# Sentobib library study

European Large-Scale research
on audience experience
in public libraries

Report on European Data

Edition 2024

**Sentobib**

# Colofon

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**Sentobib**

# Introduction

**Origins and Expansion of the Sentobib Study**

The *Sentobib* study originated three years ago in **Flanders**, the Dutch-speaking region of Belgium, as a **pilot project involving 150 libraries**. From the outset, the study was carried out in collaboration with the **University of Antwerp** and **VVBAD**, the Flemish Library Association.

Due to the **success of the pilot**, interest quickly grew beyond Belgium. With the support of **EBLIDA** (the European Bureau of Library, Information and Documentation Associations), the project was scaled up in **2024** and extended to **seven European countries**: **Germany, the Netherlands, Belgium, France, Austria, Italy, and Spain.**

**Academic Team and Supporting Partners**

In the autumn of 2023, public libraries in **seven European countries** were invited to join the large-scale audience study, made possible through a unique collaboration between **seven European universities**:

•**University of Antwerp, Belgium** – Prof. Dr. Annick Schramme
•**University of Groningen, Netherlands** – Prof. Dr. J.A.C. Kolsteeg
•**University of Bordeaux, France** – Prof. Dr. Raphaëlle Bats, Prof. Dr. Juliette Ducros
•**University of Hildesheim, Germany** – Prof. Dr. Birgit Mandel
•**FH Kufstein Tirol, Austria** – Prof. Dr. Verena Teissl
•**University of Valencia, Spain** – Prof. Dr. Manuel Cuadrado
•**University of Venice, Italy** – Prof. Dr. Francesco Casarin, Giulia Cancellieri

The study was supported by national library associations in each country, including **VOB** (Netherlands), **DBV** (Germany), **ABF** (France), **BVÖ** (Austria), **VVBAD** (Flanders, Belgium), **APBFB** (Wallonia, Belgium), **AIB** (Italy), and by **EBLIDA** on a European level. Thanks to their support and communication efforts, libraries across Europe were made aware of the opportunity to participate in the **Sentobib study**, contributing to its broad reach and success.

**Study Objectives and Approach**

The primary goal of the Sentobib study is to enable **individual libraries to conduct measurement** on their users and non-users in an accessible yet soundly underbuilt way. The study was designed to collect **valuable data at the local level**, offering insights into library usage, perceptions, and barriers within each participating community. The local report and dashboard results can serve as a supporting *dossier* for local advocacy.

Because the same core study is implemented across all participating libraries, the project also enables **cross-institutional and sector-wide learning**. Anonymized data are used to generate broader insights and benchmarks, which also support **advocacy efforts by library networks and organizations**.

The study follows a **European approach**, starting from a **standardized questionnaire** applied across countries. This common structure made sectoral comparison and benchmarking possible. However, the questionnaire is **adapted to national contexts** to reflect local realities and differences in library systems.

In a second phase, the questionnaire is **further customized at the local library level**. Each participating library provide details about its services, activities, and other relevant characteristics, which are used to tailor the survey. Libraries also have the option to add or remove questions, or modify answer choices, resulting in **fully personalized questionnaires** that increased the study's local relevance and usefulness. Libraries could **add local questions** to the survey too, these are not taken into consideration for analysis on sector level.

In 2024, thanks to widespread participation, **more than 1,000 libraries** took part—some as independent institutions, others as part of larger networks. Collectively, these libraries helped the study reach **over 160,000 adult respondents**, as well as **22,600 children and adolescents**.

**Pilot study in 2022 in Flanders, Belgium: 150 libraries**

**2024: 7 European countries**

- EBLIDA
- Germany - DBV
- the Netherlands - VOB
- Belgium – VVBAD & APBFB
- France - ABF
- Austria - BVÖ
- Italy - AIB
- Spain - Fesabid

**2024: over 1,000 participating library locations**

- Individual libraries
- Organizations with multiple locations

**Participation: 160,000 adults – 22,600 children**

- Austria: 2,712 adults (250 non-users) – 375 children
- Belgium: 26,777 adults (1155 non-users) – 3,272 children
- France: 15,297 adults (667 non-users) – 1,878 children
- Germany: 96,486 adults (6448 non-users) – 15,750 children
- Italy: 1,108 adults (106 non-users) – 83 children
- The Netherlands: 15,818 adults (679 non-users) – 1,167 children

**Methodological Considerations**

Before presenting the results, two methodological aspects should be highlighted: **participant recruitment** and **data treatment**.

The survey was **dynamic**, meaning that questions were shown or hidden depending on the respondent's profile and previous answers. Key sections, such as the *Impact Compass* and *Library of the Future*, were **randomly presented to half of the respondents** to avoid survey fatigue and preserve data quality. As a result, **the number of respondents per question in the different analyses varies**.

Most participation was driven by **digital communication**, and the surveys were primarily completed online, offering practical and financial advantages. Libraries were encouraged to **invite a random sample of members** through their library systems. However, when this was not possible, libraries could opt for **broader outreach** via websites, newsletters, and social media—what is referred to as a convenience sample. Some libraries also used **face-to-face interviews** or distributed a **simplified paper version** for specific target groups (approx. 1,000 completed). Recruitment channels were registered per individual respondent. The data used in this report are thus based on the collected data by the different participating libraries, conclusions are thus always about the (large) group of **reached users and non-users**.

Each library received a **customized link** and **tailored communication materials**. Participation was incentivized, such as through a partnership with **World Land Trust**, where 1 square meter of threatened rainforest was saved for every completed survey (certificate at the end of this report).

To control validity, the survey collected detailed **demographic data** (e.g., age, gender, background), enabling libraries to evaluate whether the respondents reflected their local population. Libraries are encouraged to compare this sample with their existing user data.
The study also offered the opportunity to reach **non-users**, mainly through communication by municipalities or local organizations. Although optional, this has proven very concrete and highly valuable at the local level for understanding barriers to library use. This extra non-user sample is to be evaluated in a qualitative manner on the local library scale, not quantitative as a representation of "the non-visitor". On macro level, the higher numbers of non-users reached give interesting opportunities for analysis, which are shared in this report.

For analysis at the European level, **subsets of the full dataset** were used. For some statistical tests, further data subsetting was applied. To prevent overrepresentation of large libraries, a **maximum of 375 responses per library** was included in aggregate statistics.

**Individual reports**

Each participating library received a **personalized extensive report** containing their own results. The main objective of this report is to provide **locally relevant insights**, based on responses from members, visitors, and—where applicable—non-users.

Benchmarking and Comparison Groups
As part of the analysis, each library can compare its results with several **benchmark groups**:
• The European average
• Country-specific results
• A **library type cluster**, based on the **location type**: **urban**, **rural**, or **mixed.** This classification was based on how libraries described themselves at the start of the study. Each library was asked to indicate whether it operated in an **urban**, **rural**, or **mixed** setting.

To ensure fair comparison, the number of respondents per library used in cluster calculations was **capped at 375**, selected randomly. This prevents libraries with large response numbers from disproportionately influencing cluster averages. However, **all local responses -** even beyond 375 - are included in each library's **individual report**. For benchmark calculations, **fully completed surveys** were prioritized to ensure data quality. The European report makes use of subsets of the data, depending on the particular analyses and tests (see previous page). That is why the absolute numbers on a European level in the individual report benchmarks can differ (non significantly) from specific results in this European report.

Because the survey was customizable, some **questions or answer options may not have been included** in all libraries' versions. In such cases, results for those questions appear only at the group, national, or European level in local reports. Locally added questions to the survey are reported in a separate document.

Local reports are strictly **confidential** and shared only with the respective library. Libraries are welcome to share their own results publicly, but individual results will never be shared with third parties.

**Timeline**
The Sentobib study was launched in **April '24** in **Germany** and the **Netherlands**, followed by a **May** start in **France**, **Austria**, **Belgium**, and **Italy**.
The **survey period ended on 31 October** for the first group of countries. For those that started in May, the data collection concluded on **30 November**.
**Individual library reports** were delivered in **November '24** for the first group of countries, and **in December '24** for the second group of countries.

**Sentobib 2025**
In the existing Sentobib countries, new libraries expressed interest in joining a **new edition** of the Sentobib study. As this was the **first large-scale edition**, some libraries only became familiar with the project at a later stage and requested an opportunity to participate in **2025**.

There is also a need for **longitudinal analysis**, both at the local and sector level, to track **library development over time**.
For this reason, *Sentobib has evolved into a permanent tool* for evaluation and sector learning.

Geographic expansion: new countries will be added to the study soon.

**About This Report**
This European report presents a selection of highlights from the extensive data collected through the Sentobib study. The questionnaire was broad in scope, and the resulting dataset and analyses are equally rich. In this report, we have chosen to highlight several key insights and highlights.

We invite you to explore the findings presented here. It is important to keep in mind that **results vary significantly from one library to another**. Local measurement and interpretation remain essential. What makes this study particularly valuable is that it allows libraries to not only reflect on their own local outcomes, but also to compare their results with those of similar libraries, as well as with national and European benchmarks.

We hope this report provides inspiration and useful insights, **enjoy reading**.

