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# of living libraries



MANIFESTO OF LIVING LIBRARIES

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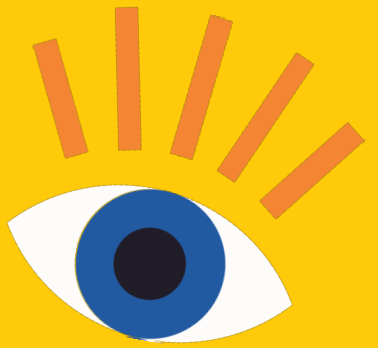
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The Manifesto of Living Libraries was created as part of the project KUK Fest 2026: Living Libraries of V4, which brings together libraries and librarians from Slovakia, the Czech Republic and Poland. Its aim is to share experiences, foster cooperation and develop libraries as open, vibrant cultural, educational and community spaces.
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Manifesto of Living Libraries

FROM FESTIVAL TO MANIFEST

When the Library Steps Out into the Community

Mgr. art. Roman Večerek, Director of Orava Library of Anton Habovštiak in Dolný Kubín and Director of KUK Fest

What can a library be? A place where we borrow books, encounter literature and find information? Or can it also be an open cultural, educational and community institution that brings people together, encourages creativity and actively contributes to the life of its surroundings? It was this vision that gave rise to KUK Fest – a festival of books, art and culture organised by the Orava Library of Anton Habovštiak in Dolný Kubín.

When we were preparing its first edition in 2021, marking the 70th anniversary of the library's founding, we wanted to go beyond a traditional cultural event. We wanted to bring books, art and culture closer to people and show







that a public library can actively help shape the cultural and community life of a town. The acronym KUK stands for books, art and culture; over time, however, it has also become an invitation to look at the library from a different perspective.

We conceived KUK Fest as a multi-genre festival where literature meets theatre, music, film, exhibitions, creative workshops and discussions. Our aim is not simply to offer a diverse programme, but above all to connect people and experiences. We realised that if we wanted to reach those who do not usually visit the library, we had to go out and meet them. We therefore moved the festival into the town centre, into an open public space. The library stepped beyond its own walls and became a natural part of the town's everyday life.

This was where the idea of the library as a so-called third place, as described by the American sociologist Ray Oldenburg, began to take shape. A place between home and work that encourages informal encounters and the building of relationships. Such a place need not be just a library reading room or community space. It can also be a square, a park or a festival tent. What matters more than the location itself is what happens there.

There is also a less visible side of the festival, one that does not quite fit into programmes, annual reports or statistics. I remember the night I spent sleeping alone in the main circus tent we had borrowed. My task was to keep watch and make sure nothing happened to it. It sounds rather heroic, but in reality it was a small adventure. A little fear, a little cold, a lot of tiredness and the very practical question of how to get to the toilet in the middle of the night. A huge tent, darkness, nocturnal sounds – and me, guardian of the festival universe. At times I felt like the last member of an expedition on a deserted planet.

And then the young volunteers arrived. They decided I should not spend the night in the tent alone, so my guard post turned into a shared dormitory. Suddenly there was more laughter, more life and perhaps a little less room to sleep. It is in moments like these that you realise what a festival is really about. Young people who bring energy, ideas and a willingness to help are not merely an extra pair of hands in the organisation. They are co-creators. We simply could not do it without them.

Over six editions, we have experienced scorching heat, torrential rain, a dislocated shoulder, a bout of back pain, power cuts and a lack of money. There have been moments when we had to improvise, relocate, rescue, make phone calls and find solutions. And every time, someone stepped in to help. Someone brought assistance, someone a solution, someone coffee and someone a good joke. And we carried on.

These experiences point to something essential: trust, cooperation, volunteering, participation and the ability to create something together. KUK Fest is not simply a series of cultural events. It is a space in which the community actively contributes to the creation of public cultural life. The library remains the natural starting point for everything that happens. We do not want to replace its traditional mission, but to broaden the ways in which we fulfil it – through education, culture, support for critical thinking, inclusion and social responsibility.

In 2026, KUK Fest took on a new international dimension. Its sixth edition, under the subtitle Living Libraries of V4, connected the festival with a professional gathering of public libraries from Slovakia, the Czech Republic and Poland. As part of the V4 Library Fair, we created a space for project presentations, the sharing of good practice, discussions and workshops.

Our conversations gradually revealed that, despite working in different conditions, we face similar questions. What does a living library mean? Is it a library with high visitor numbers, a rich programme and modern facilities? Or is it, above all, an institution that can listen to its users, respond to their needs and involve them in its own development?

The idea for the Manifesto of Living Libraries grew out of these meetings and conversations. We did not want to create a universal manual prescribing how all libraries should operate. We wanted to capture the experiences, values and shared convictions of people working in different libraries and settings who nevertheless face similar questions and challenges. We continued to develop these ideas at a joint workshop for library directors in Mikulov.

The result is a set of six principles that form the foundation of the Manifesto: we listen and respond; we create space for everyone; we trust people; we give people the freedom to create and experiment; we do things that matter; and we persevere and learn. These are not merely general declarations. Each one represents a practical challenge for the everyday running of a library.

