aluminum: the glowing liquid metal streams into the cavity of the ceramic shell and congeals into a new body. Sprues and attachment points are later removed by hand, transitions ground smooth, and the surface worked over. Digital form-giving, industrial material, and inherited foundry craft are in this way interlaced within the same body.

The myth of digitization and AI asserts again and again that machines are able to produce autonomously and creatively, which is a drastic simplification. Under the undertow of digital acceleration, nevertheless, the very concept of craft is itself changing: craft stands ever more for a particular relation to time, for human (co-)authorship, and for a form of devotion, and handmade objects become, among other things, a reservoir of lifetime and of working time.

Co-Authorship / Co-Creation: Situated Tools, Performative Glitches

In the interplay of human capacities and machinic processes, forms of skill particular to that interplay can develop. Postdigital craft arises wherever the machinic signature remains visible and is at the same time shaped by human decisions; the machine does not replace the hand but widens the space in which decisions become material.

Furthermore, the close relationship between decision-making and execution is crucial: materials have a life of their own, they offer resistance, tools leave marks, and mistakes can always happen. This gives rise to hybrid methodologies and requires specialized skills with precise workflows.

And how might machines be used otherwise, or against the grain of their standard scenarios? What possibilities are there for manipulating the 3D print, or for devising manual interventions into printing processes already under way? How might an irregular flow of material be used to force deviations in the layer structures? How might one turn to account the displacements of form produced by error, the motion blur of the scanning processes, certain gaps and algorithmic speculations? What poetics of prompting might be developed? And how might bias and preconception be averted, reversed, opened to discussion, and the strata of meaning newly arranged?

Can computerized numerical (un)control be joined to the flow properties of traditional casting? What new tools might be invented for the ends of robotic arms? Or perhaps it is precisely a simple pencil on a sheet of paper that grounds us after the last doomscroll, and that will be waiting for us on the day of the AI apocalypse?

Print Speed

The human hand is no romantic counter-proposal to the machine; what matters is whether a process triggers our conscious attention or disappears into an opaque chain of abstracted protocols – the human touch.

The current digital acceleration in digital manufacturing, mass production, and AI is creating a pull that is permeating all areas of human activity, while craftsmanship operates at the pace of biological systems and is increasingly valued for the fact that objects also embody the time and human dedication invested in them.

Craft may therefore also be understood as a practice of appropriate pace. It is directed not against technology itself, but rather against the assumption that every process ought to be optimized according to one single logic. Certain forms of knowledge emerge only through repetition and through forms of attention that cannot simply be scaled up.

This slowness should not be understood as a nostalgic retreat, but more as a critique of an economy that organizes even creative labor on the model of immediate availability. An object in whose making one has taken part possesses a meaning altogether different from that of a product whose origin vanishes into a supply chain. Postdigital production therefore offers less a return to some unscathed world of craft than the possibility of renewal, and of grasping production itself as an experience that builds knowledge.

Infrastructures of Making and the Politics of Shared Tools: Open Workshops as Third Places

While commercial digital platforms convey an ideal of democratization, they siphon off usage data in one direction only. Hackspaces, by contrast, operate under the claim of counter-infrastructures: transparent, physical places in which machines and knowledge alike are shared.

Since the 2010s, FabLabs, hack- and makespaces have spread widely in many places, at a remove both from the traditional academic world and corporate infrastructures. They afford "access to tools" – to 3D printers, laser cutters, CNC mills, and electronics workstations. They are production sites instead of mere workshops: at their best they are third places between institution, market, and private experiment, places in which technical systems are dismantled, understood, appropriated, and reassembled, and which empower people to produce.

In this sense, FabLabs are not only technical but also democratic spaces. They promise a shift from consumption to production, from dependency to agency, from black box to shared infrastructure. Whoever learns to open machines, to alter files, to adapt software and to develop workflows of their own wins back a measure of technological sovereignty – a sovereignty, however, that is not to be understood in individual terms alone. In the face of geopolitical crises, the question of such infrastructural policies becomes all the more urgent. Since the Russian assault on Ukraine, and in view of the growing unpredictability of global power blocs and technological dependencies, it has become visible how vulnerable societies are when they delegate their central technical infrastructures wholly to a handful of states, platforms, or corporations.

Building of one's own technological infrastructures must not, however, relapse into a new nationalism. The alternative to dependency is not seclusion but another form of universalism: a universalism of shared tools, open protocols, local adaptability, and collective maintenance.

From its outset, the digital has been bound up with the promise of the universal: copyability, translatability, scalability, and global access. This universal must at the same time be safeguarded from its own tendency toward standardization. It must remain open to the very local, to individual handwriting, to regional practices, situated materials, and differing cultural contexts.

Could libraries, in addition to their existing functions, also serve as platforms that open their spaces and infrastructure to diverse communities, thereby strengthening their local roots? As places of learning and

gathering, they could connect books – as repositories of knowledge – with embodied forms of knowledge, traditional practices, and collectively generated insights. The library can thus be understood as a physical and social infrastructure in which knowledge takes on a material, situational, and communal form, and is passed on, tested, and recreated. It opens up spaces for slowness and care, for collaborative creation, and for the sharing of experiences, skills, and resources.

Worldbuilding, or Designing Realities

Such infrastructures of creation are ultimately cultural constructs, and they play a decisive role in determining whether digitization further concentrates power or enables collective action. A postdigital practice must let knowledge circulate freely without rendering that openness exploitable; it should grant access without leveling local differences, and acknowledge expertise without producing new exclusions.

Here lies the productive tension between commons and craft: the commons ask how resources might be shared, while craft recalls that knowledge is situated and embodied, that it requires time and constitutes a form of attentiveness. Together they point toward a technological future that aims not at frictionless full automation but articulates relatedness instead.

Places such as open workshops and libraries, thought further than they have been, might thus become laboratories of new cultural agreements. What will prove decisive is not only which products, but predominantly which relations and which forms of living together emerge from infrastructures made in common.

Fabian Hesse & Mitra Wakil (Augsburg and Kabul) are an artist duo who explore critical engagements with digital fabrication technologies. They live and work in Berlin and Leipzig. At the heart of Hesse Wakil's artistic practice is an engagement with the materiality of the digital, including processes of translation and glitching, as well as questions about how technology might be democratized and made accessible. Through sculpture, installation, and performative scenarios, they mobilize strategies of estrangement as speculative modes of world-building. Their work has been shown internationally at various institutions as well as in public space. As professors and heads of the AV workshops at the Academy of Fine Arts Leipzig (HGB), they teach media arts and develop workshop infrastructures for artistic research in emergent media and digital materialities.

Three Approaches to Craft and Community:
Soft Systems / Inclusive Embroidery / Photo-Transfer

Between March and June 2026, the Goethe-Institut Belgrad implemented three distinct projects under the *Common Crafts – Common Libraries* program, each rooted in a different craft and addressed to a different community. *Soft Systems*, a series of five workshops developed with Nova Iskra, the Museum of Applied Art (MAA), and the Center for the Promotion of Science (CPN), brought together around fifty young designers and creatives to translate generative code into hand and machine embroidery. *Inclusive Embroidery*, led by artist Milica Dukić in cooperation with the street magazine *Liceulice*, invited socially vulnerable participants to three sessions of collective textile work with reused materials in the Goethe-Institut Library. *Photo-Transfer*, conceived by artist Sonja Lundin, moved from participatory workshops to a public exhibition in the library's gallery Menjačnica, visited by 276 people, in which images transferred onto stone, porcelain, and recycled packaging reflected on how technology reshapes collective perception.

Taken together, the three projects explore the intersection of traditional craft, contemporary artistic practice, and social engagement, and demonstrate the versatility of craft as a medium connecting technology, tradition, and community, thus positioning the library as a hub for creative experimentation and social dialogue.

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ORGANIZATION AND COORDINATION
Dr. Selman Trtovac (Goethe-Institut Belgrad)

FORMAT
Workshop series

CONCEPT
Goethe-Institut Belgrad, in collaboration with Nova Iskra (Ivan Manojlović) and the Museum of Applied Art (Jelena Popović), within the CraftWork 4.0 All and Crafting Sustainability projects

SOFT SYSTEMS: GENERATIVE ART AND EMBROIDERY

A workshop series bridging computational design and textile craft, in which participants turned generative Processing sketches into embroidered objects.

Generative embroidery Hybridity Identity Co-creation

FACILITATORS / EXPERTS
Aleksandra Jovanić, artist and digital media educator
Katarina Šaptović (KezVez), designer and embroidery specialist

PARTNER INSTITUTIONS
Nova Iskra
Museum of Applied Art (MAA)
Center for the Promotion of Science (CPN)

FUNDING
CraftWork 4.0 All, Crafting Sustainability (Goethe-Institut)

TIMEFRAME
March 2026: five workshops (2–4 h each)

PARTICIPANTS
Young artisans, designers, and creatives with interdisciplinary backgrounds
12–15 participants per session, approx. 50 in total

Context *Soft Systems* bridged traditional tactile crafts with computational logic. Participants explored the intersection of code and fabric, learning to perceive digital algorithms not as cold calculations but as a personal "digital signature" woven into physical objects. The artistic goal was to foster hybrid practices combining generative systems with embroidery; socially, the workshops encouraged collaboration and reflection on authorship in the digital age; educationally, they introduced coding as a creative tool, linking digital literacy with craft traditions relevant to the local design and maker community.

Methodology

Program Sequence

1 **Introduction to the Processing software and generative systems** Building systems rather than static images; system thinking and modular design.

2 **Coding exercises** Exploring variables, loops, and randomness to create modular patterns.

3 **Vector translation** Translating code into vector formats suitable for textile production.

4 **Transition from screen to needle** Applying hand embroidery techniques to the generative designs.

5 **Machine embroidery practice** Density, direction, and the limitations of the medium.

6 **Guided reflection** Authorship, hybridity, and the tension between algorithmic perfection and the resistance of thread and fabric.

Methods Coding exercises in Processing; vector translation; practicing hand and machine embroidery; guided reflection

Materials and Tools Computers, Processing software, embroidery threads, fabrics, sewing machines

Setting and Layout The workshops were hosted at the Goethe-Institut Belgrad, Nova Iskra Savamala, and the Center for the Promotion of Science (CPN). Each venue was organized as a hybrid learning and making space, equipped with computers for coding exercises and workstations

for hand and machine embroidery. Participants first learned the basics of generative design in Processing and then translated their digital patterns into embroidered objects. The layout supported collaboration, experimentation, and the exchange of knowledge between designers, artisans, and digital creators.

Outcomes and Reflections Participants developed unique digital-physical works combining generative design with embroidery. The surprise was how "imperfections" in hand embroidery added value to algorithmic patterns, while machine embroidery revealed constraints that sparked discussion on authorship. The program produced tangible embroidered pieces and fostered ongoing collaboration between the partner institutions.

GOETHE-INSTITUT
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FORMAT
Workshop series

CONCEPT
Developed by artist Milica Dukić, in collaboration with the Goethe-Institut and *Liceulice* magazine, within the institute's annual program on ecology and sustainability

INCLUSIVE EMBROIDERY

A collaborative embroidery series using reused materials, offering vulnerable groups new skills, self-expression, and community in a familiar library setting.

Embroidery Care Belonging Circularity

FACILITATOR / EXPERT
Milica Dukić, artist and embroidery facilitator

PHOTOGRAPHERS
Selman Trtovac, Biljana Pajić, and Jovana Tvrdišić
(copyright: Goethe-Institut Belgrad)

PARTNER INSTITUTION
Liceulice magazine

TIMEFRAME
May–June 2026: three workshops (3 h each)

PARTICIPANTS
Socially vulnerable groups,
including *Liceulice* street magazine vendors
8–12 participants per session,
approx. 30 in total

Context The *Inclusive Embroidery* workshops focused on embroidery as a tool for solidarity and sustainability, emphasizing the creative potential of everyday materials and the role of handcraft in fostering inclusion. Participants continued working on the textile piece "Tower of Cards," initiated during Dukić's solo exhibition *Games of Chance and Something More*. The artistic goal was to highlight embroidery as a contemporary practice; socially, the workshops offered vulnerable groups a safe, familiar environment to acquire new skills, express themselves, and strengthen social bonds; educationally, they emphasized reuse and ecological awareness.

Methodology

Program Sequence

1 Introduction to embroidery techniques and recycled materials
2 Collaborative work on the "Tower of Cards" textile piece, continued across the three sessions
3 Group reflection on sustainability and solidarity

Methods Collaborative embroidery, reuse of materials, guided conversation, collective creation

Materials and Tools Recycled fabrics, threads, embroidery tools

Setting and Layout The workshops were held at the Goethe-Institut Library, whose familiar atmosphere offered participants a safe and accessible environment. Large shared tables supported collaborative embroidery, while recycled materials and tools were made available in a communal workspace. The layout encouraged interaction, peer learning, and collective work on the "Tower of Cards" textile piece, reinforcing the project's focus on inclusion, care, and community building.

Outcomes and Reflections Participants valued the continuity of working in a familiar space. The collective artwork embodied solidarity and ecological awareness; the surprise was the strong emotional bond formed among participants. The program produced a tangible textile piece and strengthened ties with *Liceulice*.