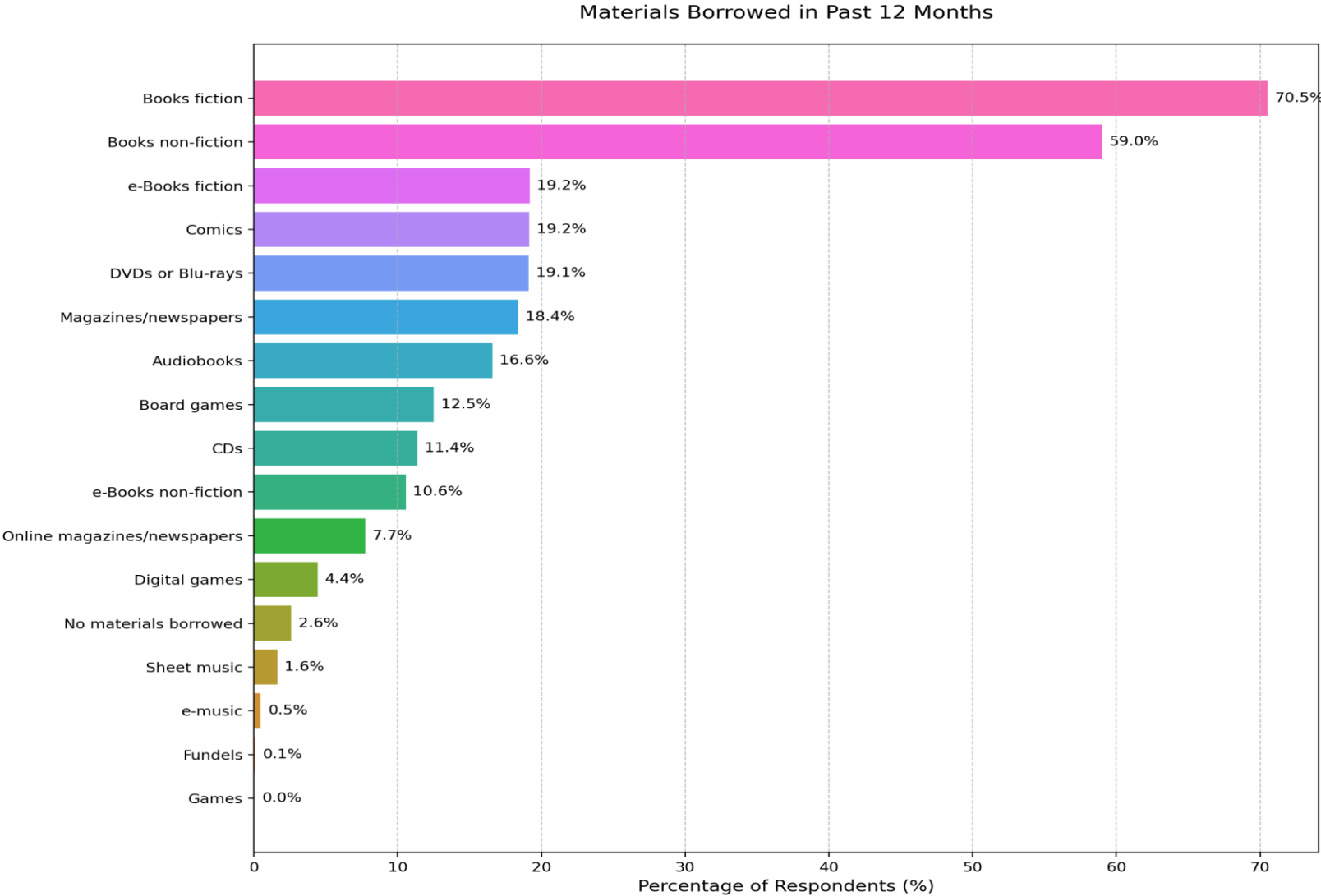www.Sentobib.eu – contact@sentobib.eu

# 1. Library usage

# Borrowing behaviour of library users

Books are by far the most borrowed materials in libraries across Europe. Fiction leads with 70.5% of respondents, followed by non-fiction at 59.0%. E-books are gaining popularity, with 19% borrowing fiction e-books and 10.6% non-fiction.
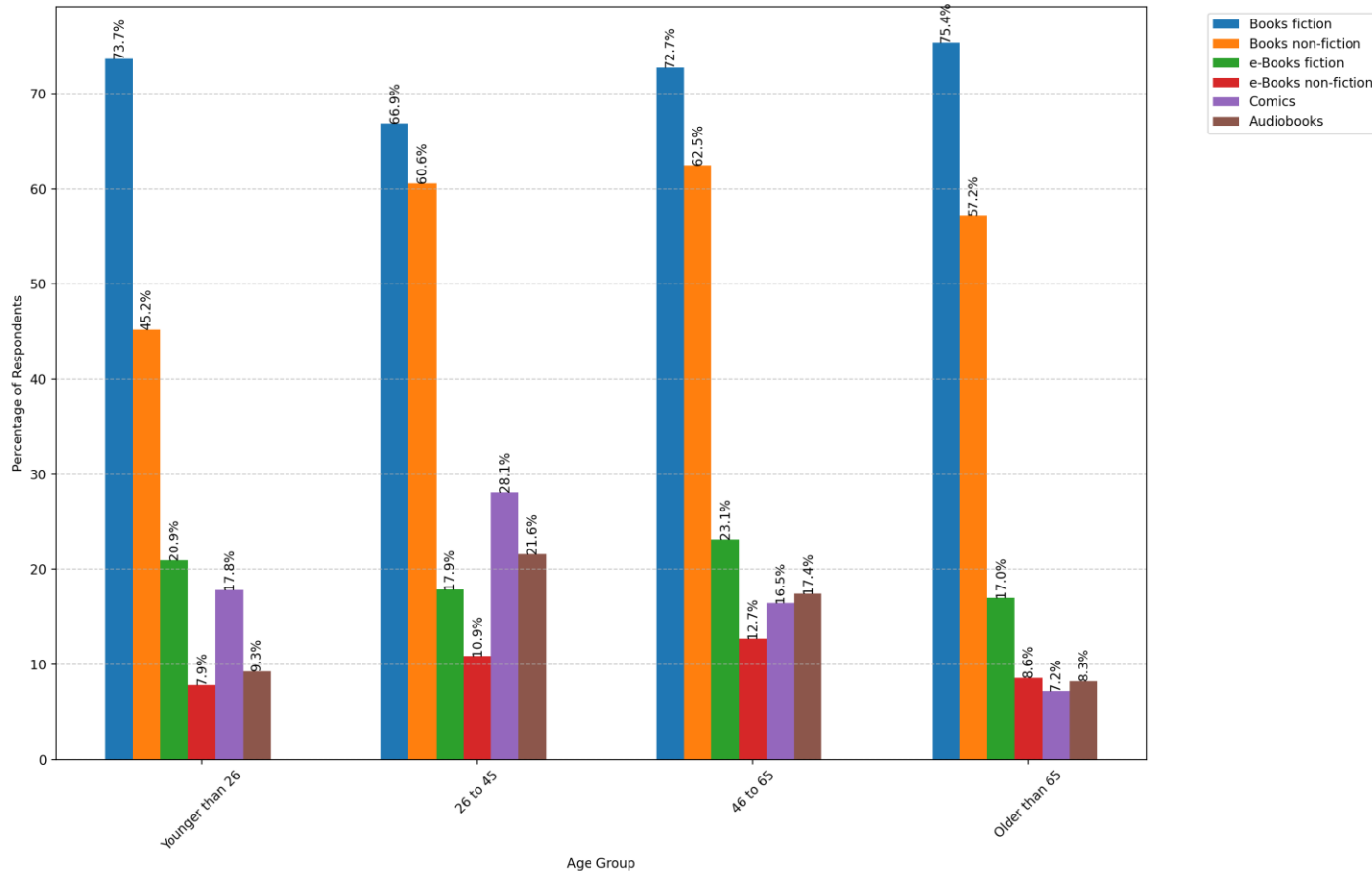
Traditional magazines and newspapers (18.4%) are borrowed more often than their digital versions (7.7%). Multimedia items such as DVDs/Blu-rays (19.1%), audiobooks (16.6%), and CDs (11.4%) also see significant use, although availability varies across libraries.

Less frequently borrowed materials include games, sheet music and digital music. Only 2.6% of respondents reported not borrowing any materials in the past year, indicating strong engagement.

The survey was adapted to the actual collections available in each library, so non available items were not shown in those questionnaires. Local interpretation keeping the local offer in mind is important (ref. local reports).



Materials Borrowed in Past 12 Months

| Material | Percentage of Respondents (%) |
|---|---|
| Books fiction | 70.5% |
| Books non-fiction | 59.0% |
| e-Books fiction | 19.2% |
| Comics | 19.2% |
| DVDs or Blu-rays | 19.1% |
| Magazines/newspapers | 18.4% |
| Audiobooks | 16.6% |
| Board games | 12.5% |
| CDs | 11.4% |
| e-Books non-fiction | 10.6% |
| Online magazines/newspapers | 7.7% |
| Digital games | 4.4% |
| No materials borrowed | 2.6% |
| Sheet music | 1.6% |
| e-music | 0.5% |
| Fundels | 0.1% |
| Games | 0.0% |

Comparison of Main Borrowing Categories by Age Group

**Borrowing behaviour by age group**

Traditional books remain the most borrowed materials across all age groups, with fiction books being particularly popular among respondents aged 65 and older (75.4%) and least popular among those aged 26–45 (66.9%).

Non-fiction books are most frequently borrowed by the 46–65 age group (62.5%), while respondents under 26 borrow them the least (45.2%).

Regarding digital materials, the 46–65 age group also shows the highest borrowing rates for fiction e-books (23.1%) and non-fiction e-books (12.7%). Borrowing rates for e-books are lowest among respondents aged 65 and older for fiction (17.0%) and among respondents under 26 for non-fiction (7.9%).

Comics display a distinct borrowing pattern, with the highest popularity among respondents aged 26–45 (28.1%) and the lowest among those aged 65 and older (7.2%). A similar age effect is observed for audiobooks, which are most borrowed by the 26–45 age group (21.6%) and least by the 65+ group (8.3%).
All observed differences between age groups are statistically significant. Particularly strong age effects were found for the borrowing of comics and audiobooks.

## Library Activities in the Past 12 Months

Next to the borrowing of certain types of materials, many other 'activities' can be done in libraries. Borrowing materials remains logically the most common library activity, reported by 93.3% of users. Other frequently mentioned uses include consulting the catalogue (29.1%), reading in the library (25.5%) and visiting with children (21%). Activities not offered locally were excluded from the survey.

Digital services are used less intensively: WiFi is the most used (10.7%), followed by public computers and printers (both 5.3%). Maker Spaces are rarely used (0.4%), due to limited availability in the library landscape. The same remark applies here: local results should be interpreted in light of the local availability of materials and services.

Educational and cultural activities reach smaller user groups: 8.7% attended reading-related events, 4.9% took part in knowledge-oriented activities, and 0.5% in language learning.