We believe that a living library is not defined by the size of its building, the number of events it organises or the amount of technology it has. Its true value lies in people, relationships, trust, openness and the ability to respond to the needs of the community.

We live in a world where information is almost constantly at our fingertips, yet we increasingly need places where we can pause, listen and understand one another. A library has a unique opportunity to create space for free access to information, lifelong learning, critical thinking, cultural diversity and encounters between different generations and viewpoints. It does not have to provide answers to every problem in society. But it can be a place where we talk about them and look for solutions together.

Perhaps it is naïve, but sometimes I tell myself that libraries will one day save the world. Not on their own, of course, but together with the people to whom they offer space. By encouraging reading and knowledge, teaching people to listen, understand, ask questions, question assumptions, create and be together. By creating small islands of trust in a world that needs them more and more.

KUK Fest lasts only a few days, but its impact continues through the new contacts, partnerships and ideas that people take home with them. We see the Manifesto in the same way – not as a closed set of rules, but as an open invitation to think and act together. Its true meaning will become clear only when its principles become part of the everyday work of libraries and their relationships with people.

Perhaps, at the beginning, all we wanted was to bring the library to the town square. Today we know that, in doing so, we opened up a much larger space – a space for thinking about what kind of libraries we want and what kind of society we want to create together.

We do not merely want to talk about living libraries. We want to create them every day – in libraries, communities and public spaces.

With the library every step of the way.











MANIFESTO OF LIVING LIBRARIES

A library is alive when it makes room for people.

A library is a living cultural, educational and community space. It is a place where people, ideas and stories meet, where new ideas emerge and where everyone can explore, create, learn and take part in what is happening around them.

A living library is shaped by people, their needs, trust and the courage to try new things. It evolves alongside people and society. It is open to change, listens, seeks meaningful ways forward and makes room for initiative.

We believe in libraries that have the courage to listen, to trust and to create new opportunities together with people.

Six principles of a living library:

1. WE LISTEN AND RESPOND

We take an interest in people's needs and take their experiences seriously. We involve them in shaping our services, spaces and programmes. We turn meaningful suggestions into concrete changes and explain what we can do and why.

2. WE CREATE SPACE FOR EVERYONE

We promote accessibility, encounters and mutual understanding. We look for ways to remove physical, communication-related and other barriers. Everyone should have the opportunity to use the library, bring their own ideas and feel welcome.

3. WE TRUST PEOPLE

Trust creates room for initiative, independence and responsibility. We encourage both staff and users to come forward with ideas, take responsibility and contribute to the development of the library. We create conditions in which good ideas can grow.

4. WE GIVE PEOPLE THE FREEDOM TO CREATE AND EXPERIMENT

We encourage curiosity, creativity and the courage to seek new paths. We enable people to explore, experiment and pursue their own initiatives. We combine freedom with professional judgement and responsibility for the purpose of what we do.

5. WE DO THINGS THAT MATTER

We know why we carry out particular activities and whom they are intended to serve. We choose services, programmes and forms of cooperation that reflect the library's mission and bring value to people and society. We base quality on an understanding of needs, professional expertise and thoughtful choices.

6. WE PERSEVERE AND LEARN

We develop the library step by step. We explore new possibilities, reflect on our experiences, learn from mistakes and share what works. We give change time and care for the people who make it happen.

A living library is created together.

We believe that a library can be a place where people find inspiration, trust, opportunities and relationships. A place where they can freely bring forward ideas, learn from one another and take part in the life of their surroundings.

The vitality of a library can be seen in what it enables people to do, how it treats them and how it is able to change.

We want to live by what we say.

About this document

This manifesto grows out of the experiences of librarians from Poland, the Czech Republic and Slovakia. It provides a shared starting point for further reflection, the sharing of good practice and the development of living libraries.



THE LIVING LIBRARY AS A PUBLIC COMMITMENT

The Manifesto of Living Libraries did not emerge as a ready-made answer to all the questions libraries face today. It grew out of conversations, experiences, doubts and a shared conviction that the role of the library in contemporary society extends far beyond lending books. It is the result of a gathering of librarians at KUK Fest in Dolný Kubín, where representatives of libraries from different countries and backgrounds discussed what a living library means today. These conversations were followed by a joint workshop for library directors in Mikulov, Czechia. It was through dialogue, the comparison of experiences and the search for common ground that the idea of the manifesto gradually took shape.

This is not a document belonging to one library, one town or one country. It is an attempt to articulate values that can unite libraries regardless of their size, governing authority, budget or geographical location. It is based on the belief that every library has its own circumstances and its own story, yet all can share a common ambition: to be an open, trusted and useful place for people.



The vitality of a library cannot be decreed or achieved through a one-off project. It does not come from organising more events, buying new technology or renovating the premises. All of these things may be important, but on their own they are not enough. A library becomes living when it can understand the world around it, understand the people it serves and turn that understanding into concrete action. When a visitor becomes more than a service user – when they become a partner. When a building becomes more than a place where documents are stored – when it becomes a space for relationships, knowledge, cooperation and trust.