GOETHE-INSTITUT
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FORMAT
Workshops, exhibition

CONCEPT
Developed by artist Sonja Lundin, presented at the Goethe-Institut Library Gallery “Menjačnica”

FACILITATOR / EXPERT
Sonja Lundin, artist, mentor, and exhibition curator

PHOTOGRAPHERS
Selman Trtovac, Biljana Pajić, and Jovana Tvrdišić (copyright: Goethe-Institut Belgrad)

PHOTO-TRANSFER: THE SUN WILL CONTINUE TO SHINE ON EARTH FOR BILLIONS OF YEARS

Participatory photo-transfer workshops, culminating in an exhibition that set Apollo’s institutional archive against Artemis’s intimate amateur imagery.

Photo-transfer Memory Situated knowledge Hybridity

TIMEFRAME
April 2026: two preparatory photo-transfer workshops (3 h each)

June 2026: exhibition opening and public program

PARTICIPANTS
Young creatives in the workshops, general public for the exhibition
15 workshop participants; 276 exhibition visitors

Context The project explored photo-transfer techniques on diverse surfaces such as stone, porcelain, cardboard, and recycled packaging, with the participatory workshop outcomes presented in a public exhibition. The artistic concept reflected on the Artemis II mission (April 2026), the first crewed lunar flyby since Apollo 17: Lundin contrasted the institutionalized visual archive of Apollo with the fragmented, amateur, and intimate imagery of Artemis II, questioning how technological development reshapes collective perception and belief. Through the inherently “lossy” process of photo-transfer, where ink resists full translation onto new surfaces, material resistance became part of meaning: each transferred image carried the weight of its substrate, raising questions about authority, permanence, and the act of witnessing.

Methodology

Program Sequence

1 Workshops introducing photo-transfer techniques
2 Application of printed images to varied surfaces and materials
3 Curation and opening of the exhibition, highlighting how material resistance shapes meaning

Methods Hands-on photo-transfer, participatory creation, guided reflection, exhibition curation

Materials and Tools Recycled ceramics, wood, metal, cardboard, printed photographs

Setting and Layout Held in the Goethe-Institut Library, the workshops brought together young creatives in a collaborative studio setting. Using a photograph of a rocket launch as the common source image, participants experimented with photo-transfer techniques on a variety of materials. Shared worktables encouraged discussion and the comparison of results, highlighting how different surfaces altered and reshaped the same visual source. The works created during the workshops became part of the final exhibition at the Goethe-Institut Library Gallery “Menjačnica,” establishing a direct connection between the participatory process and the exhibition outcome.

Outcomes and Reflections The exhibition produced tangible artworks contextualizing digital imagery. The surprise was how material resistance shaped meaning differently for each substrate. The program continued beyond the pilot through the public exhibition and the dialogue it opened.

BIOGRAPHIES

Milica Dukić is an independent visual artist and member of SULUV. She holds MFAs in painting and drawing from the Academy of Arts in Novi Sad. Working with embroidery, photography, and textiles, her practice focuses on inclusive art and marginalized communities. In 2024, she was shortlisted for the Mangelos Award and received a Special Mention at the 60th October Salon.

Dr. Aleksandra Jovanić is a Belgrade-based artist and programmer with a PhD in Digital Arts and a BSc in Computer Science. Her practice combines interactive art, art games, and generative art, exploring data visualization, optical illusions, and concepts of truth and reality. Her work has been exhibited internationally, and she teaches at the University of Arts in Belgrade.

Katarina Šaptović (KezVez) is a freelance artist and founder of the KezVez brand, exploring contemporary hand embroidery on textiles and other surfaces since 2018. She has created numerous streetwear collections, leads embroidery workshops, and has presented her work in several group exhibitions and three solo shows, using embroidery as a medium of contemporary artistic expression.

Sonja Lundin earned her BFA in Printmaking and MFA in Painting from the Faculty of Fine Arts, University of Arts in Belgrade. Combining painting, printmaking, and photo-transfer techniques, she explores family, multicultural identity, and everyday life shaped by rapid technological change. Her work has been presented in solo and group exhibitions across Serbia.

Ivan Manojlović is a curator and cultural manager with over 16 years of experience in cultural heritage, international cooperation, and cultural innovation. He has held leading roles at the Museum of Yugoslavia and the Cultural Centre of Belgrade, and co-founded the Center for Yugoslav Studies (Cejus). At Nova Iskra, he develops international partnerships connecting cultural institutions, researchers, artists, and innovation networks.

Jelena Popović is the Senior Curator of the Collection of Contemporary Applied Art and Design at the Museum of Applied Art in Belgrade, where she has worked for over 17 years researching, interpreting, and presenting 20th- and 21st-century design and applied arts. At the kick-off meeting for the *Common Crafts – Common Libraries* project in Athens in 2025, she presented “From Preservation to Participation: New Roles for Libraries and Museums,” exploring how libraries and museums can act as living laboratories for circular knowledge and shared responsibility.

Dr. Selman Trtovac has headed the Information and Library Department at the Goethe-Institut Belgrad since 2012. Holding a PhD in art, he is responsible for the library’s contribution to regional projects within Goethe-Institut Region Europe 1, fostering cross-border cooperation and cultural exchange. Through the long-term program “Art in Library,” he connects contemporary art from the Western Balkans with library audiences, and expands the library’s role as a space for cultural dialogue and community building in Serbia.

GOETHE-INSTITUT
Goethe-Institut Rumänien, Romania
bibliothek-bukarest@goethe.de

FORMAT
Exhibition, workshop series, digital forum

CONCEPT
Cristina Zanfirescu, curator

ORGANIZATION AND COORDINATION
Francesca Szöke (Goethe-Institut Rumänien)

FACILITATOR
Cristina Zanfirescu, curator

EXPERTS
Nora Neghină, psychotherapist; Oana Lăpădatu, art consultant; Matei Radu, art professor; Marta Zamfir, researcher of traditional doily-making techniques

PHOTOGRAPHER
Alexandra Ivan

MILEU 2.0: WHEN THE CORD MEETS THE ALGORITHM

The *mileu* (doily) as living memory between craftsmanship and artificial intelligence: an exhibition, intergenerational workshops, and a digital forum.

Mileu-making | Intergenerational exchange | Memory | Hybridity

PARTNERS
Vizitiu Digital & Space Innovation Collective

MEDIA PARTNERS
Scena9, Zeppelin

PRESS
Irina Radu, Mara Oğlakçı, Daria Ghiu
(Radio România Cultural, "Oraşul Vorbeşte"),
Andra Gherega (Radio România Actualităţi)

TIMEFRAME
May 2026: exhibition opening
June–July 2026: four *mileu*-making workshops (4 × 3 h)
July 2026: finissage

PARTICIPANTS
Intergenerational: senior women (recruited through the social services of Sector 1, senior clubs, radio and social media) · Textile art students from UNArte (by invitation) · Exhibition contributors and event audiences via open call · 15 workshop participants · A total of 87 visitors of the exhibition and events open to the public

Context The project *Mileu 2.0: When the Cord Meets the Algorithm*, initiated by the Goethe-Institut Rumänien within the framework of the *Common Crafts – Common Libraries* program, created a meeting place between traditional craftsmanship and new technologies, bringing different generations, practices, and perspectives into dialogue. At its center stands the *mileu* (doily), the crocheted lace piece found in Romanian homes for generations. The Institut's library became a collaborative space where women who had crocheted *mileuri* during the communist era worked alongside textile art students, united by a shared interest in preserving and revaluing a craft heritage with deep cultural significance.

The project unfolded in three dimensions. The community dimension took shape in an exhibition, opened in May following an open call inviting Bucharest residents to contribute *mileuri* from their personal collections; each exhibited piece carried its own story and emotional value.

The intergenerational dimension consisted of four workshops bringing together students and senior women. For the students, the workshops were a first opportunity to learn the technique of cord-making, acquiring fundamental skills, creating their first pattern, a star, and developing a deeper appreciation for textile cultural heritage. For the senior participants, the workshops became a space for meeting others, sharing experiences, and building community.

The digital dimension addressed the preservation of the knowledge shared in the workshops. A dedicated IT team photographed the participants' hands at work, capturing each step and the characteristic movements of the craft, while interviews with the senior participants documented both the technique and the social and family history of the *mileu* tradition. These materials form the basis of an online platform designed as an intergenerational forum on *mileu* heritage, accessible to participants and to textile students of UNArte, extending the encounter from the physical into the digital space and turning informally transmitted patterns and knowledge into a lasting archive.

Methodology

Program Sequence

1 **Research and networking** Visiting the Textile Arts Department of UNArte; mapping textile artists working in Bucharest; contacting senior citizen clubs and the social services of Bucharest's districts to recruit participants.

2 **Open call and exhibition** Inviting Bucharest residents to lend *mileuri* from their homes; collecting and exhibiting 12 pieces;

opening with a theatrical performance inspired by the Balkan tradition of drinking coffee and a psychotherapist's talk on the positive effects of handicrafts on well-being.

3 **Intergenerational workshops** Learning cord-making through demonstrations and work in pairs, with homework between sessions. When the invited artists could not attend due to daytime scheduling, their places were filled by two passionate participants recruited through radio interviews; as awareness spread, journalists and a textile artist joined the group.

4 **Free Wednesday crafting movement** Hosting this informal group, which meets weekly for handicrafts and other creative activities, at the final workshop.

5 **Documentation and digitization** Photographing hand movements throughout the sessions; recording interviews on technique and on the social history of the *mileu*; uploading the materials to the project's online forum.

6 **Finissage** Closing the exhibition with a presentation by researcher Marta Zamfir on Romanian lace, discussing its history, distinctive features, and cultural value.

Methods

Peer-to-peer craft transmission Contextual introduction to the history of the *mileu* in Romania and direct learning of the Romanian technique from experienced makers.

Demonstration-based learning Live demonstrations of making the cord for a *mileu*.

Guided conversation around personal materials The senior participants brought *mileuri* from their personal collections and presented different styles.

Group reflection circle Open discussion on experience, learning outcomes, and the role of the library as a community-building space, combining a craft hobby with conversations about the past and family life in the 1970s–80s.

Materials and Tools 4 spools of thick *macramé* cord, 2 spools of thin *macramé* cord, 7 crochet hooks, a set of sewing needles, 2 spools of thread, 2 pairs of scissors.

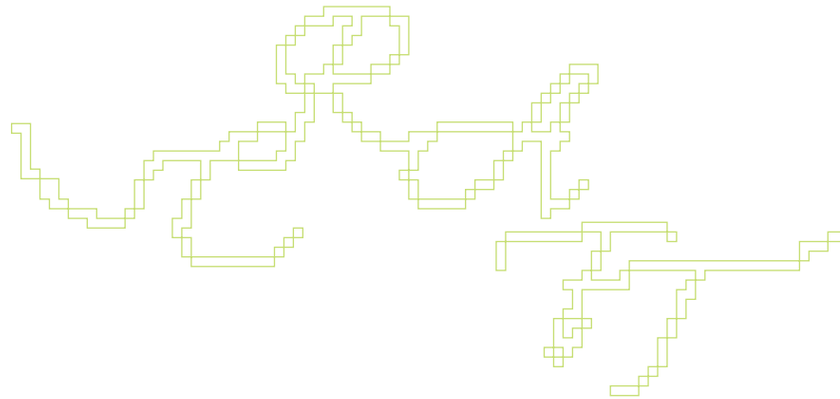
Setting and Layout Arranging tables as one round table for demonstration, practicing in pairs, assigning homework between sessions to continue the cord work at home.

Outcomes and Reflections The pilot successfully brought together participants from different generations and backgrounds, including experienced makers, students, artists, and members of the local community. The combination of practical craft workshops, storytelling, and digital documentation created a welcoming learning environment in which participants not only learned traditional lace-making techniques but also exchanged personal memories and cultural knowledge.

The most striking outcome was the participants' engagement. Among the senior women, initial reserve gradually evolved into open, confident participation, visible even in the care many took in preparing for the gatherings, often arriving elegantly dressed and clearly looking forward to them. The project demonstrated that a craft often perceived as old-fashioned can become a platform for intergenerational dialogue and creative experimentation when combined with contemporary tools and participatory methods. This appeal reached beyond the library: Bucharest's cultural press covered the project in a written article and a video feature.

The program produced several tangible outputs: a handmade *mileu* and cords by each participant, audio and video recordings of the making process, an online forum with documentation and learning materials, and the public exhibition *Mileu 2.0*. It continues beyond the pilot: both students and seniors have expressed the wish to meet regularly from September onward in the Goethe-Institut library, and participants stay in contact through the forum and a WhatsApp group, sharing articles and videos about lace-making worldwide.