Library Activities in Past 12 Months
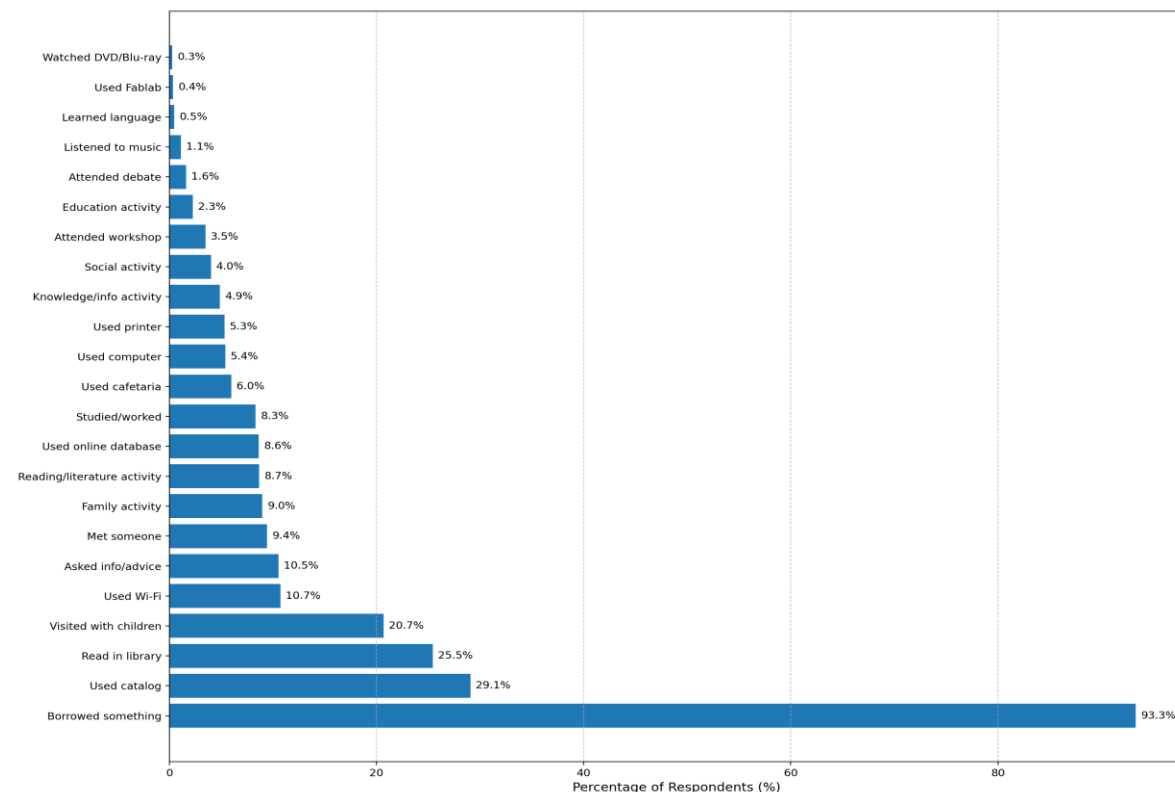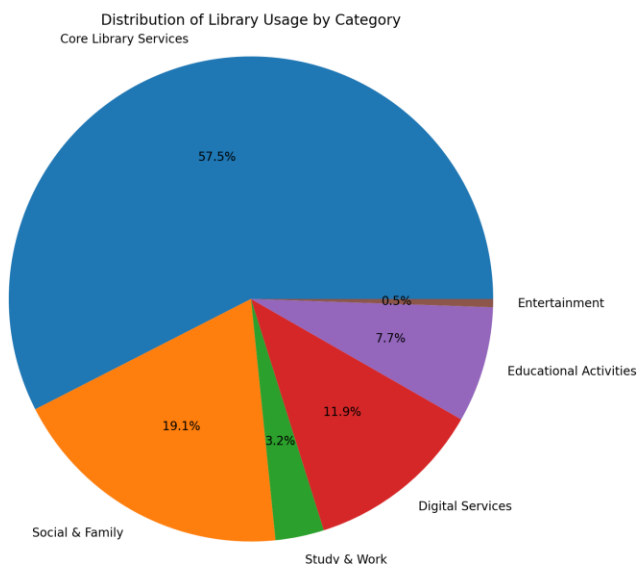
Libraries also serve a social role: 9.4% reported meeting others, 9.0% joined family activities, and 6.0% used the cafeteria.



Distribution of Library Usage by Category

Grouped by category, core library services dominate (57.5%), followed by social and family activities (19.1%), digital services (11.9%), educational activities (7.7%) and 'study and work' (3.2%). This highlights the library's central role in access to materials, with a growing engagement in social and digital services.

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Library Visit Times - Overall Distribution
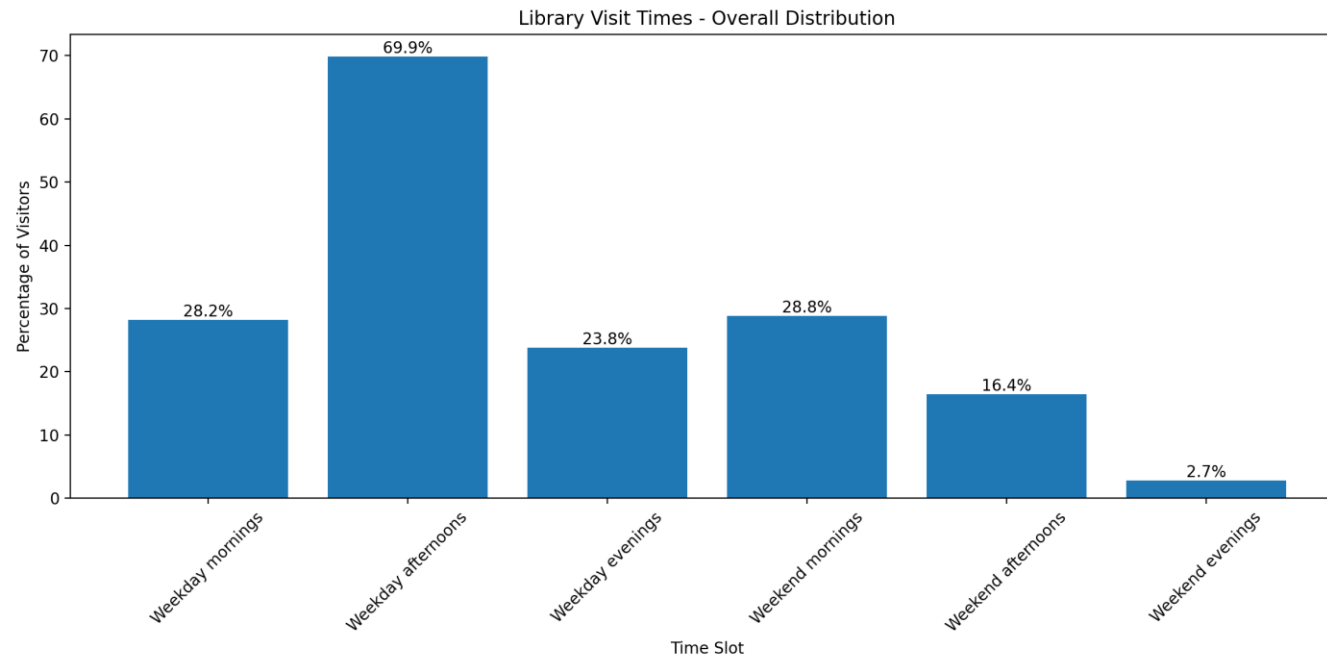
## Timing patterns in library visits

The analysis of visit timing reveals several clear trends. Weekday afternoons are the most popular times for library visits across all user groups. Evening visits are more frequent in urban areas and among younger users, while morning visits display strong age-related patterns, with older users visiting earlier in the day.

Geographically, differences between countries are more pronounced than those between types of libraries. Cultural patterns influence evening and weekend usage, particularly in some countries. Age emerges as a stronger predictor of visit timing than library type. Distinct patterns are observed between working-age users and retirees, especially in morning and evening visits. Differences between urban and rural libraries are relatively small, mainly appearing in weekend afternoon usage.

These findings suggest that extended opening hours may be especially valuable in urban areas and for younger visitors, while weekend evening services might be reconsidered in locations where demand is low.

Most users visit the library several times a year to several times a month. The number of frequent visitors (weekly or more often) is higher than the number of infrequent visitors (once year or less often).
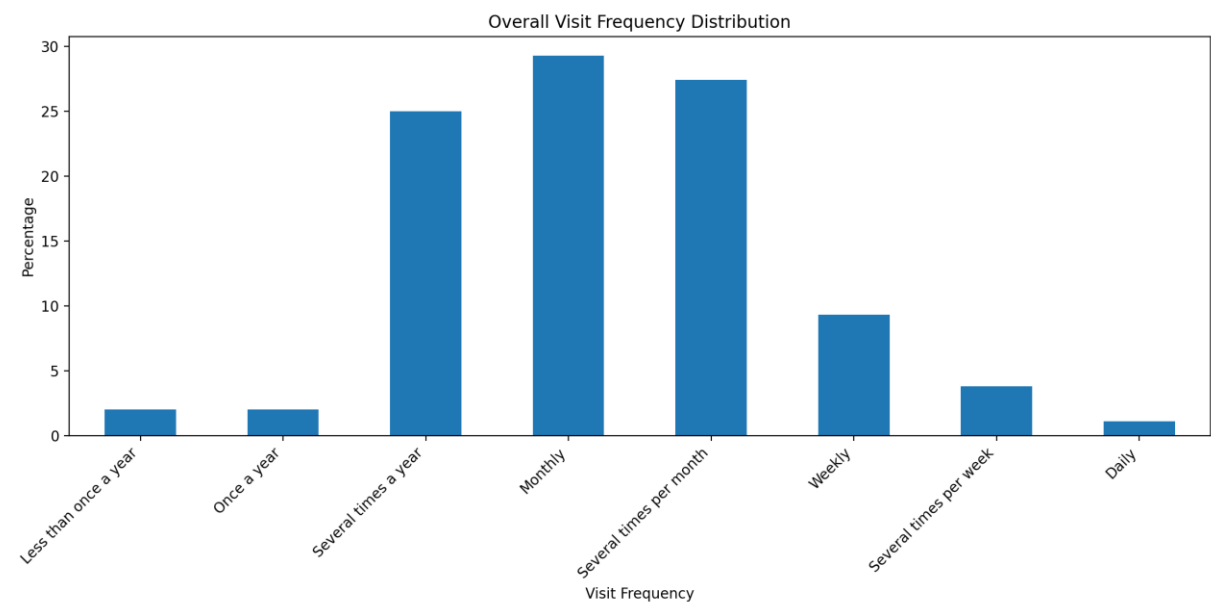


The average duration of a library visit is 32.3 minutes, a figure influenced by longer stays, with 39.5% of users staying 30 minutes or more. The most common visit length is between 15 and 30 minutes (47.9%), followed by 30 to 60 minutes (30.2%). Short visits under 15 minutes are less common (12.6%), as are visits exceeding one hour (9.3%). Although most users spend less than 30 minutes per visit, the presence of longer stays raises the overall average.