We therefore do not see the Manifesto as a set of instructions or a single model for all libraries to imitate. It is an invitation to reflect and to act. Each library must find its own way of putting its principles into practice. What matters is that these principles do not remain mere declarations, but become part of everyday work, decision-making and relationships.

1. A LIBRARY IS MORE THAN A BUILDING AND A SERVICE

A library is one of the few public institutions that people can enter without having to buy anything, prove anything or explain in advance why they have come. They may come for a book, information, peace and quiet, a conversation, help, inspiration or simply because they need to spend some time among other people. They can spend an entire day there without having to consume anything or justify their presence. This openness is one of its greatest values. At a time when many public spaces are becoming commercial or restricted to specific purposes, the library holds a special position: it offers a space in which people have value even when they are not customers.

Yet openness also means moving beyond the idea that everything important must happen within the library's walls. A library can reach out into streets, schools, parks, community centres, hospitals, social care facilities and transport hubs. It can bring books and reading to places where people live, work, wait or meet. Decentralising library services does not mean abandoning the library building. It means extending its reach and reaffirming that a public service should go out to meet people.

A living library therefore asks not only how many people have crossed its threshold. It also asks whom it has not yet reached, whom it fails to engage, who finds its services inaccessible and what it can do to change that. Its





boundaries are defined not only by its walls, but by its ability to build relationships and be present in the life of its surroundings.

2. PEOPLE ARE NOT AN AUDIENCE. THEY ARE CO-CREATORS

The traditional view of a library often divides its world into those who provide services and those who use them. A living library softens this divide. Visitors, readers, local residents, partners and staff themselves can all play an active part in its development. People do not come merely to receive a ready-made programme. They bring experiences, knowledge, questions, skills, contacts and ideas that can enrich the whole community.

Co-creation does not mean that the library gives up its professional responsibility or must turn every request into a service. It means that decisions are not made in isolation. The library creates opportunities for conversation, identifies needs, explains what it can offer and looks for solutions together with people. Sometimes this may involve a major change to a space or service; at other times, it may be a small adjustment that makes access significantly easier for someone.

We do not work only for the community, but above all together with it. The distinction is crucial: people are not merely recipients of our services and activities, but partners who can influence their shape, bring forward their own initiatives and help decide what happens in the library. This is how a space emerges that genuinely reflects the needs and possibilities of its local environment.

It is important to recognise that people are not a homogeneous group. Children, young people, parents, older people, people with disabilities, people in socially challenging situations, migrants, people living alone and those who

have never previously engaged with a library may have different needs and expectations. A living library does not rely on the idea of an average visitor. It looks for ways to create space for diversity.

A community is not created simply by naming it in a project. It develops gradually through repeated encounters, trust, shared experiences and the opportunity to influence something together. A library can be a place where people who might otherwise never meet find themselves in the same conversation. This is where its distinctive social strength lies.

3. INCLUSION IS NOT AN OPTIONAL EXTRA

A library's openness is not demonstrated by a sign on the door saying that it is for everyone. It is demonstrated by whether people with different needs can actually find their way around, feel safe and participate in a meaningful way. Accessibility is not just a matter of step-free entrances. It includes clear communication, access to information, appropriate forms of service, respectful language, sensitivity to different life circumstances and a willingness to seek individual solutions.

Inclusion does not begin with a special event for a particular group. It begins with the way a library thinks about its services, spaces, rules and everyday interactions with people. There is a difference between inviting someone to a single activity and giving them the opportunity to become a natural part of the library's life. Genuine openness means not assuming that everyone has the same opportunities, experiences or confidence when entering a public institution.

A library can help reduce loneliness, connect generations and create safe opportunities for people to meet. Intergenerational projects, community reading, creative workshops, conversations and living libraries show that knowledge does not come only from texts. It also grows through listening to one another and meeting someone whose life experience differs from our own.



This is why a library has an important role to play in building understanding. It does not have to eliminate all differences or pretend that conflicts do not exist. But it can create conditions in which differences can be discussed without humiliation and everyone has the right to be heard.

4. READING, KNOWLEDGE AND THE ABILITY TO UNDERSTAND THE WORLD

Books remain one of the fundamental pillars of a library. A living library, however, advocates reading not only as a leisure activity or a path to literary enjoyment, but also as a prerequisite for personal and social development. Reading develops language, imagination, concentration, memory and the ability to think in context. Reading with understanding enables people not merely to recognise words, but to grasp meaning, distinguish relevant information, ask questions and form their own judgements.

In a society overwhelmed by information, reading and information literacy are essential components of civic resilience. People need to know how to find information, assess its reliability, distinguish facts from opinions and understand how information spreads. Critical thinking does not mean automatically questioning everything. It means knowing how to ask questions, verify information, compare sources and be prepared to revise one's opinion when convincing evidence emerges.

The library has a distinctive role in this area. It provides access to reliable sources, supports lifelong learning and helps people navigate a changing information environment. It can develop media, digital and information literacy, create space for discussion and teach people to engage with questions that have no simple answers.

Support for reading cannot be limited to those who already read. A living library seeks new ways to reach people who have not yet developed a relationship with books. It brings reading into public spaces and connects it with art, play, conversation and personal experience. It creates opportunities for books to become a natural part of life rather than an obligation that puts people off reading.