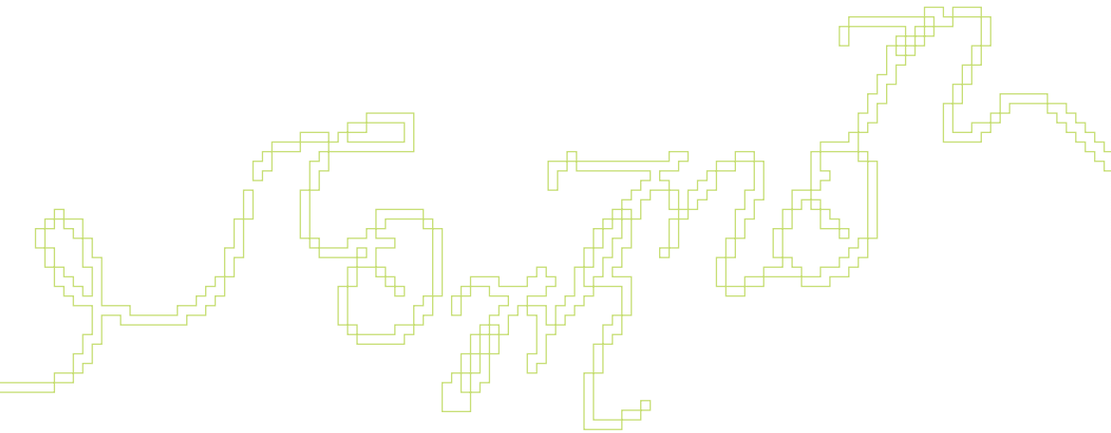
If the program were repeated, additional workshops would allow participants to develop more advanced skills and create more ambitious collaborative works.



BIOGRAPHIES

Cristina Zanfirescu has worked in public relations for over a decade and is passionate about culture, traditional crafts, and community building. She develops intergenerational cultural initiatives that strengthen social ties and dialogue. From 2017 to 2022, she was press and communication officer at the Goethe-Institut Rumänien, coordinating cultural campaigns, public events, and international collaborations.

Francesca Szöke heads the Information and Library Department at the Goethe-Institut Rumänien, where she has been working since 2005. Alongside her dedication to promoting German literature and culture, she places a strong emphasis on innovative initiatives that support the growth and transformation of libraries. Her professional interests focus on media literacy and the fight against fake news, sustainability, community engagement, and the advancement of digital competencies.



GOETHE-INSTITUT
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info-ukraine@goethe.de

FORMAT
Workshops (theory session and hands-on digital making)

CONCEPT
Maria Shubchyk, Olha Dubova
(Goethe-Institut Ukraine Library)

ORGANIZATION AND COORDINATION
Maria Shubchyk, Olha Dubova
(Goethe-Institut Ukraine Library)

FACILITATORS
Esma Adzhieva and the team of the NGO Alem

EXPERTS
Esma Adzhieva, head of the NGO Alem
Dr. Oleksii Savchenko, historian of the Crimean Tatars
Elvira Musledinova, Crimean Tatar artist, *Ornek* specialist

PATTERN CULTURE LAB: ORNEK A WORKSHOP FOR PATTERNS, STORIES, AND COMMUNITY

Ornek, the traditional embroidered ornament of the Crimean Tatars, reinterpreted through digital cutting technology into contemporary objects, connecting heritage education with digital making.

Ornek Identity Memory Hybridity

PHOTOGRAPHER
Oleksandra Barbados

PARTNER INSTITUTIONS
NGO Alem, National Museum of the History of Ukraine and its Treasury

TIMEFRAME
July 2026: two workshops (4 h each) for different audiences

PARTICIPANTS
Groups of up to 20 participants: teenagers and adults (via open call)

Context The Crimean Tatars are the indigenous people of the Crimean Peninsula and one of Ukraine's Indigenous communities. Their history has been marked by repeated displacement and cultural erasure. In 1944, the entire Crimean Tatar population was forcibly deported by the Soviet regime, thousands of place names were replaced and their presence was systematically erased from official historiography. Only in the late 1980s could Crimean Tatars gradually return to their homeland and reclaim their history and identity. Following Russia's illegal annexation of Crimea in 2014, many Crimean Tatars once again lost their homes and were forced into displacement. Preserving and transmitting their cultural heritage has therefore become not only an act of remembrance but an act of cultural resilience.

Ornek is the traditional ornamental system of the Crimean Tatars: stylised floral, geometric, and symbolic elements, each carrying its own meaning. Some symbols represent family, fertility, prosperity, or protection; others express wishes for harmony, strength, or continuity. Rather than functioning as decoration alone, *Ornek* is a visual language in which symbols combine into meaningful compositions that communicate stories, hopes, and values across generations. In 2021, it was inscribed on UNESCO's Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity; the nomination dossier was prepared by Esma Adzhieva, head of the NGO Alem, whose work has played a crucial role in safeguarding this living heritage.

Within the framework of *Common Crafts – Common Libraries*, the Goethe-Institut Ukraine and the NGO Alem developed a series of workshops combining heritage education, creative making, and intercultural dialogue. Rather than presenting *Ornek* as a museum artifact, the project explored how traditional knowledge can remain relevant in contemporary society: participants learned about Crimean Tatar history, discovered the symbolic language of *Ornek* and translated its meanings into their own creative works using digital fabrication technologies. The workshops aimed to raise awareness of the Crimean Tatars as an indigenous people of Ukraine, to create direct dialogue between Crimean Tatars and library visitors, to strengthen intercultural understanding through shared creative practice, and to show how digital technologies can support the preservation and contemporary reinterpretation of intangible heritage.

Methodology

Program Sequence

1 Research and co-creation Developing the program in close cooperation with Crimean Tatar experts, the NGO Alem, historians

and cultural practitioners; rooting all educational materials in existing research on Crimean Tatar history, symbolism, and intangible heritage.

2 Open call Recruiting two groups of up to 20 participants, both teenagers and adults.

3 Theoretical introduction (1 h) Presenting the history of the Crimean Tatars and the context of displacement and return; explaining the symbolism of *Ornek* with the historian, complemented by the personal stories of the Crimean Tatar facilitator; introducing Crimean Tatar literature, language, and writing traditions.

4 Digital making, first stage (2 h, hands-on part) Creating greeting cards decorated with *Ornek* motifs and accompanied by traditional Crimean Tatar proverbs.

5 Digital making, second stage Designing personal symbolic compositions; selecting colors and ornamental elements; cutting and heat-pressing the designs onto T-shirts, so that participants interpret the tradition rather than reproduce it.

6 Continuation Donating the Cricut equipment and materials to the partner museum after the pilot; continuing the format at the Goethe-Institut Ukraine Library with further workshops on Crimean Tatar culture.

Methods

Heritage education Exploring the historical background of Crimea and the deportation before any practical work ("context before creation").

Participatory storytelling Personal stories of Crimean Tatar facilitators complementing academic knowledge and creating an emotional connection.

Learning by making Actively interpreting traditional symbolic elements with Cricut digital fabrication instead of passively observing heritage.

Dialogue and cultural exchange Creative collaboration as a medium for conversations about identity, memory, belonging, and cultural diversity.

Transferable format Combining accessible digital tools with cultural storytelling so the format can be adapted by libraries, museums, and schools to different communities and heritages.

Psychosocial support Integrating the experiences and materials, together with the NGO Alem, into a broader methodology of culturally grounded support that strengthens resilience and social connectedness among participants affected by displacement or trauma.

Materials and Tools

Cricut Maker with supplies (iron-on vinyl, blades, infusible ink markers), Cricut heat press, white cotton T-shirts, hand-drawn *Ornek* sketches by the artist, transferred into SVG files, SVG files created by the Cricut specialist and published in open access.

Setting and Layout

All events were held at the Goethe-Institut Ukraine Library, as the partner museum's exhibition remained closed until the end of July 2026 due to damage caused by heavy shelling. The Library has its own makerspace, which provided an ideal setting for the workshops. Due to the high level of interest in the second workshop, the session moved to a larger seminar room to accommodate more participants. The setup itself is simple and adaptable. It requires tables, a screen, a plotter, cutting materials and tools, as well as T-shirts, cardboard, and other materials for creating the designs. One of the strengths of the method is its flexibility: it can be replicated in almost any space and adapted to groups of different sizes, without requiring specialized infrastructure.

Outcomes and Reflections

The workshops demonstrated that traditional cultural heritage can successfully engage contemporary audiences when combined with participatory learning and digital technologies. Participants expressed particular appreciation for the opportunity to meet Crimean Tatar facilitators directly and to discover the meanings hidden behind the symbolic language of *Ornek*.

One of the most valuable outcomes was that participants did not simply reproduce traditional patterns but consciously selected symbols representing wishes for protection, family, hope, or prosperity, transforming heritage into something personally meaningful. The Cricut technology proved an effective bridge between traditional craftsmanship

and contemporary creative practice: participants with no previous experience produced high-quality objects within a single workshop, increasing both motivation and confidence.

The pilot also generated tangible outputs, including dozens of personalized postcards and T-shirts, educational materials, and a transferable workshop methodology. The project continues beyond the pilot: the Cricut equipment and materials will be donated to the National Museum of the History of Ukraine, enabling the museum to produce *Ornek*-inspired educational and souvenir products for its shop, and the format continues at the Goethe-Institut Ukraine Library with further workshops on Crimean Tatar culture, including sessions on traditional Crimean Tatar coffee culture, another element recognized by UNESCO as intangible cultural heritage.

Looking ahead, the methodology could be expanded to other elements of Crimean Tatar intangible heritage and adapted for schools, museums, libraries, and community centers in Ukraine and internationally.

BIOGRAPHIES

Esma Adzhieva is head of the NGO Alem and an expert in safeguarding the intangible cultural heritage of the Crimean Tatars, an Indigenous people of Ukraine. She authored the nomination dossier for *Ornek*, which was inscribed on UNESCO's Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity.

Oleksii Savchenko holds a PhD in History and is Deputy Director General for Research at the National Museum of the History of Ukraine, where his research focuses on the history, culture, and heritage of the Crimean Tatars. He is the co-curator of the exhibition project *Miras. The Heritage* and co-author of the accompanying publication on Crimean Tatar cultural heritage.

Elvira Musledinova is a master of decorative and applied arts specializing in Crimean Tatar embroidery and the Ornek ornamental tradition. Through her artistic practice, she combines traditional techniques with contemporary interpretations, contributing to the safeguarding, continuity, and promotion of the living cultural heritage of the Crimean Tatar people.

Olha Dubova holds a master's degree in Philology from Kyiv National Linguistic University and has been responsible for library and information services at the Goethe-Institut Ukraine since June 2024. She previously headed the Foreign Language Literature Department at the National Library of Ukraine for Children.

Maria Shubchyk is head of communications and library at the Goethe-Institut Ukraine. With over fifteen years of experience, she works with Ukrainian and German libraries, authors, publishers, festivals, and cultural institutions. Her work focuses on culture, media literacy, international cooperation, disinformation, and the culture of remembrance.

THE EXPANDED LIBRARY: ECOLOGY, REPAIR, COMMONS



The three programs in this chapter move the library out of the reading room: onto shared worktables where torn clothes are mended in Istanbul, into a botanical garden and a courtyard in Yerevan where children turn endangered wildflowers into ceramics, and onto an underused terrace in Zagreb where students design and the public builds a garden of raised beds, some of them on wheels. None of these programs produced anything the library would once have cataloged. Each produced something the library now keeps: a repair culture, a habit of photographing a rare flower instead of picking it, a garden with a planting calendar and a seed exchange.

Shannon Mattern's "Library as Infrastructure," written in 2014 and reprinted here, asked how far the public library can be stretched, and answered by describing it as several infrastructures at once – social, technological, and intellectual – that have to be read together. Her argument that libraries should slow people down rather than turn them into engines of productivity became one of the working assumptions of the Athens meeting, where librarians described their institutions as relational infrastructures and commons. The three libraries in this chapter follow that logic in practice: they lend not only books but tools, space, and time, and they treat what grows from this – a repaired garment, a seed exchange, a garden that needs watering in August – as part of the collection.

Commons Circularity Care

← Planting workshop on the library terrace during the Open Day.
Modular Urban Garden, GI Kroatien, September 2026.
Photo: Martina Ćosić Vuglec



1



2



3



5



6



4

1, 2 *From Observation to Form*, ceramics workshop with teenagers, GI Armenien, June 2026. Photo: Eduard Tadevosyan

3, 4 *Modular Urban Garden*, carpentry workshop, GI Kroatien, June 2026. Photos: Martina Ćosić Vuglec and Igor Crnković

5, 6 *Café Reparo: Textile Repair Workshop*, GI Istanbul, July 2026. Photos: Mete Kaan Özdilek

Shannon Mattern

LIBRARY AS INFRASTRUCTURE

Reading room, social service center, innovation lab. How far can we stretch the public library?

First published in *Places* Journal, June 2014. Reprinted by kind permission of the author and *Places* Journal.

Melvil Dewey was a one-man Silicon Valley born a century before Steve Jobs. He was the quintessential Industrial Age entrepreneur, but unlike the Carnegies and Rockefellers, with their industries of heavy materiality and heavy labor, Dewey sold ideas. His ambition revealed itself early: in 1876, shortly after graduating from Amherst College, he copyrighted his library classification scheme. That same year, he helped found the American Library Association, served as founding editor of *Library Journal*, and launched the American Metric Bureau, which campaigned for adoption of the metric system. He was 24 years old. He had already established the Library Bureau, a company that sold (and helped standardize) library supplies, furniture, media display and storage devices, and equipment for managing the circulation of collection materials. Its catalog (which would later include another Dewey invention, the hanging vertical file) represented the library as a "machine" of uplift and enlightenment that enabled proto-Taylorist approaches to public education and the provision of social services. As chief librarian at Columbia College, Dewey established the first library school—called, notably, the School of Library *Economy*—whose first class was 85% female; then he brought the school to Albany, where he directed the New York State Library. In his spare time, he founded the Lake Placid Club and helped win the bid for the 1932 Winter Olympics.