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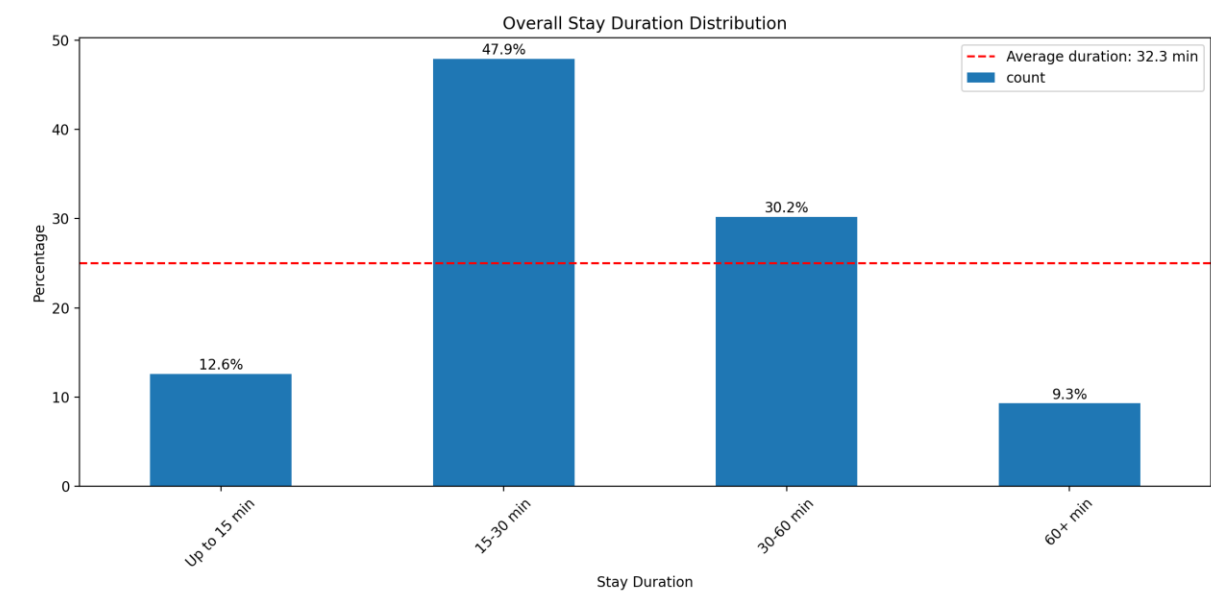
## User satisfaction in libraries

Overall user satisfaction is high in public libraries, with most evaluated aspects scoring above 3.5 out of 5.

Core services such as accessibility (4.08) and opening hours (3.91) receive the highest ratings, followed by interior layout (3.88).

In contrast, secondary services like parking (3.50) and café facilities (3.62) receive rather lower scores.

Results vary considerably across respondents, suggesting that the relevance of certain features differs by user and library context.

Also here, we like to make the remark that only services actually offered by each library were included in the local surveys. We furthermore noticed relevant differences between local and overall results in many libraries, so local interpretation and evaluation is important.



Satisfaction Levels by Aspect

## Staff Evaluation

The user satisfaction about the library staff is exceptionally high, with all evaluated aspects scoring above 4.4 out of 5.

Staff performance stands out as a particular strength, especially in terms of helpfulness and friendliness.

The highest-rated aspects are staff availability and support (4.63) and friendliness (4.60). Accessibility (4.54) and staff expertise (4.50) also receive very strong ratings, confirming the central role of staff in the positive library experience.



Staff Satisfaction Levels by Aspect
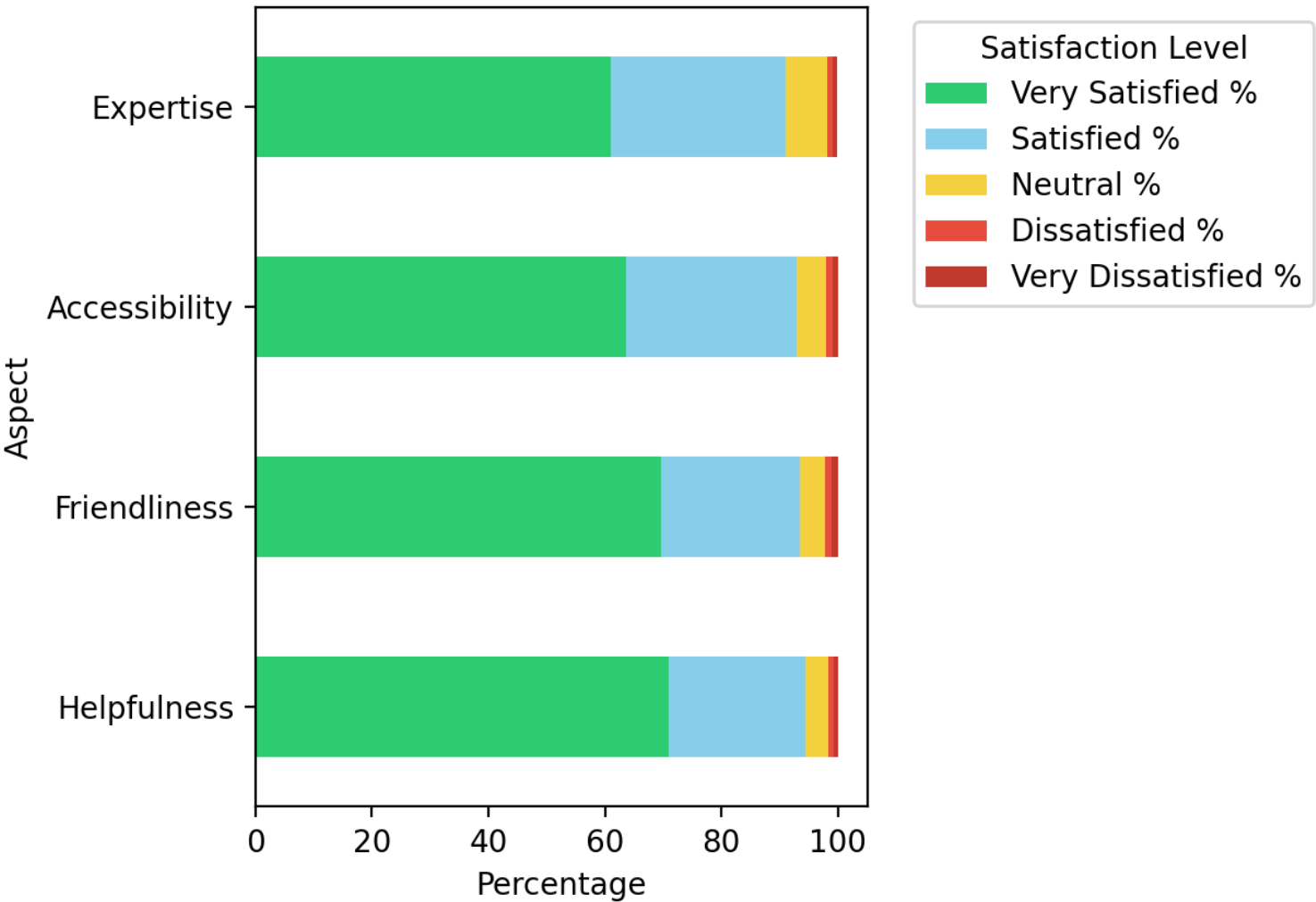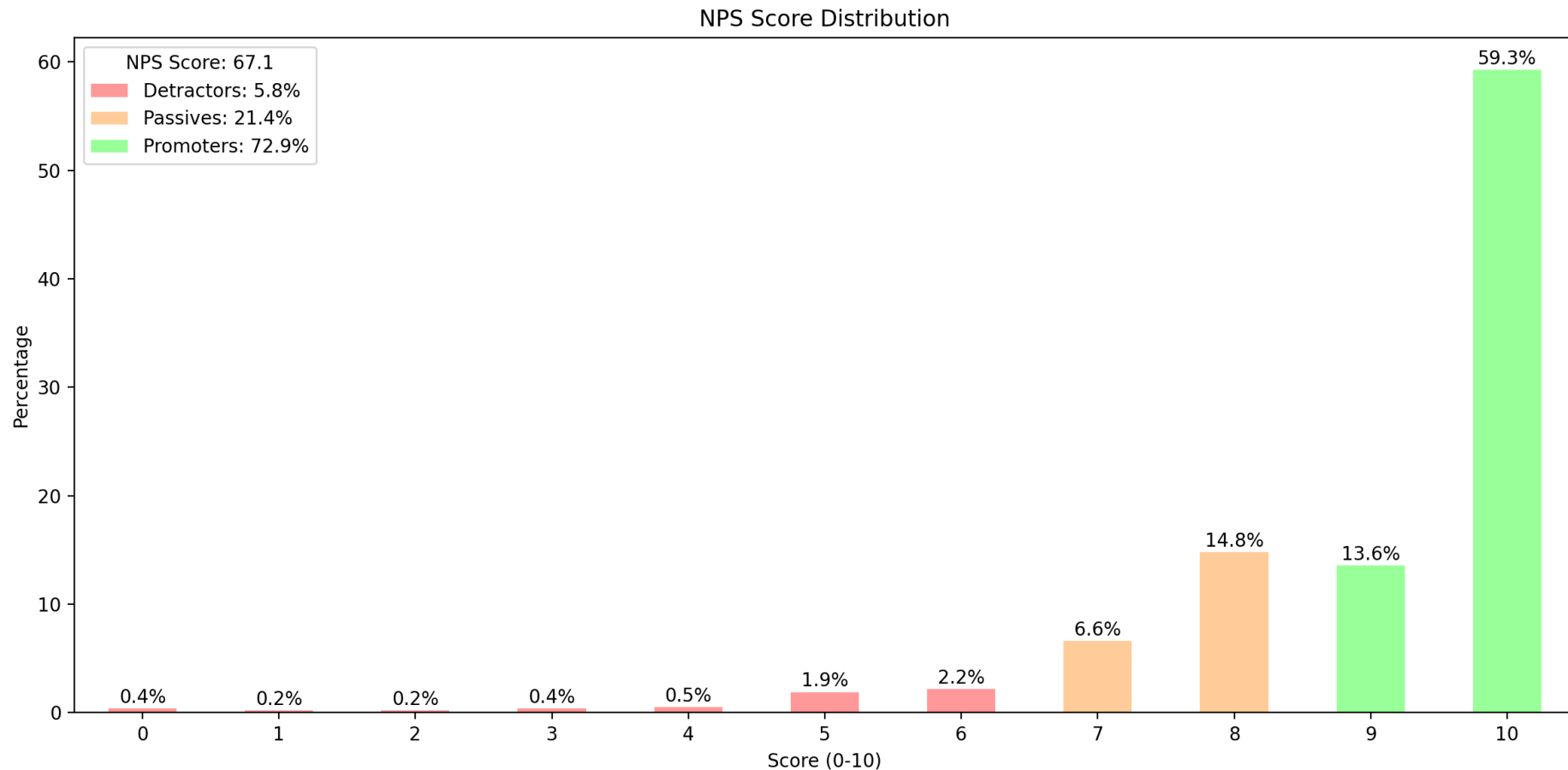
**Net Promoter Score (NPS) of public libraries**

