

How librarians create the library on an everyday basis

Annual conference EBLIDA
April 18, 2023, Luxemburg
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Institute for Management Research (IMR)



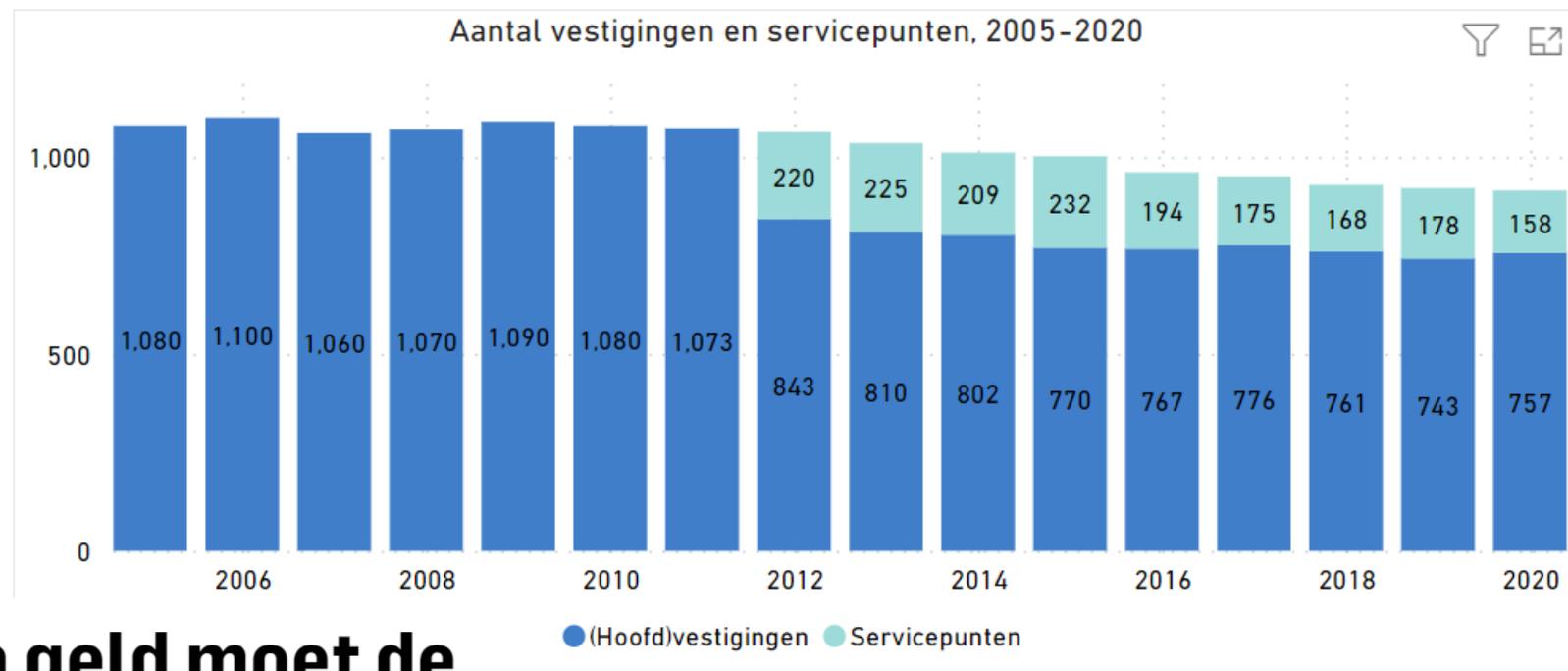
THE STORY OF ROSE

The club works diligently on all kinds of knitwear projects, while simultaneously having many conversations. Briefly interrupting her knitting, Rose proudly shows me a picture of herself volunteering as storyteller, a gift she had just received from the library managers. The picture and story-telling activity seem very important to her. She explains how she herself had learning difficulties in the past and that she had always wanted to engage with children, but never got the opportunity to do so in her private and professional life. The library managers asked the knitting group if someone would be interested in becoming a storyteller volunteer. Rose hesitated at first, but now expresses with tears in her eyes how happy she is being offered the opportunity to do what she had always wanted. (Fieldnotes)



Van Melik & Merry (2021)

CHANGING LIBRARY LANDSCAPES



Rapport: zonder extra geld moet de helft van bibliotheken in Utrecht dicht: 'Heel ingrijpend'