Dewey was thus simultaneously in the furniture business, the office-supply business, the consulting business, the publishing business, the education business, the human resources business, and what we might today call the "knowledge solutions" business. Not only did he recognize the potential for monetizing and cross-promoting his work across these fields; he also saw that each field would be the better for it. His career (which was not without its significant controversies) [1] embodied a belief that classification systems and labeling standards and furniture designs and people work best when they work towards the same end—in other words, that intellectual and material systems and labor practices are mutually constructed and mutually reinforcing.

Today's libraries, Apple-era versions of the Dewey/Carnegie institution, continue to materialize, at multiple scales, their underlying bureaucratic and epistemic structures—from the design of their web interfaces to the architecture of their buildings to the networking of their technical infrastructures. This has been true of knowledge institutions throughout history, and it will be true of our future institutions, too. I propose that thinking about the library as a network of integrated, mutually reinforcing, evolving *infrastructures*—in particular, architectural, technological, social, epistemological and ethical infrastructures—can help us better identify what roles we want our libraries to serve, and what we

1 When this article was published, in 2014, it referenced a single article chronicling Dewey's anti-Semitism and sexism. Since then, the library profession has grappled more seriously with his troubling legacy (well documented long ago by Wayne Wiegand and Dee Garrison). See Anne Ford, "Bringing Harassment Out of the History Books," American Libraries, June 1, 2018. In summer 2019, the *American Library* Association decided to remove his name from its annual "creative leadership" award; this new footnote was added shortly thereafter.

can reasonably expect of them. What ideas, values and social responsibilities can we scaffold within the library's material systems—its walls and wires, shelves and servers?

Library as Platform

For millennia libraries have acquired resources, organized them, preserved them and made them accessible (or not) to patrons. But the forms of those resources have changed—from scrolls and codices; to LPs and LaserDiscs; to e-books, electronic databases and open data sets. Libraries have had at least to comprehend, if not become a key node within, evolving systems of media production and distribution. Consider the medieval scriptoria where manuscripts were produced; the evolution of the publishing industry and book trade after Gutenberg; the rise of information technology and its webs of wires, protocols and regulations. [2] At every stage, the contexts—spatial, political, economic, cultural—in which libraries function have shifted; so they are continuously reinventing themselves and the means by which they provide those vital information services.

Libraries have also assumed a host of ever-changing social and symbolic functions. They have been expected to symbolize the eminence of a ruler or state, to integrally link "knowledge" and "power"—and, more recently, to serve as "community centers," "public squares" or "think tanks." Even those seemingly modern metaphors have deep histories. The ancient Library of Alexandria was a prototypical think tank, and the early Carnegie buildings of the 1880s were community centers with swimming pools and public baths, bowling alleys, billiard rooms, even rifle ranges, as well as book stacks. [3] As the Carnegie funding program expanded internationally—to more than 2,500 libraries worldwide—secretary James Bertram standardized the design in his 1911 pamphlet "Notes on the Erection of Library Buildings," which offered grantees a choice of six models, believed to be the work of architect Edward Tilton. Notably, they all included a lecture room.

In short, the library has always been a place where informational and social infrastructures intersect within a physical infrastructure that (ideally) supports that program.

Now we are seeing the rise of a new metaphor: the library as "platform"—a buzzy word that refers to a base upon which developers create new applications, technologies and processes. In an influential 2012 article in *Library Journal*, David Weinberger proposed that we think of libraries as "open platforms"—not only for the creation of software, but also for the development of knowledge and community. [4] Weinberger argued that libraries should open up their entire collections, all their metadata, and any technologies they've created, and allow anyone to build new

[2] See Matthew Battles, *Library: An Unquiet History* (New York: W.W. Norton, 2003); Lionel Casson, *Libraries in the Ancient World* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2001); Fred Lerner, *The Story of Libraries* (New York: Continuum, 1999).

[3] Casson explains that when Alexandria was a brand new city in the third century B.C., its founders enticed intellectuals to the city—in an attempt to establish it as a cultural center—with the famous Museum, "a figurative temple for the muses, a place for cultivating the arts they symbolized. It was an ancient version of a think-tank: the members, consisting of noted writers, poets, scientists, and scholars, were appointed by the Ptolemies for life and enjoyed a handsome salary, tax exemption ... free lodging, and food. ... It was for them that the Ptolemies founded the library of Alexandria" [33–34]. On the Carnegie libraries, see Donald Oehlerts, *Books and Blueprints: Building America's Public Libraries* (New York: Greenwood Press, 1991): 62.

[4] David Weinberger, "Library as Platform," *Library Journal* (September 4, 2012).

products and services on top of that foundation. The platform model, he wrote, "focuses our attention away from the provisioning of resources to the foment"—the "messy, rich networks of people and ideas"—that "those resources engender." Thus the ancient Library of Alexandria, part of a larger museum with botanical gardens, laboratories, living quarters and dining halls, was a *platform* not only for the translation and copying of myriad texts and the compilation of a magnificent collection, but also for the launch of works by Euclid, Archimedes, Eratosthenes and their peers.

Yet the platform metaphor has limitations. For one thing, it smacks of Silicon Valley entrepreneurial epistemology, which prioritizes "monetizable" "knowledge solutions." Further, its association with new media tends to bracket out the similarly generative capacities of low-tech, and even non-technical, library resources. One key misperception of those who proclaim the library's obsolescence is that its function as a knowledge institution can be reduced to its technical services and information offerings. Knowledge is never solely a product of technology and the information it delivers.

Another problem with the platform model is the image it evokes: a flat, two-dimensional stage on which resources are laid out for users to *do stuff with*. The platform doesn't have any implied depth, so we're not inclined to look underneath or behind it, or to question its structure. Weinberger encourages us to "think of the library not as a portal we go through on occasion but as infrastructure that is as ubiquitous and persistent as the streets and sidewalks of a town." It's like a "canopy," he says—or like a "cloud." But these metaphors are more poetic than critical; they obfuscate all the wires, pulleys, lights and scaffolding that you inevitably find underneath and above that stage—and the casting, staging and direction that determine what happens on the stage, and that allow it to function *as* a stage. Libraries are infrastructures not only because they are ubiquitous and persistent, but also, and primarily, because they are made of interconnected networks that undergird all that foment, that create what Pierre Bourdieu would call "structuring structures" that support Weinberger's "messy, rich networks of people and ideas."

It can be instructive for our libraries' publics—and critical for our libraries' leaders—to assess those structuring structures. In this age of e-books, smartphones, firewalls, proprietary media platforms and digital rights management; of atrophying mega-bookstores and resurgent independent bookshops and a metastasizing Amazon; of Google Books and Google Search and Google Glass; of economic disparity and the continuing privatization of public space and services—which is simultaneously an age of democratized media production and vibrant DIY and

activist cultures—libraries play a critical role as mediators, at the hub of all the hubbub. Thus we need to understand how our libraries function as, and as part of, infrastructural ecologies—as sites where spatial, technological, intellectual and social infrastructures shape and inform one another. And we must consider how those infrastructures can embody the epistemological, political, economic and cultural values that we want to define our communities. [5]

Library as Social Infrastructure

Public libraries are often seen as "opportunity institutions," opening doors to, and for, the disenfranchised. [6] People turn to libraries to access the internet, take a GED class, get help with a resumé or job search, and seek referrals to other community resources. A recent report by the Center for an Urban Future highlighted the benefits to immigrants, seniors, individuals searching for work, public school students and aspiring entrepreneurs: "No other institution, public or private, does a better job of reaching people who have been left behind in today's economy, have failed to reach their potential in the city's public school system or who simply need help navigating an increasingly complex world." [7]

The new Department of Outreach Services at the Brooklyn Public Library, for instance, partners with other organizations to bring library resources to seniors, school children and prison populations. The Queens Public Library employs case managers who help patrons identify public benefits for which they're eligible. "These are all things that someone could dub as social services," said Queens Library president Thomas Galante, "but they're not. ... A public library today has information to improve people's lives. We are an enabler; we are a connector." [8]

Partly because of their skill in reaching populations that others miss, libraries have recently reported record circulation and visitation, despite severe budget cuts, decreased hours and the threatened closure or sale of "underperforming" branches. [9] Meanwhile the Pew Research Center has released a series of studies about the materials and services Americans want their libraries to provide. Among the findings: 90 percent of respondents say the closure of their local public library would have an impact on their community, and 63 percent describe that impact as "major."

Libraries also bring communities together in times of calamity or disaster. Toyo Ito, architect of the acclaimed Sendai Mediatheque, recalled that after the 2011 earthquake in Japan, local officials reopened the library quickly even though it had sustained minor damage, "because it functions as a kind of cultural refuge in the city." He continued, "Most people who use the building are not going there just to read a book or watch a film; many of them probably do not have any definite purpose at all. They go just to be part of the community in the building." [10]

We need to attend more closely to such "social infrastructures," the "facilities and conditions that allow connection between people," says sociologist Eric Klinenberg. In a recent interview, he argued that urban resilience can be measured not only by the condition of transit systems and basic utilities and communication networks, but also by the condition of parks, libraries and community organizations: "open, accessible, and welcoming public places where residents can congregate and provide social support during times of need but also every day." [11] In his book *Heat Wave*, Klinenberg noted that a vital public culture in Chicago neighborhoods drew people out of sweltering apartments during the 1995 heat wave, and into cooler public spaces, thus saving lives.

The need for physical spaces that promote a vibrant social infrastructure presents many design opportunities, and some libraries are devising innovative solutions. Brooklyn and other cultural institutions have partnered with the Uni, a modular, portable library that I wrote about earlier in this journal. And modular solutions — kits of parts — are under consideration in a design study sponsored by the Center for an Urban Future and the Architectural League of New York, which aims to reimagine New York City's library branches so that they can more efficiently and effectively serve their communities. CUF also plans to publish, at the end of June, an audit of, and a proposal for, New York's three library systems. [12] New York Times architecture critic Michael Kimmelman, reflecting on the roles played by New York libraries during recent hurricanes, goes so far as to suggest that the city's branch libraries, which have "become our de facto community centers," "could be designed in the future with electrical systems out of harm's way and set up with backup generators and solar panels, even kitchens and wireless mesh networks." [13]

But is it too much to expect our libraries to serve as soup kitchens and recovery centers when they have so many other responsibilities? The library's broad mandate means that it often picks up the slack when other institutions fall short. "It never ceases to amaze me just what libraries are looked upon to provide," says Ruth Faklis, director of the Prairie Trail Public Library District in suburban Chicago:

> This includes, but is not limited to, [serving as] keepers of the homeless ... while simultaneously offering latch-key children a safe and activity-filled haven. We have been asked to be voter-registration sites, warming stations, notaries, technology-terrorism watchdogs, senior social-gathering centers,

5 For more on "infrastructural ecologies," see Reyner Banham, *Los Angeles: The Architecture of Four Ecologies* (Berkeley, University of California Press, 2009 [1971]); Alan Latham, Derek McCormack, Kim McNamara and Donald McNeil, *Key Concepts in Urban Geography* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 2009): 32; Ming Xu and Josh P. Newell, "Infrastructure Ecology: A Conceptual Mode for Understanding Urban Sustainability," Sixth International Conference of the International Society for Industrial Ecology (ISIE) Proceedings, Berkeley, CA, June 7-10, 2011; Anu Ramaswami, Christopher Weible, Deborah Main, Tanya Heikkila, Saba Siddiki, Andrew Duvail, Andrew Pattison and Meghan Bernard, "A Social-Ecological-Infrastructural Systems Framework for Interdisciplinary Study of Sustainable City Systems," *Journal of Industrial Ecology* 16:6 (December 2012): 801-13. Most references to infrastructural ecologies — and there are few — pertain to systems at the urban scale, but I believe a library is a sufficiently complicated institution, residing at nexus of myriad networks, that it constitutes an infrastructural ecology in its own right.

6 Center for an Urban Future, "Opportunity Institutions" Conference (March 11, 2013). See also Jesse Hicks and Julie Dressner's video "Libraries Now: A Day in the Life of NYC's Branches" (May 16, 2014).

7 Center for an Urban Future, *Branches of Opportunity* (January 2013): 3.

8 Quoted in Katie Gilbert, "What Is a Library?" *Narratively* (January 2, 2014).

9 Real estate sales are among the most controversial elements in the New York Public Library's much-disputed Central Library Plan, which is premised on the sale of the library's Mid-Manhattan branch and its Science, Industry and Business Library. See Scott Sherman, "The Hidden History of New York City's Central Library Plan," *The Nation* (August 28, 2013).

10 Toyo Ito, "The Building After," *Artforum* (September 2013).

11 Eric Klinenberg, "Toward a Stronger Social Infrastructure: A Conversation with Eric Klinenberg," *Urban Omnibus* (October 16, 2013).