The Net Promoter Score (NPS) measures user loyalty based on the likelihood of recommending the library at friends, family or colleagues. The NPS gives a score on a scale from -100 to +100. Public libraries in general score a highly positive NPS of 67.1.

A large majority of users are promoters (72.9%), while only a small group (5.8%) are detractors. This strong score confirms the strong satisfaction and loyalty among library users.

## NPS by Age Group and by Visit Frequency

Statistical tests show significant differences in Net Promoter Scores (NPS) across all age groups. Users under 26 report the lowest NPS, with the largest effect sizes observed between them and oldest groups. 'Middle-aged' users (26–45 and 46–65) show similarly high satisfaction and loyalty. Taking into account the scale of -100 to +100, all age categories show a very positive NPS score for public libraries.

The Net Promoter Score also varies significantly with visit frequency where a clear positive relationship emerges: the more frequently users visit the library, the higher their satisfaction and their probability of recommending the library to others. The largest difference is found between infrequent visitors (less than once a month) and weekly visitors.





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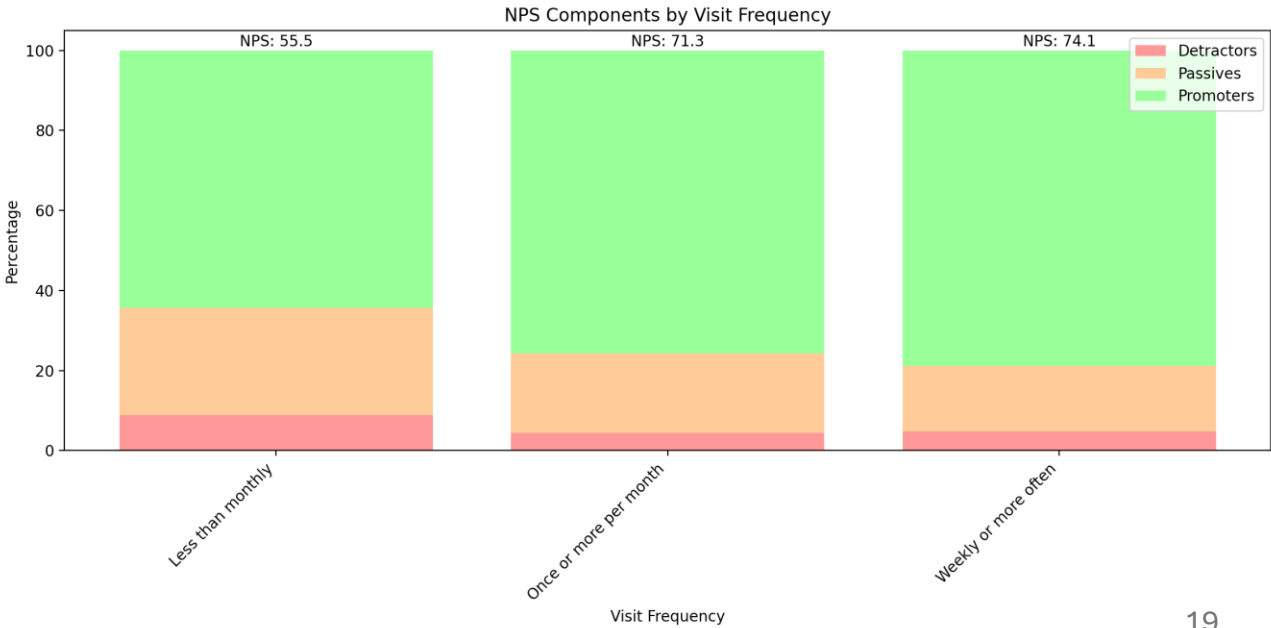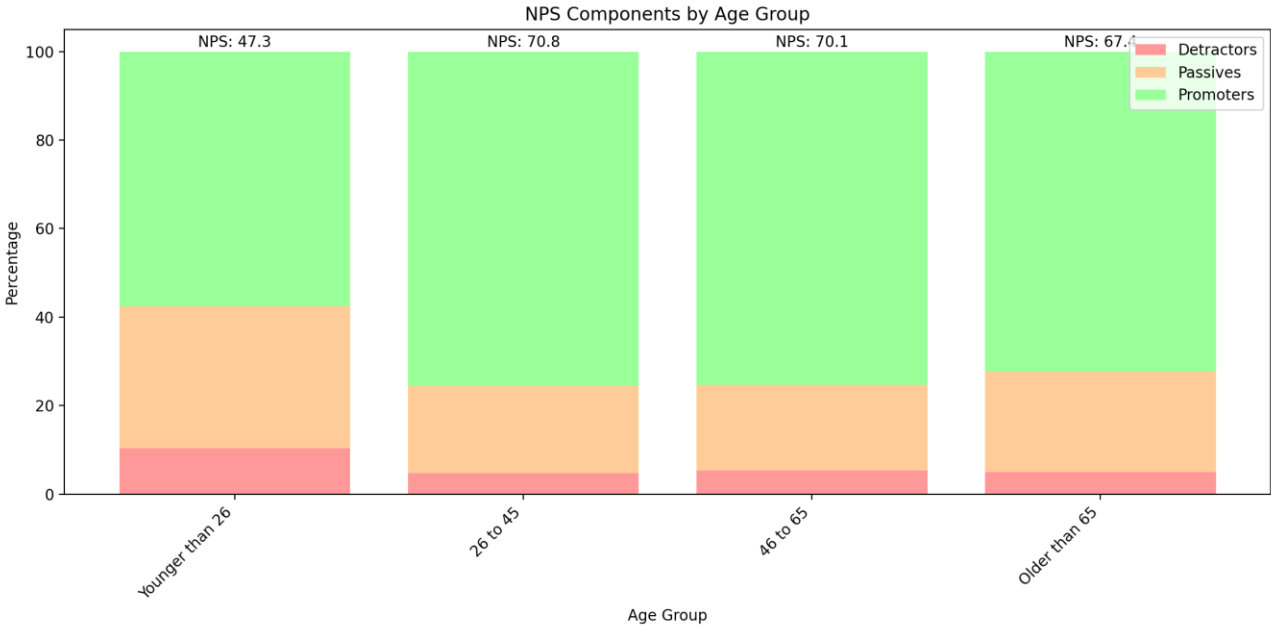
# 2. Impact of the library



**Well-Being Impact Model for Library Users and Visitors**

In addition to the traditional metrics of usage and satisfaction, which remain valuable and important, this study aimed to take a more in-depth approach. Our goal was to generate insights that can enrich and support broader discussions about the role of the library, beyond usage statistics and satisfaction scores. After all, a library is more than the number of people it reaches or how satisfied they are with its services. It plays a vital societal role and contributes to the development and well-being of the population.

The *Impact Compass* model was developed at the Roskilde Library in Denmark with the support of Seismonaut, and is based on *The Cultural Value Project*, a UK-based study launched in 2019 by the Arts and Humanities Research Council. Unlike the predominantly qualitative methods commonly used to explore well-being outcomes, this model offers a quantitative framework for measuring the library's impact on user well-being.

The model captures well-being across four key dimensions: Safe Space, Perspective, Creativity, and Community. Each dimension is assessed through three targeted statements to which users respond, allowing for a nuanced and scalable analysis of the library's contribution to personal and social well-being.

This model offers a structured approach for evaluating the broader social and emotional role libraries play, making it a valuable tool for both research and policy development.

More information about the Impact Compass can be found via the following link: https://www.roskildebib.dk/new-study-impact-public-libraries-denmark
More information about The Cultural Value Project can be found via the following link: https://culturalvalueproject.wordpress.com/about/

**Dimensions of the Impact Compass Model:**

- **Safe Space**
  - I feel good in the library (comfortable, relaxed, calm).
  - The library evokes emotions in me (e.g., joy, being moved).
  - In the library, I can immerse myself in something and concentrate.