5. THE LIBRARY IN THE DIGITAL WORLD

Digital technologies are changing the way people search, read, communicate and learn. A library that wants to remain living cannot ignore these changes. However, it does not have to embrace every new technological trend. Its task is to choose tools that improve access to services, expand opportunities for learning and make people's lives easier.

Digitalisation makes sense when it removes barriers. Online services, digital library cards, online catalogues, electronic information resources and digital reading platforms can make the library accessible even to people who cannot visit regularly. Technology must not, however, create a new barrier for those who lack the necessary equipment, skills or confidence. Digital services should complement personal contact, not automatically replace it.

A library can be a place where people learn to use digital tools safely and responsibly. It can help older people navigate the online environment, support children and young people in critically assessing content, and provide adults with opportunities for lifelong learning. With the development of artificial intelligence and automated information services, the ability to ask questions, verify answers and understand the limits of technology will become even more important.

The digital and physical library are not opposites. They form a single space of services and possibilities. A library can be accessible remotely while remaining a place for personal encounters. Its future does not lie in choosing between a book and a screen, but in its ability to connect different forms of knowledge in a thoughtful way.

6. THE LIBRARY AS A PARTNER AND AN ACTIVE PART OF THE TOWN AND REGION

A living library is not an island. It is part of the local ecosystem and develops through partnerships with schools, local authorities, cultural institutions, civic associations, social and health services, communities, businesses and individuals. A partnership is not simply the placement of a logo on a poster or an exchange of venues. It is a joint effort to address a need that one organisation cannot meet on its own.

A library can connect culture, education, social affairs and civic life. It can be a place where schools meet families, art meets the public, professionals



meet people seeking help, or young people meet older generations. Such connections extend the library's reach and strengthen its importance within the community.

A library need not remain confined to the traditionally understood cultural sphere. Culture is increasingly involved in areas such as mental health, support for people with disabilities, social services, youth work and strengthening social resilience. Cultural and community activities can also be tools for positive change in local communities. A library has the opportunity to connect these fields, create space for cooperation and find new ways of being useful to the people around it.

Festivals, public readings, book swaps, discussions, community projects and activities in public spaces show that a library can initiate things rather than merely host them. It can reach out into streets and squares, create new opportunities for people to meet and bring culture to those who would not seek it out themselves. Public space can thus become an extension of the library, and the library a natural part of a town or village.

Partnership also requires a willingness to share space, responsibilities and decision-making. The library does not always have to be the lead organiser. Sometimes it is more important to create the right conditions, connect the right people or provide professional support. Its success need not be measured by how many activities carry its name, but also by how many worthwhile things have happened thanks to its involvement.

7. THE COURAGE TO EXPERIMENT AND LEARN

A living library is not content to repeat established practices simply because that is how things have always been done. It preserves what is valuable, while also asking whether its services meet today's needs. It has the courage to try new ways of working, enter unfamiliar partnerships and test ideas in practice. Not every attempt will succeed. Failure, however, need not be a reason to give up if we can learn from it.

Innovation does not have to mean expensive technology or a major project. It may involve changing opening hours, finding a new way to communicate, moving an activity into a public space, involving volunteers or creating a service that responds to a specific need. What matters is not whether an idea is new on an international scale, but whether it brings meaningful change to the environment in which the library operates.

We do not have to be perfect, nor do we need to have everything fully prepared. Sometimes it is better to start with a small change or a modest event than to spend endless time preparing a large, perfectly designed project that may never happen. Small steps can also bring significant change when they respond to people's real needs and when we have the courage to put them into practice. The important thing is not to wait for ideal conditions, but to begin, experiment, evaluate and learn.

A culture of learning must also be present within the organisation. Staff need opportunities for professional development, sharing experiences, cooperation and open discussion about what works and what does not. A living library is not created by its director or management alone. It is created by the whole team and by the way its members work together. Trust, clear goals and an appropriate degree of autonomy allow initiative to become a natural part of the work rather than an exception.

It is equally important for libraries to share their experiences with one another. What has worked in one village or town may inspire another library, even if the solution has to be adapted to its own circumstances. Cooperation between libraries, joint meetings, working groups and international networks help organisations move beyond their individual boundaries and create opportunities for shared learning.

8. THE LIBRARY AND DEMOCRATIC SOCIETY

A library is neither a political party nor an instrument of a single ideology. Its public mission is to support free access to information, knowledge, culture and a diversity of opinions. In a democratic society, its importance lies precisely in creating a space where people can learn, think independently and form their own opinions.

A neutral library is not an indifferent library. It cannot be indifferent to exclusion, discrimination, restrictions on access to information or situations in which people lose the opportunity to learn and express themselves freely. Its professionalism lies in protecting pluralism, respecting human dignity, working with verifiable information and creating fair conditions for different voices to meet.

Discussion in a library does not have to mean agreement. It can provide an opportunity to confront different opinions, ask questions and seek understanding. A library should support a culture of dialogue in which difference does not become a reason for exclusion. The ability to listen, distinguish between arguments and engage in constructive dialogue is one of the important skills of democratic life.