12 I'm a member of the organizing team for this project, and I hope to write more about its outcomes.

13 Michael Kimmelman, "Next Time, Libraries Could Be Our Shelters From the Storm," *New York Times* (October 2, 2013).

> election sites, substitute sitters during teacher strikes, and the latest — postmasters. These requests of society are ever evolving. Funding is not generally attached to these magnanimous suggestions, and when it is, it does not cover actual costs of the additional burden, thus stretching the library's budget even further. I know of no other government entity that is asked to take on additional responsibilities not necessarily aligned with its mission. [14]

In a Metafilter discussion about funding cuts in California, one librarian offered this poignant lament:

> Every day at my job I helped people just barely survive. … Forget trying to be the "people's university" and create a body of well informed citizens. Instead I helped people navigate through the degrading hoops of modern online society, fighting for scraps from the plate, and then kicking back afterwards by pretending to have a farm on Facebook. [15]

Read the whole story. It's quite a punch to the stomach. Given the effort librarians expend in promoting basic literacies, how much more can this social infrastructure support? Should we welcome the "design challenge" to engineer technical and architectural infrastructures to accommodate an ever-diversifying program — or should we consider that we might have stretched this program to its limit, and that no physical infrastructure can effectively scaffold such a motley collection of social services?

Again, we need to look to the infrastructural ecology — the larger network of public services and knowledge institutions of which each library is a part. How might towns, cities and regions assess what their various public (and private) institutions are uniquely qualified and sufficiently resourced to do, and then deploy those resources most effectively? Should we regard the library as the territory of the civic mind and ask other social services to attend to the civic body? The assignment of social responsibility isn't so black and white — nor are the boundaries between mind and body, cognition and affect — but libraries do need to collaborate with other institutions to determine how they leverage the resources of the infrastructural ecology to serve their publics, with each institution and organization contributing what it's best equipped to contribute — and each operating with a clear sense of its mission and obligation.

Libraries have a natural affinity with cultural institutions. Just this spring, New York Mayor Bill de Blasio appointed Tom Finkelpearl as the city's new Commissioner of Cultural Affairs. A former president of the Queens Museum, Finkelpearl oversaw the first phase of a renovation by

14 Ruth Faklis, in Joseph Janes, Ed., *Library 2020: Today's Leading Visionaries Describe Tomorrow's Library* (Lanham: Scarecrow Press, 2013): 96-7.

15 codacorolla on Metafilter (February 12, 2012) : https://www.metafilter.com/112698/California-Dreamin#4183210

16 The Seattle Central Library was a focus of my first book, on public library design. See *The New Downtown Library: Designing With Communities* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2007).

17 Personal communication with Marcellus Turner, March 21, 2014.

18 Marcellus Turner in *Library 2020*: 92.

19 Ken Worpole addresses library partnerships, and their implications for design in his *Contemporary Library Architecture: A Planning and Design Guide* (New York: Routledge, 2013). The book offers a comprehensive look the public roles that libraries serve, and how they inform library planning and design.

Grimshaw Architects, which, in its next phase, will incorporate a Queens Public Library branch — an effective pairing, given the commitment of both institutions to education and local culture. Similarly, Lincoln Center houses the New York Public Library for the Performing Arts. As commissioner, Finkelpearl could broaden support for mixed-use development that strengthens infrastructural ecologies. The CUF/Architectural League project is also considering how collaborative partnerships can inform library program and design.

I've recently returned from Seattle, where I revisited OMA's Central Library on its 10th anniversary and toured several new branch libraries. [16] Under the 1998 bond measure "Libraries for All," citizens voted to tax themselves to support construction of the Central Library and four new branches, and to upgrade every branch in the system. The vibrant, sweeping Ballard branch (2005), by Bohlin Cywinski Jackson, includes a separate entrance for the Ballard Neighborhood Service Center, a "little city hall" where residents can find information about public services, get pet licenses, pay utility bills, and apply for passports and city jobs. While the librarians undoubtedly field questions about such services, they're also able to refer patrons next door, where city employees are better equipped to meet their needs — thus affording the library staff more time to answer reference questions and host writing groups and children's story hours.

Seattle's City Librarian, Marcellus Turner, is big on partnerships —with cultural institutions, like local theaters, as well as commercial collaborators, like the Seahawks football team. [17] After taking the helm in 2011, he identified five service priorities — youth and early learning, technology and access, community engagement, Seattle culture and history, and re-imagined spaces — and tasked working groups with developing proposals for how the library can better address those needs. Each group must consider marketing, funding, staff deployment and partnership opportunities that "leverage what we have with what [the partners] have." For instance, "Libraries that focus on early-childhood education might employ educators, academicians, or teachers to help us with research into early-childhood learning and teaching." [18]

The "design challenge" is to consider what physical infrastructures would be needed to accommodate such partnerships. [19] Many libraries have continued along a path laid by library innovators from Ptolemy to Carnegie, renovating their buildings to incorporate public gathering, multi-use, and even commercial spaces. In Seattle's Ballard branch, a large meeting room hosts regular author readings and a vibrant writing group that

typically attracts 30 or more participants. In Salt Lake City, the library plaza features an artist co-op, a radio station, a community writing center, the Library Store, and a few cafes — all private businesses whose ethos is consistent with the library's. The New York Public Library has recently announced that some of its branches will serve as "learning hubs" for Coursera, the provider of "massive open online courses." And many libraries have classrooms and labs where they offer regular technical training courses.

These entrepreneurial models reflect what seems to be an increasingly widespread sentiment: that while libraries continue to serve a vital role as "opportunity institutions" for the disenfranchised, this cannot be their primary self-justification. They cannot duplicate the responsibilities of our community centers and social service agencies. "Their narrative" — or what I'd call an "epistemic framing," by which I mean the way the library packages its program as a knowledge institution, and the infrastructures that support it — "must include everyone," says the University of Michigan's Kristin Fontichiaro. [20] What programs and services are consistent with an institution dedicated to lifelong learning? Should libraries be reconceived as hubs for civic engagement, where communities can discuss local issues, create media, and archive community history? [21] Should they incorporate media production studios, maker-spaces and hacker labs, repositioning themselves in an evolving ecology of information and educational infrastructures?

These new social functions — which may require new physical infrastructures to support them — broaden the library's narrative to include everyone, not only the "have-nots." This is not to say that the library should abandon the needy and focus on an elite patron group; rather, the library should incorporate the "enfranchised" as a key public, both so that the institution can reinforce its mission as a social infrastructure for an inclusive public, and so that privileged, educated users can bring their knowledge and talents to the library and offer them up as social-infrastructural resources.

Many among this well-resourced population — those who have jobs and home internet access and can navigate the government bureaucracy with relative ease — already see themselves as part of the library's public. They regard the library as a space of openness, egalitarianism and freedom (in multiple senses of the term), within a proprietary, commercial, segregated and surveilled landscape. They understand that no matter how well-connected they are, they actually don't have the world at their fingertips — that "material protected by stringent copyright and held in proprietary databases is often inaccessible outside libraries" and that, "as

[20] Kristin Fontichiaro in *Library 2020*: 8.

[21] See Bill Ptacek in *Library 2020*: 119.

digital rights management becomes ever more complicated, we … rely even more on our libraries to help us navigate an increasingly fractured and litigious digital terrain." [22] And they recognize that they cannot depend on Google to organize the world's information. As the librarian noted in that discussion on Metafilter:

> The [American Library Association] has a proven history of commitment to intellectual freedom. The public service that we've been replaced with has a spotty history of "not being evil." When we're gone, you middle class, you wealthy, you tech-savvy, who will fight for that with no profit motivation? Even if you never step foot in our doors, and all of your media comes to a brightly lit screen, we're still working for you.

The library's social infrastructure thus benefits even those who don't have an immediate need for its space or its services.

Finally, we must acknowledge the library's role as a civic landmark — a symbol of what a community values highly enough to place on a prominent site, to materialize in dignified architecture that communicates its openness to everyone, and to support with sufficient public funding despite the fact that it'll never make a profit. A well-designed library — a contextually-designed library — can reflect a community's character back to itself, clarifying who it is, in all its multiplicity, and what it stands for. [23] David Adjaye's Bellevue and Francis Gregory branch libraries, in historically underserved neighborhoods of Washington D.C., have been lauded for performing precisely this function. As Sarah Williams Goldhagen writes:

> Adjaye is so attuned to the nuances of urban context that one might be hard pressed to identify them as the work of one designer. Francis Gregory is steel and glass, Bellevue is concrete and wood. Francis Gregory presents a single monolithic volume, Bellevue an irregular accretion of concrete pavilions. Context drives the aesthetic. [24]

His designs "make of this humble municipal building an arena for social interaction, … a distinctive civic icon that helps build a sense of common identity." This kind of social infrastructure serves a vital need for an entire community.

Library as Technological-Intellectual Infrastructure

Of course, we must not forget the library collection itself. The old-fashioned bookstack was at the center of the recent debate over the proposed renovation of the New York Public Library's Schwarzman Building on

[22] The quotations are from my earlier article for *Places*, "Marginalia: Little Libraries in the Urban Margins." Within mass-digitization projects like Google Books, as Elisabeth Jones explains, "works that are still in copyright but out of print and works of indeterminate copyright status and/or ownership" will fall between the cracks (in *Library 2020*: 17).

[23] I dedicate a chapter in *The New Downtown Library* to what makes a library "contextual" — and I address just how slippery that term can be.

[24] Sarah Williams Goldhagen, "The Revolution at Your Community Library," *The New Republic* (March 9, 2013): https://newrepublic.com/article/112443/revolution-your-community-library. Since this article was originally published, Adjaye, like Dewey, has been subjected to a deeper reckoning amidst charges of sexual misconduct.

42nd Street, which was cancelled last month after more than a year of lawsuits and protests. This storage infrastructure, and the delivery system it accommodates, have tremendous significance even in a digital age. For scholars, the stacks represent near-instant access to any materials within the extensive collection. Architectural historians defended the historical significance of the stacks, and engineers argued that they are critical to the structural integrity of the building.

The way a library's collection is stored and made accessible shapes the intellectual infrastructure of the institution. The Seattle Public Library uses translucent acrylic bookcases made by Spacesaver — and even here this seemingly mundane, utilitarian consideration cultivates a character, an ambience, that reflects the library's identity and its intellectual values. It might sound corny, but the luminescent glow permeating the stacks acts as a beacon, a welcoming gesture. There are still many contemporary libraries that privilege — perhaps even fetishize — the book and the bookstack: take MVRDV's Book Mountain (2012), for a town in the Netherlands; or TAX arquitectura's Biblioteca José Vasconcelos (2006) in Mexico City.

Stacks occupy a different, though also fetishized, space in Helmut Jahn's Mansueto Library (2011) at the University of Chicago, which mixes diverse infrastructures to accommodate media of varying materialities: a grand reading room, a conservation department, a digitization department, and a subterranean warehouse of books retrieved by robot. (It's worth noting that Boston and other libraries contained book railways and conveyer belt retrieval systems — proto-robots — a century ago.) Snøhetta's James B. Hunt Jr. Library (2013) at North Carolina State University also incorporates a robotic storage and retrieval system, so that the library can store more books on site, as well as meet its goal of providing seating for 20 percent of the student population. [25] Here the patrons come before the collection.

Back in the early aughts, when I spent a summer touring libraries, the institutions on the leading edge were integrating media production facilities, recognizing that media "consumption" and "creation" lie on a gradient of knowledge production. Today there's a lot of talk about — and action around — integrating hacker labs and maker-spaces. [26] As Anne Balsamo explains, these sites offer opportunities — embodied, often inter-generational learning experiences that are integral to the development of a "technological imagination" — that are rarely offered in formal learning institutions. [27]

The Hunt Library has a maker-space, a GameLab, various other production labs and studios, an immersion theater, and, rather

[25] This sentence was amended after publication to note the multiple motives of implementing the bookBot storage and retrieval system; its compact storage allowed the library to reintegrate some collections that were formerly stored off-site. The library has also developed a Virtual Browse catalog system, which aims to promote virtual discovery that isn't possible in the physical stacks.

[26] According to a late 2013 web-based survey of libraries, 41 percent of respondents provide maker-spaces or maker activities in their libraries, and 36 percent plan to create such spaces in the near future. Most maker-spaces, 51 percent, are in public libraries; 36 percent are in academic libraries; and 9 percent are in school libraries. And among the most popular technologies or technological processes supported in those spaces are computer workstations (67 percent), 3D printers (46 percent), photo editing (45 percent), video editing (43 percent), computer programming/software (39 percent). 33 percent accommodated digital music recording; 31 percent accommodated 3D modeling, and 30 percent featured work with Arduino and Raspberry Pi circuit boards (Gary Price, "Results From 'Makerspaces in Libraries' Study Released," *Library Journal* (December 16, 2013). See also James Mitchell, "Beyond the Maker Space," *Library Journal* (May 27, 2014).

[27] Anne Balsamo, "Videos and Frameworks for 'Tinkering' in a Digital Age," Spotlight on Digital Media and Learning (January 30, 2009).