- **Perspective**
  - The library gives me food for thought.
  - The library broadens my knowledge and outlook.
  - The library helps me think critically.

- **Creativity**
  - The library inspires me.
  - I have learned new things through the library (e.g., digital skills, reading, cooking).
  - The library motivates me to try something new (e.g., reading a new genre, listening to something different, creating something).

- **Community**
  - I meet other people at the library.
  - The library gives me insight into others' lives (e.g., through characters in books or films, or through direct interaction).
  - Because of the library, I have new or different conversations with people around me (e.g., about things I've read).



Emotional impact
**Haven**

Enthusiasm
Concentration and immersion
Wellness
Being moved

Intellectual impact
**Perspective**

Learning
Reflection
Critical sense and problem solving
Cultivation of interest

Social impact
**Community**

Insights and empathy
Community and relationships
Democratic participation
Citizenship

Creative impact
**Creativity**

Motivation and new ideas
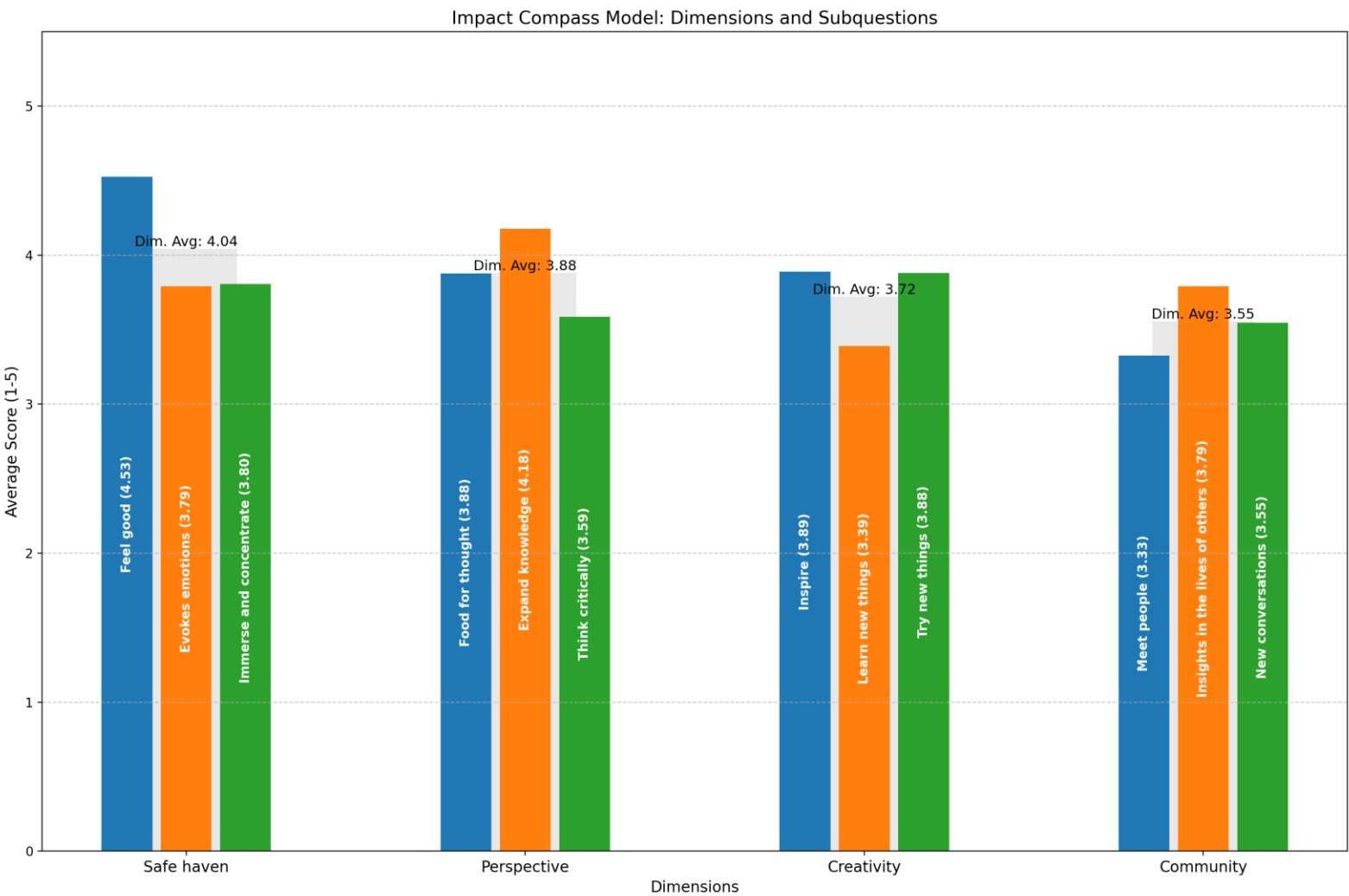Development of skills
Imagination
Self-expression

# Impact on Well-Being: Results by Dimension

User responses to the *Impact Compass* model show that libraries contribute very positively to well-being. According to the model, all scores above 3 are considered as a positive impact. The highest overall scores are seen in the dimension of **Safe Haven** (average score: 4.04). Users most strongly agreed with the statement *"I feel good in the library"* (4.53), highlighting the library's role as a comfortable and calming environment.

The **Perspective** dimension follows with an average score of 3.88, led by the statement *"The library expands my knowledge"* (4.18). **Creativity** scores slightly lower (3.72), though users noted feeling inspired (3.89) and motivated to try new things (3.88). Learning new things received a lower score (3.39), indicating potential room for growth in this area.

The **Community** dimension scored 'lowest' overall (3.55), yet still a positive impact. The statement *"In the library, I meet other people"* received the lowest individual rating (3.33). This suggests that while libraries succeed in providing individual enrichment, their social role may be an important role to strengthen in the future. This conclusion is also reflected in 'the library of the future' section, later in this report.



Impact Compass Model: Dimensions and Subquestions

Overall, the results indicate that libraries have the strongest impact on personal comfort, reflection, and inspiration, while social interaction and skill development may be areas for further development.
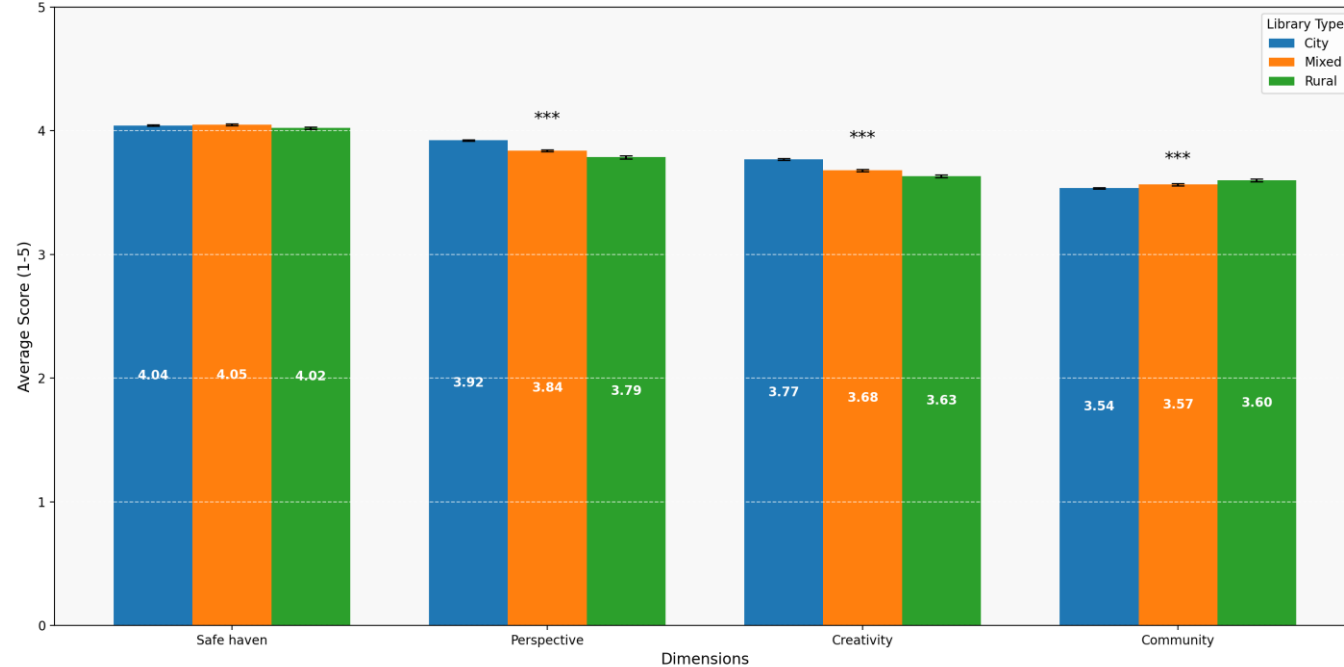
**Impact by library type**

User well-being scores are very positive across all types of libraries. The **Safe Haven** dimension consistently scores highly, with no significant differences between library categories.

For **Perspective** and **Creativity**, there is a slight downward trend from urban to rural libraries, suggesting different perceptions of these roles depending on the library's setting.

In contrast, the **Community** dimension shows a stronger impact in rural libraries, highlighting the library's importance as a meeting place in less urbanized communities.

The analysis shows that age significantly affects well-being scores across all dimensions.