A library strengthens society in ways that cannot always be easily expressed in numbers. It helps build trust, reduce information inequality, encourage civic engagement and create a shared space at a time when people often retreat into separate information and social worlds.

9. WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO TURN THE MANIFESTO INTO EVERYDAY PRACTICE?

The Manifesto matters only if its values are reflected in decisions. Every library can ask itself a few simple but important questions: Who do our services reach, and who do they not reach? Who helps shape the programme? Do we know why we organise each activity? Are our spaces and information genuinely accessible? Do we give staff and visitors room to take initiative? What have we learned recently, and what have we changed in response to feedback?

The answers will not always be comfortable. They may reveal that some established practices no longer work, that a particular group remains beyond



the library's reach, or that the programme is extensive but not always sufficiently meaningful. The ability to acknowledge our own limitations is a prerequisite for development. Self-assessment should not be an administrative obligation, but a tool that helps the library understand its own work better.

The vitality of a library cannot be measured by a single indicator. Statistics on visits, loans, events and users are important, but they do not tell the whole story. It is equally important to observe whether people return, whether they get involved, whether new partnerships emerge, whether access to services improves and whether the library can respond to changes in the community. Qualitative feedback, conversations and people's stories can reveal value that numbers alone cannot capture.

Every library can set its own steps and pace. For one, the first step may be opening its space to new groups; for another, developing digital services, working with volunteers, partnering with a school or moving a programme outside the building. What matters is to begin, persevere and regularly return to the question of whether what we do genuinely serves people.

10. SHARED RESPONSIBILITY FOR THE FUTURE OF LIBRARIES

The future of libraries will not depend solely on new technologies, buildings or budgets. It will also depend on whether libraries can convincingly explain their value, remain present in the life of communities and retain public trust. Libraries need stable conditions, skilled and motivated staff, high-quality collections, accessible premises and the support of their governing authorities. At the same time, they need the courage to articulate where they want to go and what value they bring.

A living library is not a luxury that only large city institutions can afford. It is a way of thinking that can be applied in a small village library, a regional or municipal library, or a large research institution. Each has different opportunities, but every one can listen, create space, trust people, try new things and do work that matters.

Cooperation between libraries gives these efforts a wider dimension. Experiences from Slovakia, Czechia and Poland, as well as other countries, show that many challenges are shared. Libraries can identify needs together, develop new forms of service, create international projects and support one another. Differences between settings are not an obstacle, but a source of inspiration.

We therefore see this manifesto as the beginning of an ongoing conversation. It is neither a closed document nor a final definition of a living library. It is a shared commitment to keep returning to the questions of whom we serve, why we exist and how we can be useful in a changing world. It is an invitation to libraries, their staff, partners, governing authorities and communities to help shape this future.

A CALL TO ACTION

We believe in libraries that are not closed in on themselves. Libraries that step out to meet people, open their doors and their minds, bring generations together, connect different worlds and make room for questions as well as answers. Libraries that understand that their greatest wealth lies not only in collections, technology or premises, but in the people and relationships they help to create.

We commit to listening before we decide. To seeking before we reject. To cooperating before we act alone. To explaining, learning and sharing. To protecting free access to knowledge and creating an environment in which everyone can feel welcome. We do not merely want to talk about openness, inclusion and trust. We want to put them into practice every day.

A living library is not a finished state. It is a constant movement, a relationship and a decision. A decision to be there for people – and to change together with them.

THE LIBRARY FAIR: WHERE LIBRARIES MEET AND INSPIRE ONE ANOTHER

The V4 Library Fair was part of the sixth edition of KUK Fest 2026, held under the subtitle Living Libraries of V4. And it truly was a fair in every sense of the word. Ten libraries from Slovakia, the Czech Republic and Poland presented their work at individual stands, offering festival visitors a glimpse of the best of what they do. They showcased their services, events, community activities, successful projects and ideas for engaging readers and enriching life in their towns and regions.

Visitors were not just passive spectators. They could stop by, ask questions, discover new things, browse examples, take part in activities and try things out for themselves. They had the opportunity to experience first-hand how libraries work today, what they offer their communities and how they go beyond the boundaries of traditional library services. Each stand told a different story, shared a different experience and offered a new source of inspiration.

The fair was not intended for the general public alone. Its professional and collegial dimension was just as important. Librarians presented their approaches to one another, exchanged experiences, compared practices and explored new opportunities for cooperation. The presentations were complemented by professional discussions and workshops addressing the future of public libraries, their role in the community, the accessibility of their services and ways of responding to society's changing needs.

The V4 Library Fair embodied exactly what KUK Fest is about and what the idea of living libraries represents. It was a lively space for encounters, experimentation, conversation and sharing. A place where librarians met visitors – and one another. Where experiences became inspiration and ideas were given room to grow. It showed that a library is not just a building or a collection of services, but above all, people and the relationships they create.

The first edition of the V4 Library Fair welcomed ten libraries from three countries. We hope this marks the beginning of a new tradition, and that next year the festival grounds will be even more diverse, filled with more libraries, their stories, projects and inspiring people. Will you accept our invitation and come to present your library at the next edition?