[28] This sentence was amended after publication to note that the Apple Technology Showcase was named after former NCSU faculty member Dr. J. Lawrence Apple and his wife, Ella Apple; in an email to the author, library director Carolyn Argentati wrote that the corporate pun was intentional.

eyebrow-raisingly, an Apple Technology Showcase (named after library donors whose surname is Apple, with an intentional pun on the electronics company). [28] One might think major funding is needed for those kinds of programs, but the trend actually began in 2011 in tiny Fayetteville, New York (pop. 4,373), thought to be the first public library to have incorporated a maker-space. The following year, the Carnegie Libraries of Pittsburgh — which for years has hosted film competitions, gaming tournaments, and media-making projects for youth — launched, with Google and Heinz Foundation support, The Labs: weekly workshops at three locations where teenagers can access equipment, software and mentors. Around the same time, Chattanooga — a city blessed with a super-high-speed municipal fiber network — opened its lauded 4th Floor, a 12,000-square foot "public laboratory and educational facility" that "supports the production, connection, and sharing of knowledge by offering access to tools and instruction." Those tools include 3D printers, laser cutters and vinyl cutters, and the instruction includes everything from tech classes, to incubator projects for female tech entrepreneurs, to business pitch competitions.

Last year, the Brooklyn Public Library, just a couple blocks from where I live, opened its Levy Info Commons, which includes space for laptop users and lots of desktop machines featuring creative software suites; seven reserveable teleconference-ready meeting rooms, including one that doubles as a recording studio; and a training lab, which offers an array of digital media workshops led by a local arts and design organization and also invites patrons to lead their own courses. A typical month on their robust event calendar includes resume editing workshops, a Creative Business Tech prototyping workshop, individual meetings with business counselors, Teen Tech tutorials, computer classes for seniors, workshops on podcasting and oral history and "adaptive gaming" for people with disabilities, and even an audio-recording and editing workshop targeted to poets, to help them disseminate their work in new formats. Also last year, the Martin Luther King, Jr., Memorial Library in Washington, D.C., opened its Digital Commons, where patrons can use a print-on-demand bookmaking machine, a 3D printer, and a co-working space known as the "Dream Lab," or try out a variety of e-book readers. The Chicago Public Library partnered with the Museum of Science and Industry to open a pop-up maker lab featuring open-source design software, laser cutters, a milling machine, and (of course) 3D printers — not one, but three.

Some have proposed that libraries — following in the tradition of Alexandria's "think tank," and compelled by a desire to "democratize

entrepreneurship" — make for ideal co-working or incubator spaces, where patrons with diverse skill sets can organize themselves into start-ups-for-the-people. [29] Others recommend that librarians entrepreneurialize themselves, rebranding themselves as professional consultants in a complex information economy. Librarians, in this view, are uniquely qualified digital literacy tutors; experts in "copyright compliance, licensing, privacy, information use, and ethics"; gurus of "aligning … programs with collections, space, and resources"; skilled creators of "custom ontologies, vocabularies, taxonomies" and structured data; adept practitioners of data mining. [30] Others recommend that libraries get into the content production business. In the face of increasing pressure to rent and license proprietary digital content with stringent use policies, why don't libraries do more to promote the creation of independent media or develop their own free, open-source technologies? Not many libraries have the time and resources to undertake such endeavors, but NYPL Labs and Harvard's Library Test Kitchen, have demonstrated what's possible when even back-of-house library spaces become sites of technological praxis. Unfortunately, those innovative projects are typically hidden behind the interface (as with so much library labor). Why not bring those operations to the front of the building, as part of the public program?

Of course, with all these new activities come new spatial requirements. Library buildings must incorporate a wide variety of furniture arrangements, lighting designs, acoustical conditions, etc., to accommodate multiple sensory registers, modes of working, postures and more. Librarians and designers are now acknowledging — and designing for, rather than designing out — activities that make noise and can occasionally be a bit messy. I did a study several years ago on the evolution of library sounds and found widespread recognition that knowledge-making doesn't readily happen when "shhh!" is the prevailing rule. [31]

These new physical infrastructures create space for an epistemology embracing the integration of knowledge consumption and production, of thinking and making. Yet sometimes I have to wonder, given all the hoopla over "making": are tools of computational fabrication really the holy grail of the knowledge economy? What knowledge is produced when I churn out, say, a keychain on a MakerBot? I worry that the boosterism surrounding such projects — and the much-deserved acclaim they've received for "rebranding" the library — glosses over the neoliberal values that these technologies sometimes embody. Neoliberalism channels the pursuit of individual freedom through property rights and free markets [32] — and what better way to express yourself than by 3D-printing a bust of your own head at the library, or using the library's CNC router to launch your customizable cutting board business on Etsy? While librarians

[29] Emily Badger, "Why Libraries Should Be the Next Great Start-Up Incubators," *Atlantic Cities* (February 19, 2003).

[30] Stephen Abram in Library 2020: 46; Courtney Greene in *Library 2020*: 51.

[31] See my "Resonant Texts: Sounds of the Contemporary American Public Library," *The Senses & Society* 2:3 (Fall 2007): 277-302.

have long been advocates of free and democratic access to information, I trust — I hope — that they're helping their patrons to cultivate a critical perspective regarding the politics of "technological innovation" — and the potential instrumentalism of makerhood. Sure, Dewey was part of this instrumentalist tradition, too. But our contemporary pursuit of "innovation" promotes the idea that "making new stuff" = "producing knowledge," which can be a dangerous falsehood.

Library staff might want to take up the critique of "innovation," too. Each new Google product release, new mobile technology development, new e-reader launch brings new opportunities for the library to innovate in response. And while "keeping current" is a crucial goal, it's important to place that pursuit in a larger cultural, political-economic and institutional context. Striving to stay technologically relevant can backfire when it means merely responding to the profit-driven innovations of commercial media; we see these mistakes — innovation for innovation's sake — in the ed-tech arena quite often.

Reading across the Infrastructural Ecology

Libraries need to stay focused on their long-term cultural goals — which should hold true regardless of what Google decides to do tomorrow — and on their place within the larger infrastructural ecology. They also need to consider how their various infrastructural identities map onto each other, or don't. Can an institution whose technical and physical infrastructure is governed by the pursuit of innovation also fulfill its obligations as a social infrastructure serving the disenfranchised? What ethics are embodied in the single-minded pursuit of "the latest" technologies, or the equation of learning with entrepreneurialism?

As Zadie Smith argued beautifully in the *New York Review of Books*, we risk losing the library's role as a "different kind of social reality (of the three dimensional kind), which by its very existence teaches a system of values beyond the fiscal." [33] Barbara Fister, a librarian at Gustavus Adolphus College, offered an equally eloquent plea for the library as a space of exception:

> Libraries are not, or at least should not be, engines of productivity. If anything, they should slow people down and seduce them with the unexpected, the irrelevant, the odd and the unexplainable. Productivity is a destructive way to justify the individual's value in a system that is naturally communal, not an individualistic or entrepreneurial zero-sum game to be won by the most industrious. [34]

[32] See David Harvey, *A Brief History of Neoliberalism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005).

[33] Zadie Smith, "The North West London Blues," *New York Review of Books* Blog (June 2, 2012).

[34] Barbara Fister, "Some Assumptions About Libraries," *Inside Higher Ed* (January 2, 2014).

Libraries, she argued, "will always be at a disadvantage" to Google and Amazon because they value privacy; they refuse to exploit users' private data to improve the search experience. Yet libraries' failure to compete in efficiency is what affords them the opportunity to offer a "different kind of social reality." I'd venture that there is room for entrepreneurial learning in the library, but there also has to be room for that alternate reality where knowledge needn't have monetary value, where learning isn't driven by a profit motive. We can accommodate both spaces for entrepreneurship and spaces of exception, provided the institution has a strong epistemic framing that encompasses both. This means that the library needs to know how to read itself as a social-technical-intellectual infrastructure.

It's particularly important to cultivate these critical capacities — the ability to "read" our libraries' multiple infrastructures and the politics and ethics they embody — when the concrete infrastructures look like San Antonio's BiblioTech, a "bookless" library featuring 10,000 e-books, downloadable via the 3M Cloud App; 600 circulating "stripped down" 3M e-readers; 200 "enhanced" tablets for kids; and, for use on-site, 48 computers, plus laptops and iPads. The library, which opened last fall, also offers computer classes and meeting space, but it's all locked within a proprietary platformed world.

In libraries like BiblioTech — and the Digital Public Library of America — the collection itself is off-site. Do patrons wonder where, exactly, all those books and periodicals and cloud-based materials live? What's under, or floating above, the "platform"? Do they think about the algorithms that lead them to particular library materials, and the conduits and protocols through which they access them? Do they consider what it means to supplant bookstacks with server stacks — whose metal racks we can't kick, lights we can't adjust, knobs we can't fiddle with? Do they think about the librarians negotiating access licenses and adding metadata to "digital assets," or the engineers maintaining the servers? With the increasing recession of these technical infrastructures — and the human labor that supports them — further off-site, behind the interface, deeper inside the black box, how can we understand the ways in which those structures structure our intellect and sociality?

We need to develop — both among library patrons and librarians themselves — new critical capacities to understand the distributed physical, technical and social architectures that scaffold our institutions of knowledge and program our values. And we must consider where those infrastructures intersect — where they should be, and perhaps aren't, mutually reinforcing one another. When do our social obligations compromise our intellectual aspirations, or vice versa? And when

do those social or intellectual aspirations for the library exceed — or fail to fully exploit — the capacities of our architectural and technological infrastructures? Ultimately, we need to ensure that we have a strong epistemological framework — a narrative that explains how the library promotes learning and stewards knowledge — so that everything hangs together, so there's some institutional coherence. We need to sync the library's intersecting infrastructures so that they work together to support our shared intellectual and ethical goals.

The reprint retains the spelling and punctuation of the original publication.

Shannon Mattern is the Director of Creative Research at the Metropolitan New York Library Council. Previously, she held tenured full professorships in media studies, anthropology, and art history at The New School and the University of Pennsylvania. She is the author of four books and the (co-)editor of seven collections about media architecture, urban technology, knowledge infrastructures, local media, information discovery, maps, and maintenance. She was the 2025 Kluge Chair in Modern Culture at the Library of Congress. You can find her at wordsinspace.net.

GOETHE-INSTITUT
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FORMAT
Hands-on repair workshop

CONCEPT
Ufuk Emin Akengin, curator

ORGANIZATION AND COORDINATION
Arda Aşkın (Goethe-Institut İstanbul)

FACILITATOR(S) / EXPERTS
Ufuk Emin Akengin, curator and maker (Onaranlar Kulübü)
Gülnihal Uluçay, tailor and textile repair specialist

CAFÉ REPARO: TEXTILE REPAIR WORKSHOP

A repair-focused program within *Common Crafts – Common Libraries*, exploring textile repair, sustainable practices, and hands-on knowledge sharing through a participatory workshop.

Textile repair Care Circularity

PHOTOGRAPHER
Mete Kaan Özdilek

PARTNER INSTITUTION
Onaranlar Kulübü

TIMEFRAME
July 2026: one workshop (3 h)

PARTICIPANTS
20 participants: general public, students, artists, and the Onaranlar Kulübü community, invited and selected via open call; no previous repair skills required

Context *Café Reparo: Textile Repair Workshop* was developed within *Common Crafts – Common Libraries*, as a hands-on program exploring textile repair as both a practical skill and a way of rethinking our relationship with clothing, consumption, and care. Hosted at the Goethe-Institut Istanbul Library and developed in collaboration with Onaranlar Kulübü, the workshop invited participants to bring a clean and dry garment in need of a small- or medium-sized repair and work on it together with experienced facilitators.

Onaranlar Kulübü, a community initiative in Istanbul that promotes repair, making, sharing, and sustainable everyday practices, was a natural partner for the program. Their approach, that you do not need to be an expert to become a repairer but simply curious and willing to try, shaped the workshop's accessible and welcoming format. Through this collaboration, textile repair was presented not only as a technical skill, but also as a social and creative practice that can bring people together.

Textile repair was chosen because it connects everyday life with broader questions of sustainability and consumption. A torn seam, a small hole, or a missing button can easily lead to a garment being discarded. By learning simple techniques such as hand stitching, patching, and visible mending, participants were encouraged to extend the life of their clothes and discover the creative potential of repair.

The library was chosen as a setting because it is more than a place for accessing information: it can also be a space for learning, sharing knowledge, and building community. In the context of *Common Crafts – Common Libraries*, *Café Reparo* explores how libraries can facilitate situated knowledge and hands-on learning, connecting cultural programming with practical skills relevant to everyday life.

The program aimed to provide participants with useful repair skills, encourage a more conscious relationship with clothing, and create a space for collective learning and exchange. By bringing Onaranlar Kulübü's repair culture into the Goethe-Institut Istanbul Library, the workshop connected local knowledge and community practice with the library's role as an open space for knowledge-sharing and participation. In the local context of Istanbul, *Café Reparo* offered a tangible alternative to a throw-away culture by making repair, reuse, and sharing accessible to everyone.

Methodology

Program Sequence

1 **Welcome and introduction** Welcoming participants into the Goethe-Institut İstanbul Library; introducing the *Café Reparo* concept and the approach of Onaranlar Kulübü; discussing why

repair matters and emphasizing that no previous sewing or repair experience is required.

2 Assessment of the garments Examining each participant's garment (one clean and dry piece in need of a small- or medium-sized repair) together with the facilitators; identifying what type of intervention is appropriate and feasible within the workshop.