For **Safe Haven**, scores slightly decrease with age. The dimension **Perspective** shows the older user groups giving higher ratings compared to the younger groups. For **Creativity**, a less clear pattern is seen. The community impact of libraries gets higher as age groups get older, but the differences remain small.
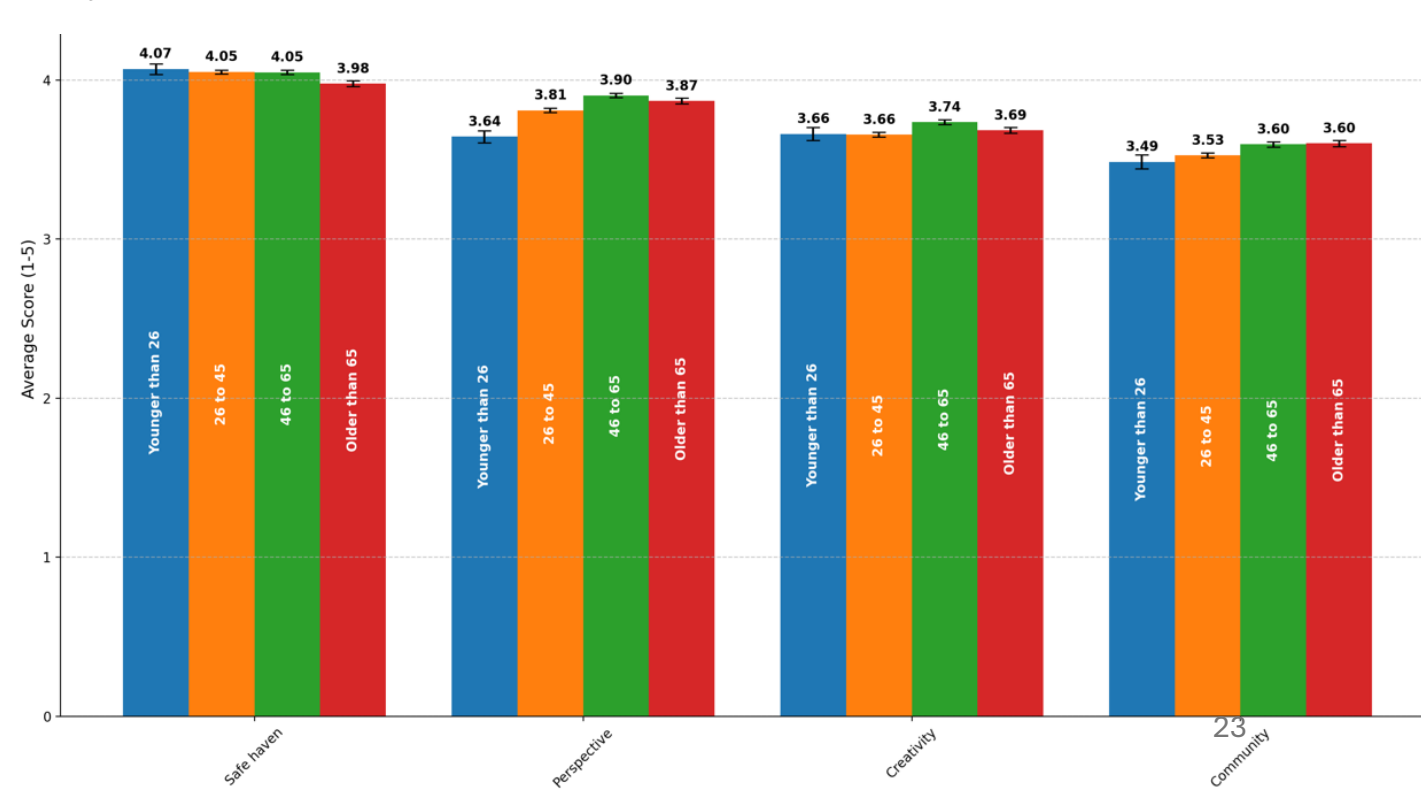
In this analysis, users are categorized based on their place of birth and parental origins:

• **Native**: Born in the country where the library is located, with at least one parent also born in that country.
• **Second-generation newcomer**: Born in the country, but with both parents born in another country.
• **First-generation newcomer**: Not born in the country of the library.

These definitions provide the basis for examining differences in library impact across different migration backgrounds, on this page and later on in this report.

**Impact of Libraries by Migration Background**
Libraries have a very positive impact across all user groups. We notice an even stronger impact among first-generation newcomers, those not born in the country. This highlights the important role libraries play in supporting the integration of new arrivals. Across all dimensions, first-generation newcomers consistently report the highest scores.



The strongest 'background' effects are observed for **Creativity** (3.88) and **Perspective** (3.97), while **Safe Haven** (4.14) shows the smallest variation between groups. Statistical analysis confirms significant differences across origin groups for all dimensions, with the strongest effects in Creativity and Safe Haven. No significant differences were found between natives and second-generation newcomers for most dimensions, except for Community. So first generation newcomers generally report higher scores than the other groups, particularly for Creativity (3.88).

Overall, libraries have a particularly strong and positive impact on the well-being of all users, with an extra positive impact on first-generation newcomers, while maintaining high satisfaction across all user groups.
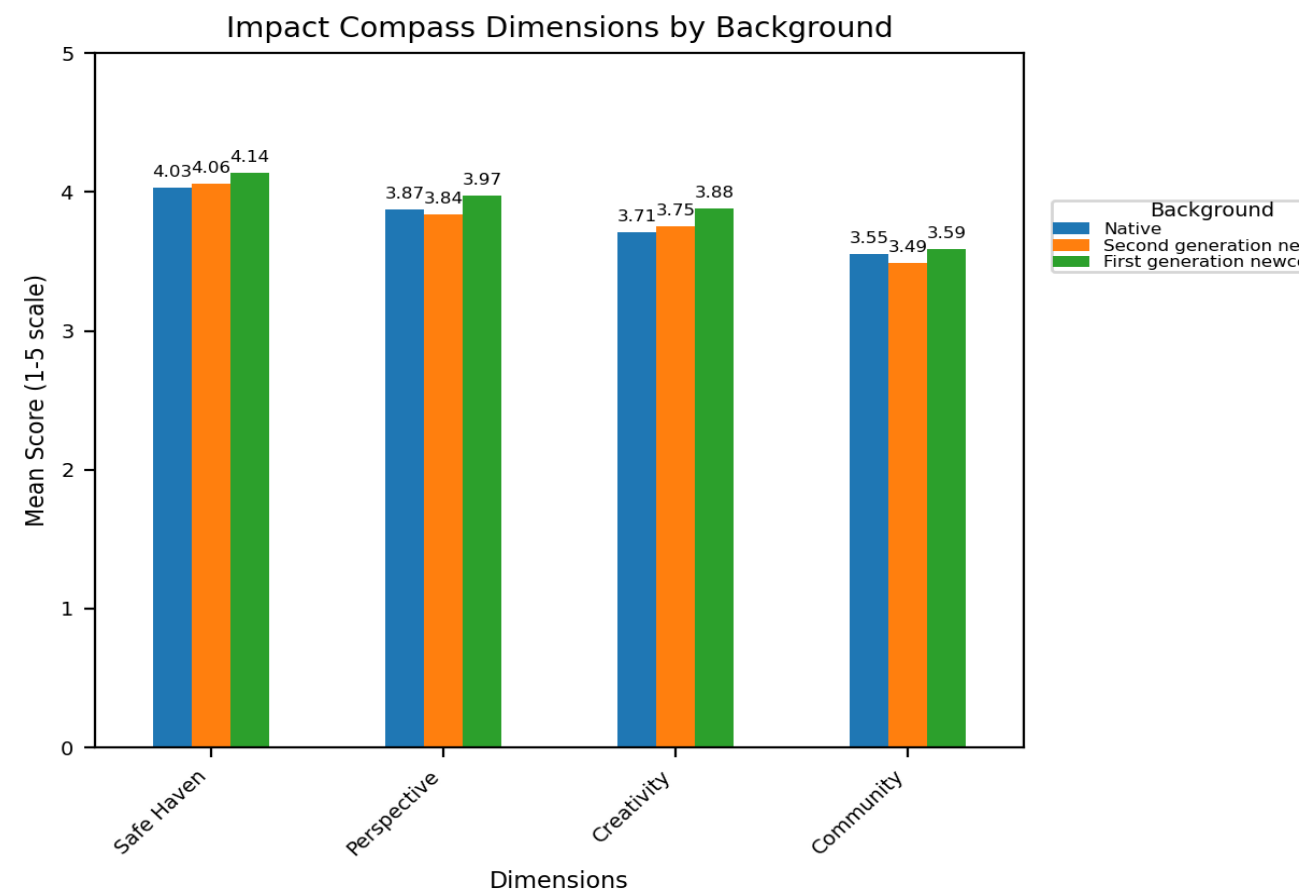
## Relation to Visit Frequency

The analysis shows a consistent positive relationship between visit frequency and perceived impact across all dimensions. The strongest effect is observed in the **Perspective** dimension, with a difference of 0.32 points between weekly visitors and less frequent users. The following strongest effect appear in **Community** and **Creativity**, showing the same influence of higher impact in higher visit frequency. **Safe Haven** (0.204-point difference) show the lowest impact: regardless of visit frequency, all users seem to (almost) equally value the impact of the library as a safe haven.