VOICES OF KUK FEST



DADO NAGY

KUK Fest in Dolný Kubín shows that a local library can be the vibrant and inspiring heart of a town's cultural life, where books, discussions, theatre, live music and street performances naturally bring people together on many different levels.

The festival brings inspiring guests into public spaces and reaches visitors who would never attend a traditional literary event in a library.

Taking part in the festival is also a formative experience for dozens of young secondary-school students who volunteer there.

In my view, one of the festival's greatest strengths is the way KUK Fest connects local and international authors with representatives of cultural institutions.

Taking part in this festival has always been a powerful experience for me – from the first edition, when I attended as a guest, to the later ones, when I became its moderator.

Two years ago, after a stage discussion, I met for dinner with the writer and director Eva Borušovičová, her son Martin, and Soňa, her sister and a literary doula. It was our best conversation, the best we had had in the thirty years we had known one another. Sadly, I had no idea it would be our last.

I also fondly remember an evening spent together after an event with writers Arpád Soltész and Juraj Červenák and information security expert Tomáš Kriššák.

Or a long morning, before the programme even began, with Saša Salmela and her two Finnish teenagers.

And the informal encounters with representatives of libraries and publishing houses, theatre practitioners and other notable people.

I could go on for a long time listing these unusual encounters at the festival. I have known some of these people for many years; others were a new experience not only for the audience, but for me as well.

Last but not least, I admire the determination with which library director Roman Večerek manages to create an event that truly matters in Dolný Kubín.

Dado Nagy, long-time festival moderator

IVETA BABJAKOVÁ

Taking part in the sixth edition of the summer book festival KUK Fest 2026: Living Libraries of V4 in Dolný Kubín was an exceptionally inspiring and profound experience for me. I had been looking forward to it for several years, but it was only this year that I was able to be part of it.

I believe that Thursday's panel discussion with library representatives and directors was enriching, stimulating and full of ideas, not only for me but for all those who took part. Together, we explored pressing issues as well as visionary ideas, showing that modern libraries are no longer merely quiet warehouses for books, but open and dynamic community centres. This fruitful and thought-provoking exchange of experiences helped us move forward in many ways and gave us an enormous boost of creative energy. It reaffirmed how indispensable international cross-border cooperation within the V4 region is. I personally took away many ideas from the discussion, not only from Czech libraries but also from Polish ones, and made new contacts with people from the library world abroad.

Heartfelt thanks go to the International Visegrad Fund, whose meaningful support made it possible to hold this exceptional international event to such a high standard. My sincere and immense thanks also go to the entire organising team of the Orava Library of Anton Habovštiak in Dolný Kubín, led by its director, Roman Večerek, for the flawless organisation, incredibly warm atmosphere and professionally prepared facilities. Friendship was quite literally tangible at every turn.

The inspiring discussion was of tremendous benefit to the entire Mikuláš Kováč Public Library (VKMK), and we are already looking forward to putting all these fresh ideas into practice! I hope I will be able to say, 'See you next year, friends!'

Mgr. Iveta Babjaková, Director, Mikuláš Kováč Public Library



JANA SIKOROVÁ

From 10 to 13 June, we took part as a partner library in the international KUK Fest in Dolný Kubín, which this year was held under the subtitle Living Libraries of V4. It was an honour to stand alongside Orava Library of Anton Habovštiak in Dolný Kubín and be part of an event that showed that libraries today are much more than places where people borrow books.
I had the opportunity to experience the festival from several different perspectives. As a partner institution, we helped prepare part of the programme; as a director, I took part in the panel discussion; and as a representative of the Znojmo library, my colleague Eva Šrámková and I were able to present our work, projects and vision for the library's further development.

What did we bring to the festival?

We wanted to present the best of our region and of the network of people with whom we have been working over the long term.
For the literary programme, we recommended poets Jan Spěváček and Aleš Kauer, both prominent figures in contemporary Czech poetry.
The music programme was enriched by Znojmo musician Taliraw, whose performance created a unique festival atmosphere.
A colleague from the Matěj Josef Sychra Library in Žďár nad Sázavou also accepted our invitation, and we shared a presentation stand. It was another opportunity to show how important cooperation between libraries across regions can be.

What will libraries look like in ten years?

One of the strongest moments for me was the panel discussion involving library directors from the V4 countries.
We talked about how to reach new visitors, what role libraries play in communities, how to work with modern technologies and how to create a space that people will still want to visit ten years from now.
I came away reassured that the future of libraries depends above all on people, high-quality services, openness, education and the ability to respond to society's changing needs.

We presented Znojmo

At our stand, we presented several projects that show the direction in which the Znojmo library is developing.
The transformation of the Loucká branch, created in cooperation with students from the Faculty of Architecture at Brno University of Technology, attracted particular interest. We also presented a study for a new library in the former post office building, as well as our projects for children and older people and the Bibliotheca inspirans award.
I was also pleased to have the opportunity to speak briefly with a representative of the International Visegrad Fund and establish further contacts that may open up new opportunities for international cooperation.