3 Choosing the repair technique Introducing suitable techniques based on the condition and material of each garment (hand stitching, patching, machine sewing, visible mending); demonstrating the basic steps; helping participants choose an approach that matches their garment and experience level.

4 Hands-on repair and creative intervention Working directly on the participants' own garments, with individual guidance from the facilitators; using sewing machines and heat press machines; repairing damaged areas, reinforcing worn sections, and adding creative interventions with Goethe-Institut-themed prints and embroidery elements.

5 Sharing and reflection Sharing and reflecting on the repaired and customized garments; connecting the practical experience to broader ideas of care, reuse, and sustainability, reflecting on extending the life of everyday objects, highlighting repair as both a practical skill and a creative, collective practice.

Methods

Hands-on textile repair Each participant working on their own garment.

Step-by-step demonstration The facilitators showing the basic techniques before participants try them.

Individual guidance and peer learning Facilitators moving between participants, who also learn from one another.

Material- and object-based assessment Choosing the technique from each garment's condition and fabric.

Visible mending and creative patching Treating repair as visible, creative expression rather than concealment.

Informal knowledge sharing and group reflection Closing conversation connecting the practice to everyday habits.

Materials and Tools Sewing machines, heat press machines, sewing threads, needles, scissors, buttons, and fabric patches; Goethe-Institut-themed prints and embroidery elements for personalizing the garments

Setting and Layout Arranging shared worktables in the Goethe-Institut Istanbul Library, creating an open and accessible setting where participants work individually while exchanging ideas with others, temporarily transforming the library into a practical repair and making space

Outcomes and Reflections *Café Reparo* created a direct and tangible connection between sustainability, creativity, and everyday practice. One of the strongest aspects of the workshop was that participants did not simply learn about textile repair but immediately applied what they learned to their own clothes. Each participant left with a repaired or transformed garment, as well as practical knowledge that could be transferred to future repairs.

The combination of traditional hand-sewing techniques with sewing machines, heat press applications, prints, and embroidery created a particularly engaging format. The Goethe-Institut-themed prints and embroidery elements brought an additional creative dimension and encouraged participants to see repair not only as fixing something damaged, but as an opportunity to personalize and reinterpret an existing garment.

The collaboration with Onaranlar Kulübü was central to the success of the program. Their hands-on and accessible approach created an informal learning environment in which participants could ask questions, experiment and learn from one another without needing prior sewing skills. The library setting also worked well as a space for practical knowledge exchange, demonstrating that libraries can host activities that extend beyond traditional forms of reading and information access.

For future editions, more time could be allocated to individual repairs and creative interventions. The workshop format also offers potential for continuation through a series of repair sessions, allowing participants to return with new garments and gradually develop their skills. The main tangible outcome was a collection of repaired and creatively transformed garments, demonstrating the potential of repair as an everyday, sustainable, and community-based practice.

BIOGRAPHIES

Ufuk Emin Akengin is a social innovator and founder of OK Labs, a creative social innovation lab working at the intersection of sustainability, design, and community engagement. Since 2016, he has led participatory urban projects, public installations, and maker-based programs, collaborating with organizations including LEGO, UNICEF, and the Goethe-Institut. He lives between Istanbul and Berlin.

Gülnihal Uluçay graduated in Fashion and Textile Design from Yeditepe University. She specializes in experimental pattern cutting and sustainable design, with a focus on transforming waste materials into new designs. She was a finalist in the 2024 Koza Competition and completed the MA program at Istanbul Fashion Academy (İMA) in 2025, where she also trained in CLO3D and digital fashion design. Her *Cosmic Flow* collection was presented at the Turkish Emerging Designers fashion show at Expo 2025 Osaka. She currently continues her independent design and production practice in her Istanbul studio.

Onaranlar Kulübü is a social enterprise developing social impact projects focused on making, repairing, and sharing. Through collective making projects, educational programs, and workshops, it creates democratic spaces for hands-on learning and invites everyone to become active participants in shaping their city and environment.

WEB onaranlarkulubu.com

Arda Aşkın has been working at the Goethe-Institut Istanbul as a library staff member for three years. He studied Sociology and German Language and Literature at Istanbul University, followed by a master's degree in Cultural Studies. He currently coordinates literature projects and the translation support program at the Goethe-Institut Istanbul.

GOETHE-INSTITUT
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FORMAT
Workshops, guided botanical garden visit

CONCEPT
Goethe-Institut Armenien in collaboration with artist Ani Qananyan

ORGANIZATION AND COORDINATION
Kristine Gevorgyan (Goethe-Institut Armenien)

FACILITATOR / EXPERT
Ani Qananyan, painter and ceramic artist

PHOTOGRAPHER
Eduard Tadevosyan

FROM OBSERVATION TO FORM

Ceramics as a language for observing nature, connecting Armenia's craft heritage with environmental education for children and teenagers.

Ceramics Care Situated knowledge Safeguarding nature

PARTNER INSTITUTION
City Central Library named after Avetik Isahakyan

TIMEFRAME
May 2026: Workshop with children (2 h)

May 2026: Visit to the Botanical Garden with teenagers (2 h)

June 2026: Two ceramics workshops with teenagers (2 × 2 h)

June 2026: Ceramics workshop with teenagers (2 h)

PARTICIPANTS
50 participants in total

Workshop for children (aged 7–8): 20 participants

Botanical Garden visit, Workshop for teenagers (aged 13–14): 15 participants

Workshop for teenagers (aged 15): 15 participants

Context The project aimed to introduce children to clay as one of humanity's oldest crafts and as an important part of Armenia's cultural heritage. For centuries, clay has been used not only to create functional objects but also as a medium through which people have expressed their relationship with nature and their cultural identity. Through these workshops, the children discovered that clay is much more than a material: it is a language capable of preserving memories, telling stories, and communicating ideas across generations.

Unlike many contemporary materials, clay responds directly to touch, recording every gesture and preserving every mark made by the hand. This physical interaction encourages patience, concentration, and careful observation, allowing children to understand that making is a gradual process in which every stage contributes to the final result. They also experienced the transformation of clay from a soft, fragile material into a permanent ceramic object through drying, glazing, and firing, discovering how time itself becomes an active part of the creative process.

An equally important objective was to demonstrate that artistic practice can become a powerful educational tool. Rather than approaching ceramics solely as a technical skill, participants were encouraged to use clay as a means of observing, interpreting, and understanding the natural world. Creativity begins with attention: learning to slow down, notice details, and observe carefully enables children to build a deeper relationship with their surroundings and to appreciate aspects of nature that often remain unnoticed.

The central focus of the workshops was Armenia's endangered and vulnerable wildflowers and native plants. These species are frequently overlooked despite their ecological importance and, in many cases, face increasing threats caused by habitat loss, climate change, and human activity. Instead of conventional classroom methods, children explored the topic through direct observation and artistic creation. By translating these plants into ceramic artworks, they studied their proportions, textures, colors, and structures closely; every ceramic piece became both an artwork and a visual record of learning, curiosity, and discovery.

Working with clay also encouraged participants to embrace experimentation and accept that every creative process contains moments of uncertainty.

Ultimately, the project was about fostering empathy, responsibility, and a stronger sense of connection with nature, demonstrating how creative practice can inspire long-term awareness, curiosity, and respect for biodiversity.

Methodology

Program Sequence Two formats were designed for the different age groups, following the same concept and objectives.

Workshop with children (aged 7–8):

1 **Preparation** Selecting and printing photographs of endangered native flowers and plants in advance.

2 **Choosing and learning** Each child choosing the image that attracted them most; learning the plant's name and discussing its characteristics before beginning the artistic process.

3 **Sketching and painting** Drawing the chosen plant in pencil onto a ceramic plate; painting it with engobes (ceramic underglazes), selected because they are non-toxic, safe for children, and easy to apply while offering a wide range of colors.

4 **Finishing** Glazing the plates with a transparent glaze and kiln-firing them, so that each child could keep a durable artwork as a lasting reminder of the workshop and of Armenia's endangered flora.

Workshops with teenagers (aged 13–15):

1 **Botanical Garden visit** Exploring the garden with specialists, who introduced rare and endangered plant species and explained their ecological importance; photographing a plant of personal interest, encouraging careful observation rather than collecting specimens from nature.

2 **Studio session** Transforming the chosen plant into a ceramic artwork, as a two-dimensional relief or a fully three-dimensional sculptural form; interpreting the observations creatively rather than simply reproducing the photograph, so that personal expression became part of the learning process.

3 **Finishing** Decorating the works with engobes, drying, bisque-firing, coating with a transparent glaze, and firing once more for the final finish.

Methods

Guided expert tour Botanical Garden visit with specialists introducing rare and endangered plant species.

Photographing instead of collecting Careful observation of plants without removing them from nature.

Guided conversation about the chosen species Name, characteristics, and conservation status before the artistic work.

Observation-based drawing and hand-building Translating a living plant into ceramic form, as surface decoration, relief, or sculpture.

Painting with engobes, glazing, and firing Experiencing the complete ceramic cycle from soft clay to permanent object.

Materials and Tools *The Red Book of the Flora of Armenia,* used to select the endangered species; printed photographs of the plants; white clay (SiO_2 PA), BOTZ engobes, transparent glaze, brushes, ceramic modeling tools, palette, rolling pin.

Setting and Layout The workshops were held at the City Central Library, with the first and third sessions taking place in the library hall, and the second in the inner courtyard. The tables were arranged parallel to one another, to ensure that all children could be efficiently assisted during the creative process, as required. Each table was equipped with wooden boards, small portions of clay (with additional clay provided as needed), and wooden tools for each child, alongside supplementary instruments for drawing and engraving on clay. Photographs of flowers and plants were provided, from which the children made selections according to their preferences. The younger age group painted these chosen images onto plates, whereas the adolescents used them as inspiration to create three-dimensional artworks. During the second phase, engobes (slip coatings) with several palettes and brushes were added to the tables for each child to color their works. Containers of water were also provided for rinsing the brushes. Subsequently, the artworks were transported to Ani Qananyan's studio, where they underwent two firings: the initial bisque firing, followed by the second firing for the transparently glazed pieces.

Outcomes and Reflections The workshops provided a meaningful and memorable experience for the children. For many of them, it was their first opportunity to work with clay, and they approached the material with genuine curiosity, enthusiasm, and a willingness to experiment. Throughout the creative process, it was rewarding to observe how quickly they became engaged, gradually gaining confidence in expressing their ideas

through a completely new medium. For some, this first encounter may become the beginning of a lasting interest in ceramics.

Beyond learning practical ceramic skills, one of the project's most important achievements was its educational and environmental dimension. Encouraging children to observe nature more carefully and to understand the importance of protecting biodiversity was a central objective. Through direct observation and artistic interpretation of endangered plants, participants developed a more personal relationship with the natural world. This experience may well influence their future behavior. The next time they encounter a rare flower or plant during a walk or hike, instead of picking it, they may choose to photograph it, identify it, and learn more about it. Such small changes in attitude can gradually foster a stronger sense of environmental responsibility and respect for nature.

If one aspect of the project were to be improved, it would be extending the duration of the workshops. Additional time would allow participants to observe, research, and discuss the selected plant species more thoroughly before beginning the practical work. A deeper understanding of the plants, their ecological role, characteristics, and conservation status would enrich the creative process and strengthen the connection between artistic practice and environmental education. This would likely result in more thoughtful artistic outcomes while making the educational experience even more meaningful and lasting for the participants.

BIOGRAPHIES

Ani Qananyan is an Armenian artist and a member of the International Academy of Ceramics (IAC). She is the founder of the Qananyan's Clay and Porcelain brand and a lecturer at the State Academy of Fine Arts of Armenia. The focus of the artist's research is transformation through the passage of time and the idea of collaboration with the material itself. She creates through a direct relationship with the material, exploring the connection between humans and nature, as well as the concept of cyclical continuity.

Kristine Gevorgyan is a librarian at the Goethe-Institut Armenien. She graduated from Brusov State University, Faculty of German and English Languages. She began her career in 2000 as a librarian in the German Reading Room, and has been working at the Goethe-Institut Library since 2017. In addition to promoting German literature, she places great importance on innovative projects that contribute to the development and expansion of the Library.

GOETHE-INSTITUT
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FORMAT
Open call, co-design workshop, public presentation, carpentry workshop, gardening workshop

CONCEPT
Martina Ćosić Vuglec, head of the Information and Library Department (Goethe-Institut Kroatien)
Magdalena Novotny, librarian (Goethe-Institut Kroatien)
Igor Crnković, librarian (Goethe-Institut Kroatien)
Mateja Medić, expert advisor (Inner Garden)
Petra Pavleka, landscape architect (Zemljanka)

ORGANIZATION AND COORDINATION
Martina Ćosić Vuglec (Goethe-Institut Kroatien)

FACILITATOR(S) / EXPERTS
Petra Pavleka, landscape architect (Zemljanka)
Kristijan Perlić, carpenter (ZMAG)

MODULAR URBAN GARDEN

A participatory gardening and carpentry program transforming the library's terrace into a communal urban garden, co-designed by students through democratic workflows.