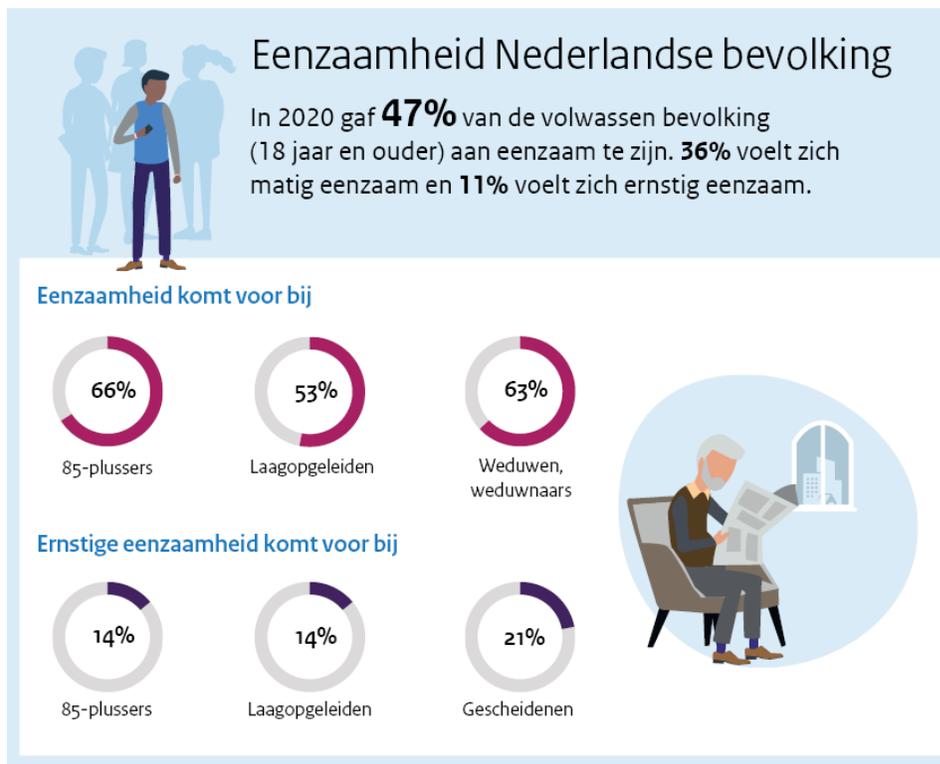
Zonder extra financiële steun van de gemeente moeten zes van de dertien vestigingen van Bibliotheek Utrecht dicht. Nog eens twee anderen vestigingen worden fors kleiner. Dat blijkt uit een rapport dat woensdag is gepubliceerd.

<https://www.bibliotheekinzicht.nl/kern-en-basisgegevens/bibliotheeklocaties-en-faciliteiten>