Inspiration that continues

KUK Fest was not just a conference or a cultural festival. Above all, it was a meeting of people who believe that libraries have an important place in today's society.
We are taking home new contacts, inspiration, concrete ideas and the desire to continue working on joint projects. Meetings like these remind us that the greatest value of libraries lies not only in their collections, but above all in the people who shape them and bring them together.
I would like to thank director Roman Večerek, the entire team of the Orava Library, the student volunteers and everyone who helped organise the festival. It was an honour to be part of it.

Jana Sikorová, Director of Znojmo Municipal Library



BOHUMIL KARTOUS

One of the highlights of my 2026 was KUK Fest in Dolný Kubín. This small town in north-western Slovakia has not only a wonderful location among the green hills of the Orava region, but also a library. And that library has a director, Roman Večerek, who understands that the role of libraries today extends far beyond services related to lending books.
I was invited to the festival to take part in a discussion about the development of information and psychological manipulation techniques. But I also experienced other talks and discussions on current issues, an excellent selection of music and even a film pub quiz that drew a full tent of people at eleven o'clock at night!
And Roman knows why he does it. 'If not us, then who?' he says of the festival, which brings interesting guests to Dolný Kubín every year and creates an important social, cultural and community event for local people.
I am looking forward to returning to KUK Fest in 2027, if Roman and his organising team decide they would like to include me in the programme.
Once again, my thanks to Roman and to Natália Šťastná, who contacted me about KUK Fest. And I hope that next year we will also meet Tomáš Kriššák, who was unable to come this year!

Bohumil Kartous – Czech education expert, writer and commentator focusing on disinformation and media literacy

SLAVOMÍRA KRASŇANOVÁ

I attended KUK Fest in Dolný Kubín on behalf of the Karol Kmeťko Regional Library in Nitra. I was particularly impressed by the diverse programme, which connected the cultural life of libraries from Poland, Czechia and Slovakia and created space for mutual inspiration, the exchange of experiences and open discussion.
I also took part in the panel discussion entitled 'Living Libraries'. The title itself captured the atmosphere of the discussion: it was open, lively and welcoming to different opinions and suggestions. It also offered space for free thinking and public participation. We explored the issues and questions libraries are facing today, and what I found particularly thought-provoking was the discussion about how to reach young people, how to communicate with them and what they expect from libraries.
One important insight I took away was that young people today are often



overwhelmed by the number of events, school commitments and various educational activities. A library therefore does not have to become yet another place where we tell them what they should or should not do and what is right. Instead, above all, they need a space where they can be themselves, meet one another, organise their own activities and devote time to what genuinely interests them.

This experience also made me realise that the direction taken by the Karol Kmeťko Regional Library in Nitra is the right one. We strive to be an open institution accessible to everyone and to create a safe and stimulating space where young people can meet and put their own ideas and activities into practice. Through partnerships with civic associations and other organisations, as well as opportunities to meet interesting people, we also enable them to pursue and develop their own plans, interests and expectations. Taking part in KUK Fest gave me an opportunity to gain new ideas, exchange experiences with colleagues from other libraries and reaffirm my belief that a library should above all be a living, open and safe space for people.

We are already looking forward to the next edition.

Slavomíra Krasňanová, Director of the Karol Kmeťko Regional Library in Nitra

PAVOL LACKO

I come from a town similar in size to Dolný Kubín, so I know that KUK Fest is a small miracle. To experience so much high-quality literature, music and art in just a few dozen square metres is extraordinary. I also loved the friendly atmosphere and the programme, which is welcoming to families with children. Eleven out of ten stars!

Pavol Lacko – analyst and critical-thinking trainer



VENDULA HUMLOVÁ

Big Things in a Small Town

I first met Roman Večerek, director of Orava Library of Anton Habovštiak in Dolný Kubín, at a conference at the Regional Library in Karviná. His presentation about working with young people in Dolný Kubín and the KUK Fest festival impressed me so much that I decided to visit the following edition. I did not want to miss the preparations and behind-the-scenes work either, so I took the opportunity to apply for the Erasmus+ programme. My aim was to find inspiration for organising cultural and educational activities at our library. I gained much more than that.

The train journey from Kladno takes almost nine hours, but this pleasant Slovak town beneath the mountains is definitely worth visiting. I arrived in Dolný Kubín the day before the festival began. This gave me the opportunity to help put up the circus tent and to share my experience of kamishibai, a form of Japanese street theatre that works wonderfully at a festival of this kind.

At KUK Fest, it was impossible to miss the many young volunteers in pink T-shirts. Secondary-school students helped with the organisation, technical arrangements and the programme itself. Many of them spent practically the whole festival day on site, and some stayed overnight as well. For them, simply sleeping in the circus tent and keeping watch over the equipment was an experience in itself. They were not merely a 'target group', but a natural and indispensable part of the festival. The programme also made room for young people. For example, the workshop Two Treasures in the Library, led by coach Alena Zborníková, encouraged them to reflect on how to be attentive, what they can influence themselves, how to get involved in what is happening around them and why it matters not to be indifferent.

KUK Fest also offered a unique connection between the local community and the library world. Residents of Dolný Kubín naturally met members of the professional community. The programme was valuable to both groups. The discussion Good Evening to You, for example, explored what culture means to us, how it relates to politics, how to protect cultural freedom and where self-censorship begins.