Urban gardening · Commons · Intergenerational exchange · Co-creation

PHOTOGRAPHERS
Martina Ćosić Vuglec and Igor Crnković (Goethe-Institut Kroatien)

PARTNER INSTITUTION
Zemljanka, ZMAG

TIMEFRAME
March 2026: Open call for urban garden design proposals
April 2026: Student design workshop (2 × 4 h)
May 2026: Public presentation of the concept
June 2026: Open carpentry workshop
September 2026: Planting and gardening workshop

PARTICIPANTS
Student design workshop mentored by Petra Pavleka (Zemljanka): 15 participants
Public presentation: 30 participants
Open carpentry workshop: 25 participants
Planting and gardening workshop: 20 participants

Context The program focused on creating a community garden on the large, underused terrace of the Goethe-Institut Kroatien library. The aim was to establish a shared space where the local community could gather, learn, and take care of the garden together. Gardening was chosen as the craft because it embodies replicability, the notion of commons, and togetherness: it is a practice that can be learned by anyone, transferred easily, and sustained collectively. In terms of sustainability, the garden was envisioned as a small oasis of nature in the middle of an urban concrete jungle.

As part of the regional initiative *Common Crafts – Common Libraries*, the Goethe-Institut Kroatien wanted to position the library not only as a place where knowledge is stored, but as a space where knowledge is actively produced through shared making: a testing ground where ideas can be tried out, and a platform where young voices and ideas are heard.

During a two-day workshop facilitated by landscape architect Petra Pavleka (Zemljanka), 15 students of architecture, landscape architecture, and design collaborated through a participatory and democratic process to create the final sketch of the garden layout. They learned not only how to build an urban garden, but also how their future professions intersect. This interprofessional exchange was a key educational goal of the program.

The artistic goal was to create an attractive, usable terrace that people would enjoy visiting and maintaining. The social goal was to bring together people who would not normally interact and enable them to learn from each other. This became visible during the carpentry workshop, where families, students, working people, and pensioners, who had never met before, formed groups, laughed together, and built the first raised bed, based on the students' sketches. The project responded directly to the Goethe-Institut's aim of activating its terrace as a community space and to the city's growing interest in green urban initiatives.

Methodology

Program Sequence

1 **Identifying needs and setting goals** Recognizing the underused Library terrace and defining the goal of turning it into a community garden and learning space.

2 **Open call** Issuing an open call to students of architecture, landscape architecture, design, and forestry for modular garden concepts adapted to the terrace, including planting plans, sustainable materials and visualizations; selecting participants.

3 **Student design workshop** Bringing 15 students together under the guidance of the landscape architect; merging their individual concepts into one shared sketch and layout, working in four groups with distinct tasks; refining the joint concept with a focus on mobility, replicability, and the use of recycled and donated materials; agreeing that both the students and the Goethe-Institut may use the final concept with mutual acknowledgment.

4 **Public presentation** Presenting the refined concept to the public in the Goethe-Institut Library, with the students as presenters.

5 **Open carpentry workshop** Introducing the carpenter to the students' concept and sketches at a preparatory meeting; incorporating his practical advice (notably purchasing new wooden elements rather than reusing recycled wood such as euro pallets, which are difficult to disassemble); leading a public workshop with a presentation of tools, followed by sawing, drilling, and assembling the raised beds.

6 **Planting and gardening workshops** Planting the garden in a public workshop led by the landscape architect, followed by further themed activities around the garden, such as planting sessions and seed exchanges.

Methods

Open call Inviting students to propose concepts and selecting the working group.

Facilitated participatory workshop Merging individual ideas into one shared concept through democratic decision-making.

Work in small groups Four groups, each with a distinct task.

Expert consultation The carpenter's review of the sketches and advice on materials and construction.

Public presentation Students presenting the concept to a mixed audience.

Hands-on carpentry workshop Public, supervised building of the raised beds.

Materials and Tools Wooden elements, geotextile lining, soil and substrates, seeds and seedlings, hand saws, Japanese hand saws, drills, measuring tools, gloves.

Setting and Layout

Student workshop setting The workshop began with a theater-style seating arrangement in the Goethe-Institut library. The participating students introduced their project proposals and draft concepts through presentations by the six groups that had applied for the project, followed by an open discussion with participants from the other groups and the mentor to gather feedback and clarify key details. On the second day of the workshop, the setting was transformed into a collaborative table arrangement, with the tables placed in a circle to encourage interaction and equal participation. Guided by the mentor, participants worked together in groups, exchanged ideas, and co-created concepts through discussion, brainstorming, and collaborative development.

Concept presentation setting The Goethe-Institut library was arranged to accommodate a public audience, while the students presented their concept through a PowerPoint presentation they had created together. The audience, consisting of students, university professors, professional associates, librarians, and members of the public interested in the project, had the opportunity to ask questions and propose solutions following the presentation.

Carpentry workshop setting The library terrace was set up as an open-air workshop, with workstations and tools laid out visibly for the introductory demonstration. Participants then worked in small mixed groups around the raised bed elements, while the carpenter moved between the workstations to provide guidance. One completed raised bed was displayed as a model for participants to follow. At the end of the workshop, participants had the opportunity to sign the raised bed they had created together and ask the carpenter questions about the skills they had acquired and for advice about their own planned projects.

Garden setting Raised beds were positioned on the terrace, some of them movable and mounted on wheels to meet accessibility and mobility requirements. The garden served as the setting for the planting workshop in September and will continue to be used for future seed exchange activities.

Outcomes and Reflections The collaboration between Petra Pavleka, the students, Kristijan Perlić, and the Goethe-Institut created a smooth workflow in which each phase naturally led to the next. The balance between closed, concept-focused workshops and open, public activities also proved effective.

Several aspects of the process were surprising. The high level of interest from students, who engaged deeply with both the design and construction phases, exceeded expectations. Equally striking was the public's enthusiasm for the emerging urban garden. Through the project, the library unexpectedly connected with the Section of Environmental Journalists of the Croatian Journalists' Association, opening the door to future collaborations beyond the initial scope.

If one element were to be changed, it would be the sheer scale of the construction process. Building a raised-bed garden from scratch, while ensuring a participatory and publicly accessible process, required time, labor, and coordination. A slightly smaller pilot or a phased construction approach might make future iterations more manageable.

The program produced clear tangible outputs: the students' and carpenter's sketches, the refined concept, and ultimately the raised-bed garden itself on the library terrace. The project did not end with the pilot but rather continued through planned planting workshops and further thematic activities, ensuring that the garden remains an active learning and community space.

BIOGRAPHIES

Petra Pavleka is a landscape architect, permaculture practitioner, and founder of Zemljanka, an education and consultancy initiative focused on agroecology and sustainable living. Through workshops, projects, and partnerships with cultural and educational institutions, she promotes organic gardening, seed saving, wild plant foraging, and local sustainable food systems.

Mateja Medić studied sociology, philosophy, and fashion design. After working in the NGO sector, she became a freelance educator in sustainable living and founder of Inner Garden. Through interactive workshops and lectures, she helps children and adults develop practical skills in sustainable consumption, waste reduction, and the creative reuse of materials.

Kristijan Perlić is a member of ZMAG and has worked in natural building education for over 15 years. He leads bushcraft workshops, educational tours, and outdoor learning activities for children and adults. Inspired by nature and traditional craftsmanship, he also co-founded a small artisan brand producing handcrafted wooden objects.

Martina Ćosić Vuglec is head of the Information and Library Department at the Goethe-Institut Kroatien. She graduated with a degree in German and South Slavic languages from the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences at the University of Zagreb. During her studies, she also attended the universities of Novi Sad, Berlin, and Klagenfurt. She has worked at the Goethe-Institut Kroatien since 2015, focusing on topics such as media literacy, social responsibility, and intercultural issues.

Magdalena Novotny is an information specialist and historian working in the fields of digital heritage, documentation, and media literacy. She graduated in Information Sciences and History at the University of Zagreb and has gained experience across several cultural and research institutions since 2020. She currently works at the Goethe-Institut Kroatien in social media communication and library services.

Igor Crnković is a librarian and web administrator at the Goethe-Institut Kroatien. He holds a degree in Philosophy and German Language and Literature from the University of Zagreb. He has extensive experience in project management in German-speaking environments and works as a literary translator from German into Croatian, as well as a certified court interpreter for the German language.

Co-design, democratic Individual proposals merged into one shared concept through facilitated group decision-making, with the makers presenting the result publicly.
→ Zagreb, p. 122

Collective creation of a shared artifact One work continued by many hands across sessions, so that the object itself carries the group's shared time.
→ Belgrade (Inclusive Embroidery), p. 71

Collective sequencing and co-curation Participants negotiate the theme, order and structure of a shared publication, turning authorship into a negotiated process.
→ Athens, p. 29

Demonstration-based learning A technique is shown live, with room for questions, before participants try it themselves.
→ Athens, p. 29 → Thessaloniki, p. 42
→ Bucharest, p. 78 → Istanbul, p. 110

Digital documentation of hands Hand movements photographed and filmed, and makers interviewed, so that the gesture, not only the pattern, survives in an online forum.
→ Bucharest, p. 78

Digital fabrication as interpretation Traditional motifs redrawn and cut with plotters and heat presses, so participants interpret a visual language rather than reproduce it.
→ Kyiv, p. 84

Exhibition as participation An open call brings objects from private homes, or workshop outcomes, into a public exhibition in the library.
→ Belgrade (Photo-Transfer), p. 73 → Bucharest, p. 77

Exhibition-based learning Sample pieces, loom models, and finished examples on display throughout the workshops, so participants learn from objects as they make.
→ Thessaloniki, p. 43

Expressive arts facilitation Artists who also work as art therapists create conditions in which making and conversation support one another (not clinical therapy).
→ Sofia / Vratsa, p. 37

Generative design to textile Code written in Processing is translated into vectors and then embroidered by hand and machine, testing algorithm against thread.
→ Belgrade (Soft Systems), p. 68

Group reflection circle A facilitated closing conversation connects the making to participants' own experience and to the library.
→ Athens, p. 29 → Sofia / Vratsa, p. 37
→ Belgrade, p. 71 → Bucharest, p. 78
→ Istanbul, p. 111

Guided city walk A craft is situated in its urban history by walking to the places that carried it (see also "Wasteland," the 2025 Athens sound walk, in Chapter 1).
→ Thessaloniki, p. 43

Guided expert visit A working place of knowledge visited with its keeper or specialists, tools, and materials in situ.
→ Athens (bindery), p. 29
→ Yerevan (botanical garden), p. 116

Heritage education, context before creation History and symbolism are taught before any practical work, so that making becomes informed interpretation.
→ Kyiv, p. 84

Interpretation of local heritage as living material Local legends encountered not as historical knowledge to be learned but as living material through which participants reflect on their own lives.
→ Sofia / Vratsa, p. 37

Material- and object-based assessment The object itself decides the approach: each garment examined for condition and fabric before the repair technique is chosen.
→ Istanbul, p. 110

Narrative identity approach Collective stories become a language for personal ones, experienced through making and shared reflection rather than explicitly discussed (after McAdams).
→ Sofia / Vratsa, p. 37

Object-based storytelling Personal and found materials, pages, doilies, a library publication, serve as entry points for shared narrative.
→ Athens, p. 29 → Sofia / Vratsa, p. 37
→ Bucharest, p. 78

Observation-based making Drawing and modeling from careful observation of living things, translating what is seen into form rather than copying an image.
→ Yerevan, p. 117

Open call Participants and contributions recruited publicly, widening the circle beyond the library's regulars.
→ Athens, p. 26 → Bucharest, p. 77
→ Kyiv, p. 84 → Istanbul, p. 108 → Zagreb, p. 122

Participatory performance Choreographic prompts translate a craft's principles into body and space.
→ Athens (*ENGAGÉ*), p. 29

Participatory storytelling Personal stories from tradition bearers complement expert knowledge and create emotional connection.
→ Bucharest, p. 78 → Kyiv, p. 84

Peer learning at shared tables Tables arranged so participants watch, help, and learn from one another as much as from the facilitator.
→ Sofia / Vratsa, p. 37
→ Belgrade (Inclusive Embroidery), p. 71
→ Bucharest, p. 79 → Istanbul, p. 110

Peer-to-peer craft transmission A technique learned directly from experienced makers, in pairs, with homework between sessions.
→ Bucharest, p. 78

Photographing instead of collecting Plants studied through the camera and left where they grow, so that attention replaces possession.
→ Yerevan, p. 117

Psychosocial support through craft Culturally grounded making, developed with the NGO Alem, strengthens resilience and social connectedness among participants affected by displacement or trauma.
→ Kyiv, p. 85

Reuse of materials Recycled fabrics, packaging, and leftover stock anchor the making in circular practice.
→ Belgrade (Inclusive Embroidery, Photo-Transfer), p. 71, 73

Small groups with distinct tasks A complex job divided among groups, each with its own responsibility, then reassembled into one shared result.
→ Zagreb, p. 122

Supervised hands-on practice The craft itself, binding, embroidering, printing, repairing, weaving, cutting, shaping, building, planting, tried by every participant under a maker's guidance.
→ all nine cities

Visible mending Repair treated as visible, creative expression rather than concealment.
→ Istanbul, p. 110



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