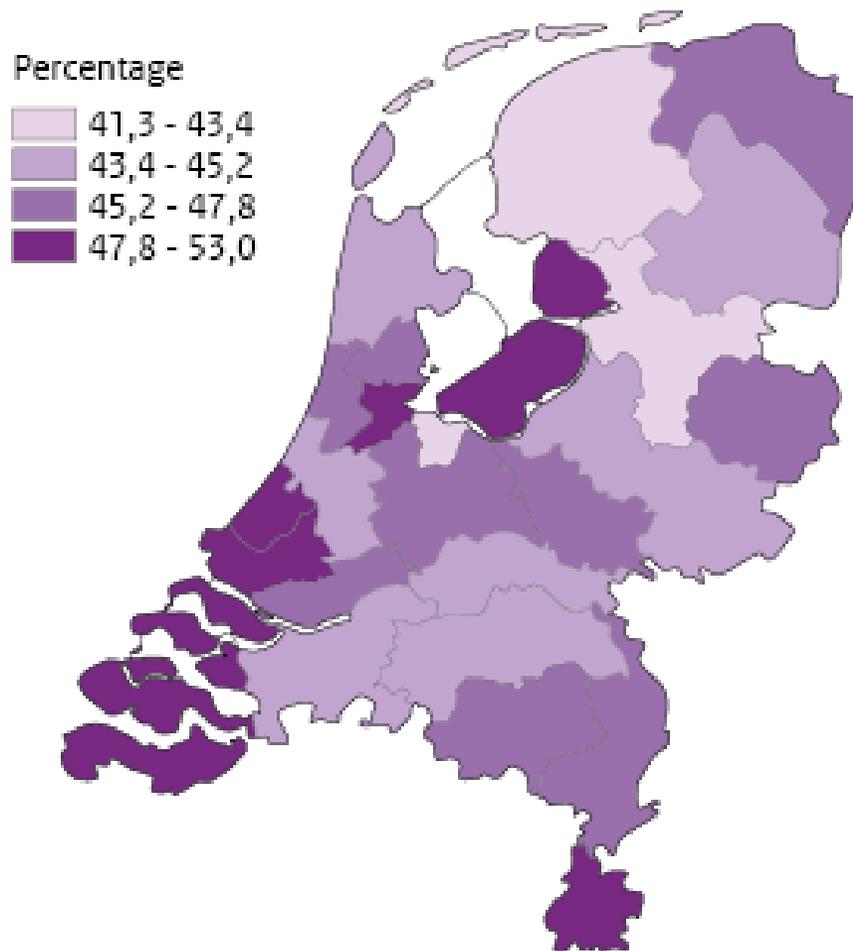
URBAN STRUGGLES IN LIBRARY LANDSCAPES

Laaggeletterdheid in Nederland

In Nederland hebben 2,5 miljoen mensen van 16 jaar en ouder moeite met lezen, schrijven en/of rekenen. Dat is 18% van alle mensen in Nederland. Dus ongeveer 1 op de 6 mensen!



Eenzaamheid per GGD-regio 2020



<https://www.vzinfo.nl/eenzaamheid/infographic>

INFRASTRUCTURING LIBRARIES IN TRANSITION (ILIT)

- Public libraries: from information to social infrastructure
- Problem: high expectations to provide social service assistance and address systemic challenges (illiteracy, unemployment, loneliness, pandemic, refugee crises); yet potentially overburdened and threatened by austerity
- Aim: unpacking (in)formal practices of library staff, patrons, policy-makers and other stakeholders to provide, perform and maintain public libraries through a lens of 'infrastructuring'
- Themes: institutional support, local involvement and community librarianship
- Ambition: simultaneously studying *and* cultivating a sense of community through co-productive zine-making workshops with main stakeholders
- By: Radboud University, University of Lund, University of Vienna and associate partners (2022-2025), incl. EBLIDA
- www.transforminglibraries.net



THEMES & CASE STUDIES



Institutional support: How do national, regional and local policies envision and fund libraries as socio-cultural infrastructures?



Local involvement: How do libraries engage diverse local communities with the goal of advancing library innovation and transformation as an urban infrastructure?



Community librarianship: How do librarians provide, practice and perform the infrastructuring of libraries?

Bibliotheek Rotterdam

- Centrale Bibliotheek
- Bibliotheek Delfshaven

Bibliotheken I Malmö

- Malmö Stadsbibliotek
- Rosengårdsbibliotheket

Büchereien Wien

- Hauptbücherei Wien
- Bücherei am Schöpfwerk

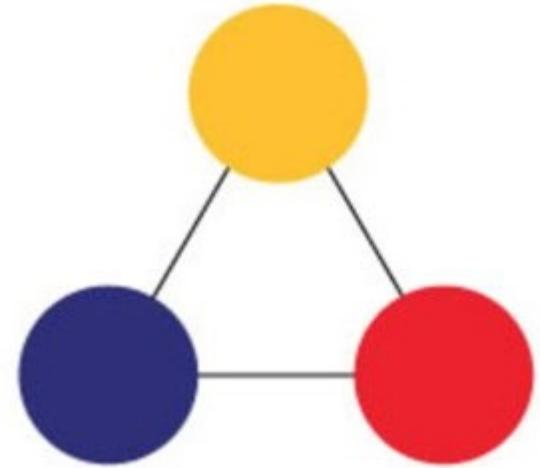
LIBRARIES AS SOCIAL INFRASTRUCTURE // SOCIAL INFRASTRUCTURING

- **Social infrastructure** (Klinenberg, 2018): “sites where strangers can meet and mix with others with whom they share their neighbourhoods and cities. More than just fulfilling an instrumental need, they are sites where cities can be experienced as inclusive and welcoming. (...) social infrastructures are necessary for nurturing public life, but also for addressing and preventing some of the most pressing concerns of contemporary urban life: countering social isolation, negotiating difference, and creating places for all—regardless of age, race, gender, sexuality, or income” (Layton & Latham, 2019: 2)
- **Increased appreciation** of libraries as *essential* urban infrastructure, esp. during pandemic
- Important to not only focus on what the library as social infrastructure *is*, but also how it comes *into being* through (informal) sayings and doings (**‘infrastructuring’**, i.e. **‘librarising’**, Rivano Eckerdal, 2018)