The European Hour with Bohumil Kartous and Pavol Lacko was equally thought-provoking. Among other things, it focused on technology and its impact on society, particularly on children and young people. The discussions were lively and very open, and fitted naturally into the overall atmosphere of the festival.

Presentations by active libraries from the V4 countries and the panel discussion with their representatives naturally led into opportunities to get to know one another, share experiences and have informal conversations. Perhaps paradoxically, the festival gave me the opportunity to talk more with Czech colleagues from Znojmo Municipal Library and the Matěj Josef Sychra Library in Žďár nad Sázavou. It also created space to meet colleagues from Polish and Slovak libraries. I identified so strongly with the motto of Tomek Grabiński, director of the library in Kamienna Góra – 'In libraries, there are few things we have to do, but many things we can do' – that it even appeared in the timetable published by the Central Bohemian Library this year.

The festival evenings also offered wonderful music. I was personally thrilled by the energetic Polish combination of punk, folk and lyrics inspired by interwar Poland performed by the band Hańba!, as well as by the gentle, sensitive and emotive TALIRAW, whose music combines classical cello, voice, live looping and contemporary electronic sounds.

I will not even mention all the other things and experiences... The KUK Fest programme was so diverse that it is impossible to cover everything. KUK Fest is a professional, community and cultural event all at once. It has a unique atmosphere, is able to open up complex topics and yet never loses its lightness. I am already looking forward to the next edition...

Vendula Humlová, Central Bohemian Library in Kladno

TOMASZ GRABIŃSKI

KUK Fest was a very successful event for me for several reasons.
First and foremost, it provided a platform for small and medium-sized libraries and librarians from Poland, Czechia and Slovakia to meet over an extended period and get to know one another better – not only those from neighbouring border regions. I do not know of another platform that offers a similar opportunity. Usually, we meet only in smaller circles of librarians from our own countries. KUK Fest gave us the time and space for discussions and informal conversations, mutual inspiration and the exchange of ideas about future cooperation in various formats and initiatives.
We were able to learn more about how individual libraries and librarians work, what we have in common and where we differ, as well as discover approaches that could be interesting and valuable in our own settings. I am convinced that it is worth continuing such meetings and discussions on a regular basis.
Another great strength of KUK Fest was its multi-genre character. Alongside the professional library programme, we had the opportunity to listen to and meet in person writers and musicians from three neighbouring countries. It was therefore not just a professional conference, but also an opportunity to discover the living culture of neighbouring countries, brought to us by the festival organisers. This, too, may lead to further activities and partnerships in the future, for example book translations or the organisation of concerts.

Tomasz Grabiński, Director of the Municipal Public Library in Kamienna Góra



AND THIS IS ONLY THE BEGINNING...

When a festival comes to an end, there is always a strange feeling of emptiness for a moment. Just a little while ago, the park was full of people, music, conversations, ideas and energy. If you close your eyes, you can still almost hear the echoes of concerts and the laughter of theatre audiences. Suddenly, it is quiet. Where the tents once stood, only traces of those busy days remain, and everything slowly returns to its usual rhythm. But this feeling lasts only briefly. Then comes gratitude, joy at what we have achieved and, above all, the desire to continue.

The sixth edition of KUK Fest brought us many experiences, new insights and opportunities to learn. It opened up new partnerships, created international encounters and, above all, showed us how much we can achieve when people who are eager to cooperate, share and inspire one another come together.

As we read the individual principles of the Manifesto and the stories of people who have shared their experiences with us, we may realise that there is no single form of a living library. Each one is different because every community is different. In one place, change may begin with a new service; elsewhere, with the courage of staff, the trust of management, the initiative of volunteers or a simple conversation with a visitor. What matters is that we do not stop at good intentions and words.

We do not want the Manifesto to remain merely a beautiful text on paper. We see it as an open invitation and, at the same time, a commitment that every library can fulfil in its own way. We do not have all the answers, nor do we claim to know the one right path. But we can experiment, learn, make mistakes, look for solutions and help one another. After all, that is one of the principles of living libraries too.

And that is precisely why we are already looking ahead. We are preparing KUK Fest 2027, the next edition of the V4 Library Fair and new opportunities to meet and cooperate. We believe that what began in Dolný Kubín can continue far beyond the borders of our town and the V4 countries. We would like the ideas that emerged during our conversations, workshops and meetings to gradually become part of the everyday life of libraries.

Perhaps we will not change the world with a single festival or a single manifesto. But we can change the small things around us. We can create places people enjoy coming to, where they feel welcome, where they can think freely, ask questions, create and meet one another. And when more and more such places begin to appear, that is no small achievement.

We therefore invite you to join us. Bring your ideas, experiences, doubts and the courage to try new things. Let us share what works, but also what has not worked. Because it is when we are able to listen to one another and learn from one another that space for real change emerges.

KUK Fest 2027 is already taking shape in our minds. And living libraries? They begin wherever we give them room to live. See you in Dolný Kubín!

Mgr. art. Roman Večerek, Director of Orava Library of Anton Habovštiak in Dolný Kubín and KUK Fest