PRACTICE-ORIENTED APPROACH TO SOCIAL INFRASTRUCTURING

- Librarising/"doing the library": everyday routinised practices of staff working as community librarians
- Rivano Eckerdal (2018: 1409: "In a library- assemblage, elements include the librarians, library assistants, the patrons, the physical space, furniture, objects including books, journals and computers, digital resources, inter alia OPAC, search engines and social media platforms, and the articulations that are produced and used within the assemblage. All these elements make up the assemblage and librarians are not assigned any specific position or legitimacy."

Meaning: cultural conventions, expectations and socially shared meanings



Material: objects, tools, infrastructures

Competence: knowledge and embodied skills

Shove et al. (2012: 14)

THE STORY OF ANNE

- “librarian duties [are] shifting from information experts, or collectors and organizers of materials, to community advocates, *teachers*, and as match-makers for people to meet one another and new ideas” (Barniskis, 2016: 114 – emphasis added)
- Community-led Librarianship (CLL): “an integrated approach in which librarians seek to work *with*, not *for*, community members to better meet what they need and want from their public library” (Freeman & Blomley, 2019: 206 – original emphasis)

Over our coffee break, Anne relates an anecdote about a teenager who recently came to the library to study for her economics exam. In addition to providing Wi-Fi and a cup of refreshment, Anne could also help this particular student with the content of her exam material. After the exam, the teenager returned to the library to proudly share her results. Anne exactly recalls her grade: ‘a 8,4 [on a scale of 1 to 10]!, she says with a big smile. (Fieldnotes)

Van Melik & Merry (2021)



COMMUNITY LIBRARY: GUEST AT THE TABLE



Van Melik & Merry (2021)

There is no guest talking about a topic today, instead the group (6 participants) discusses all kinds of themes. I am amazed how well-read and informed they are; knowledgeable about current affairs but also literature classics. Bart immediately starts talking, about his visit to a museum and a particular writer he loves. It is difficult to follow his argumentation and to interrupt him; he seems happy he has someone to lecture to. After half an hour, another visitor finally takes over and expresses his amazement regarding Prince Andrew's interview on his connections to Jeffrey Epstein. In the remainder of the lunch meeting, the group discusses themes as varied as sweating when lying, strikes in health care, and irritating voices in audiobooks. (Fieldnotes)

De Bibliotheek *

+15%



Mensen willen graag hun verhaal vertellen.
 Hier kan iedereen op een laagdrempelige manier zijn ervaringen delen. Anderen kunnen aanschuiven en meedoen.

ELKE WOENSDAG

Gast aan Tafel

de Bibliotheek



Ontmoeten, inspireren en leren in een veilige en vertrouwde omgeving.

De bibliotheek biedt kansen, zodat iedereen volwaardig kan meedoen in de samenleving.



zeer (ernstig) eenzaam

eenzaam

sociaal weerbaar



19 - 64 jaar

65 +

"Leuk initiatief, interessant onderwerp, ik ga vaker komen..." ****

natuur

gezondheid

grenservaringen

"Het leuke van de bieb is dat je er kan zitten en je bent niets verplicht."

reizen in Laos

verhalen van vroeger

toeval

balans in je leven

vrouwen

"Dat ik hier nu zit is om andere mensen te ontmoeten."

van boekenbieb naar mensenbieb

politiek

oertijd

Zweden

"Vandaag erg interessante gesprekken. Fijn om gast te zijn."

wat

waar

wie

waarom

hoe

Een wekelijkse lunch-ontmoeting. Gasten vertellen over allerlei onderwerpen.

Woensdag 12 tot 13 uur in de Bibliotheek. Neem je eigen lunchpakket mee.

Iedereen is welkom om een verhaal te delen. Aanschuiven en luisteren mag ook.

Gasten worden zelfredzamer, vaardiger, creatiever en betrokkener.

Natuurlijk laten ontstaan en groeien van sociale cohesie. Gewoon doen!



Hoe verder?

Stap voor stap

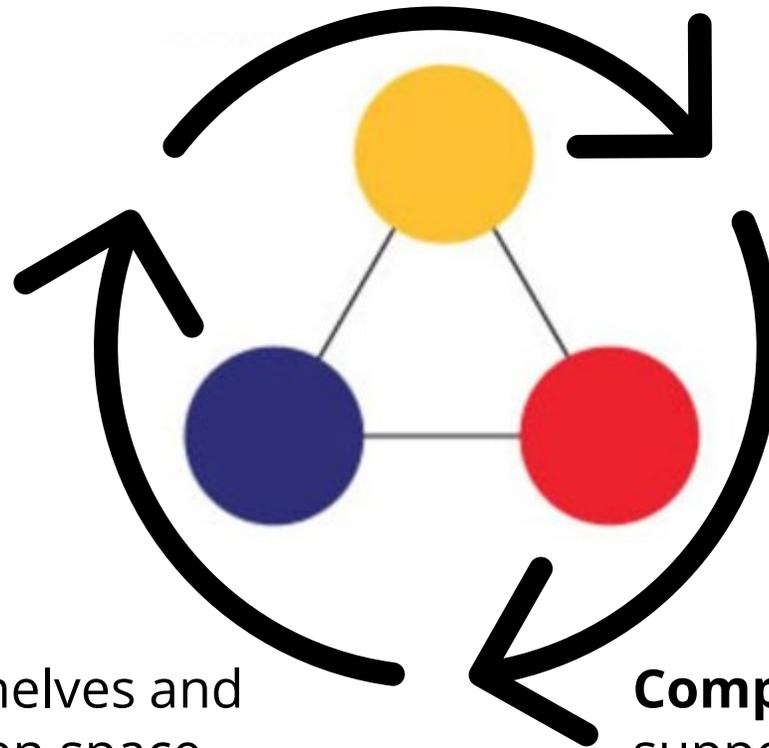
Vraaggericht

Netwerk versterken

Samenwerken

*Cijfers bibliotheekvestiging 2018. **Aantal bezoekers in 2019. ***Gezondheidsmonitor GGD 2016. ****Citaten uit Gastenboek van Gast aan Tafel, 2019.

Meaning: from place of books (*boekenbieb*)
to place of encounter (*mensenbieb*);
provide connection rather than collection;
community space; third space



Librarising/infrastructuring

Material: mobile bookshelves and
tables, plants, chairs, open space,
guestbooks, infographics

Competence: recognise, build and
support small-scale, self-sustaining
communities; provide emotional labour;
tell stories to patrons *and* funders

CHALLENGES OF SOCIAL INFRASTRUCTURE/INFRASTRUCTURING

- Understanding how the library comes into being as social infrastructure implies not only focussing on activities that take place in the library, but also taking into account all enabling/constraining factors (e.g. available space or knowledge, potential collaborations with other welfare institutions, financial struggles, consensus regarding the library's primary meaning)
- Who is the 'social'? Different communities with different (sometimes competing) needs
- How to reach out to those that would benefit most?
- How to convince funding bodies of this new function of the library? Is library 'culture' or 'social work'? *'The role of the library as a provider of media still holds significantly more weight, in terms of dollars spent today, than the provision of creative spaces and programs* (Barniskis, 2016: 1150)
- Are librarians and volunteers equipped enough to deal with vulnerable populations?
- Requires continuous investment and adaptation

Staatssecretaris investeert miljoenen om bibliotheken voor iedereen bereikbaar te houden

Het aantal bibliotheken neemt af, dus trekt het kabinet de komende jaren tot bijna 60 miljoen euro per jaar extra uit voor de sector. Het kabinet wil daarmee garanderen dat iedere Nederlander toegang heeft tot een volwaardige bibliotheek.

Michiel Kruijt 4 november 2022, 15:56

QUESTIONS?

For more information:

- Project website of ILIT: www.transforminglibraries.net
- Email: rienne.vanmelik@ru.nl
- Van Melik, R. & M. Hazeleger (2023), Routinised practices of community librarians: Daily struggles of Dutch public libraries to be(come) social infrastructures. *Journal of Librarianship and Information Science*. <https://doi.org/10.1177/09610006221149>
- Van Melik, R. & M.S. Merry (2021) Retooling the public library as social infrastructure: A Dutch illustration. *Social & Cultural Geography* <https://doi.org/10.1080/14649365.2021.1965195>
- Corble A. & R. Van Melik (2021) Public libraries in crises: Between spaces of care and information infrastructures. In: Van Melik, R., P. Filion & B. Doucet (Eds.). *Global Reflections on COVID-19 and Urban Inequalities: Public Space and Mobility (Vol. 3)* (pp. 119-129). Bristol: Bristol University Press.