Impact Compass Dimensions by Library Visit Frequency



Impact Compass Dimensions: Members vs Visitors
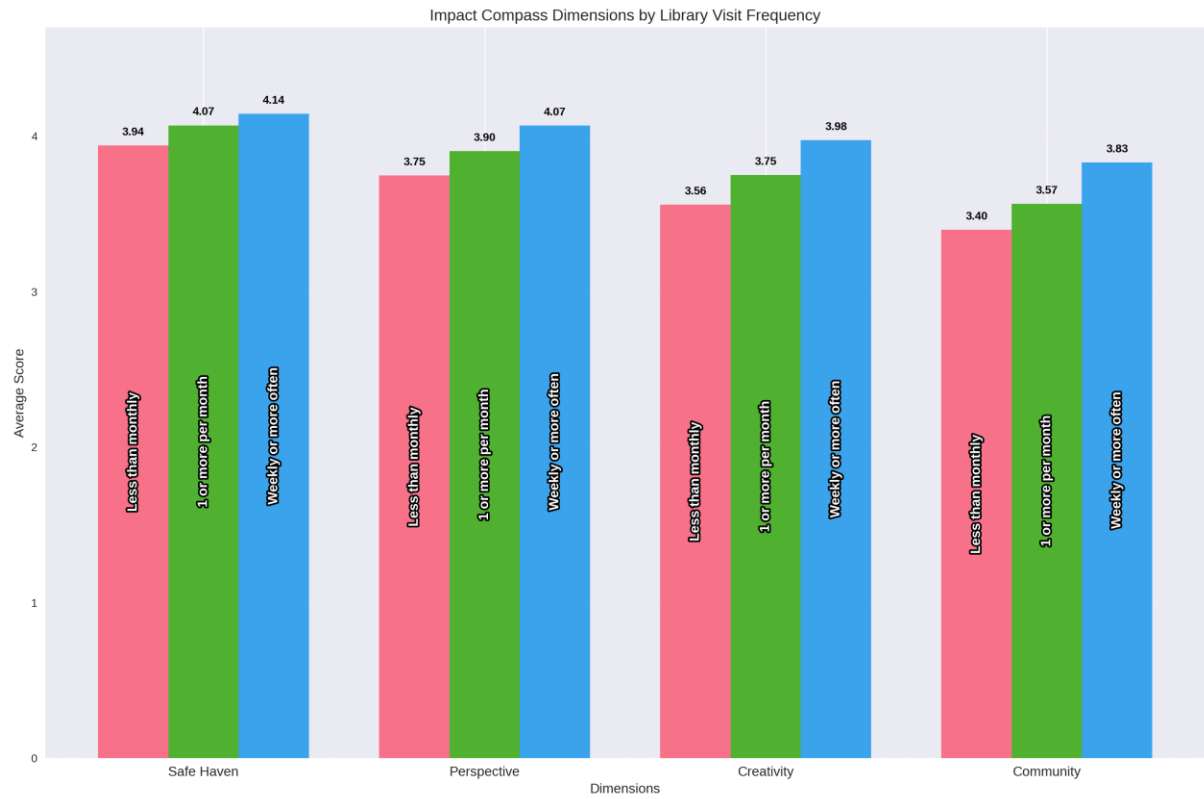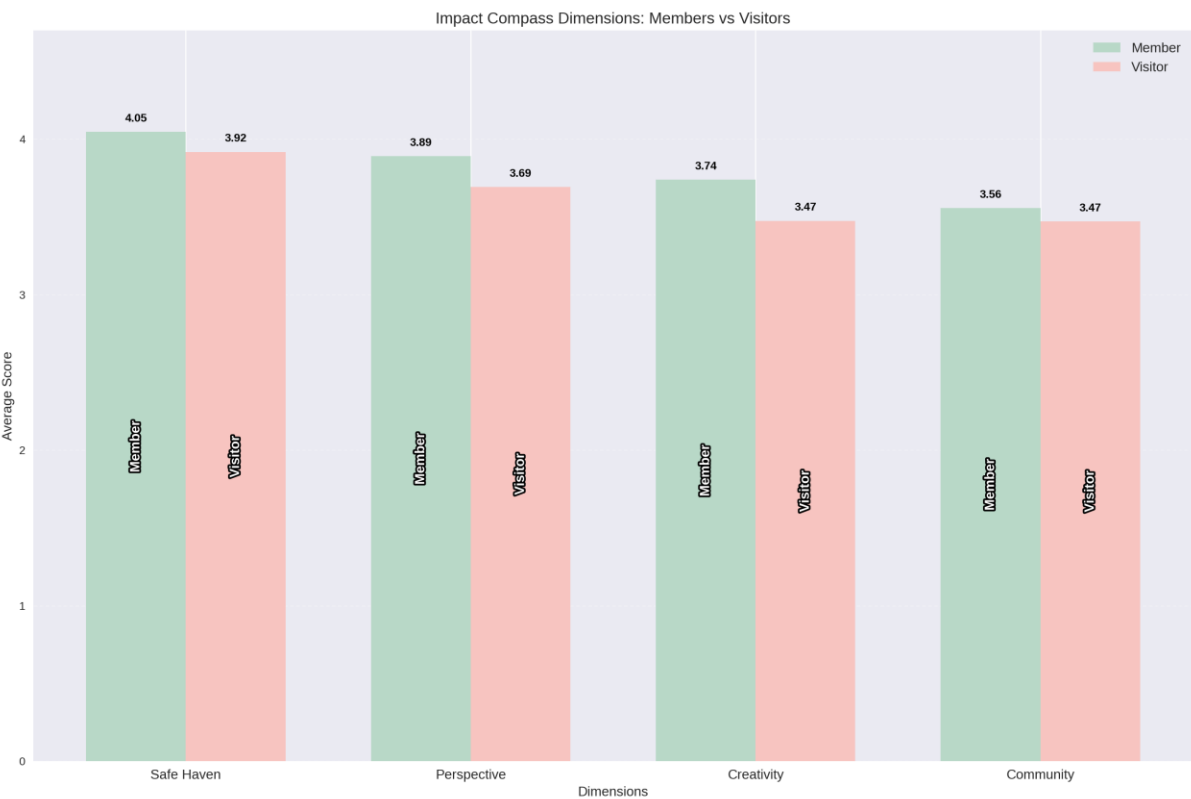
The study makes the distinction between 'members' of the library and 'visitors', people who visit the library and make use of some of its services, without actually being a member.

Members consistently report higher scores, with the largest differences seen in **Creativity** and **Perspective**. **Safe Haven** shows a smaller but still meaningful difference and **Community** the smallest.

The results suggest that membership strengthens the impact of libraries, especially in areas related to creativity and perspective. Even in dimensions with smaller gaps, such as community, membership still shows a meaningful effect. Encouraging library membership may therefore be an effective strategy for enhancing user engagement and well-being.

**Measuring Impact on Skills and Cultural Inclusivity**
In addition to the Impact Compass well-being model, the survey assessed the library's impact on specific skills and cultural inclusivity. Respondents evaluated a series of statements using a 5-point scale, from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). Responses marked as "no opinion / don't know" were excluded from the analysis to ensure the reliability of the results.

The following statements were asked to the respondents:

**Reading skills**: The library helps me to improve my reading skills
**Writing skills:** The library helps me to improve my writing skills
**Digital skills:** The library helps me to improve my digital skills (working with a computer, using the internet, digital government, social media, ...)
**Language knowledge:** The library helps me to improve my language knowledge
**Cultural inclusivity:** The library is a welcoming house for all cultures and backgrounds
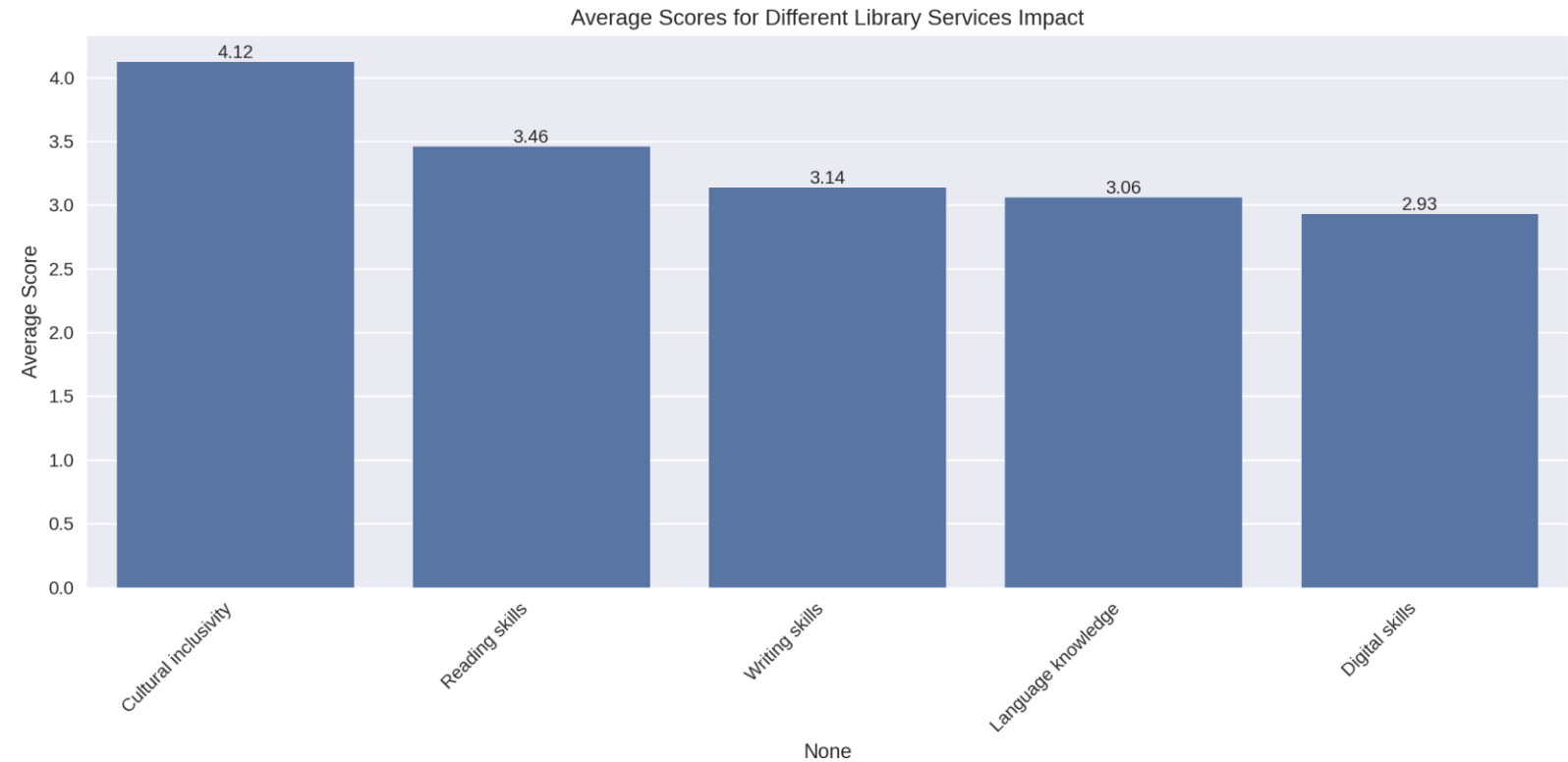
The chart on this page presents the overall results for these statements. Any score above 2.5 can be considered positive.
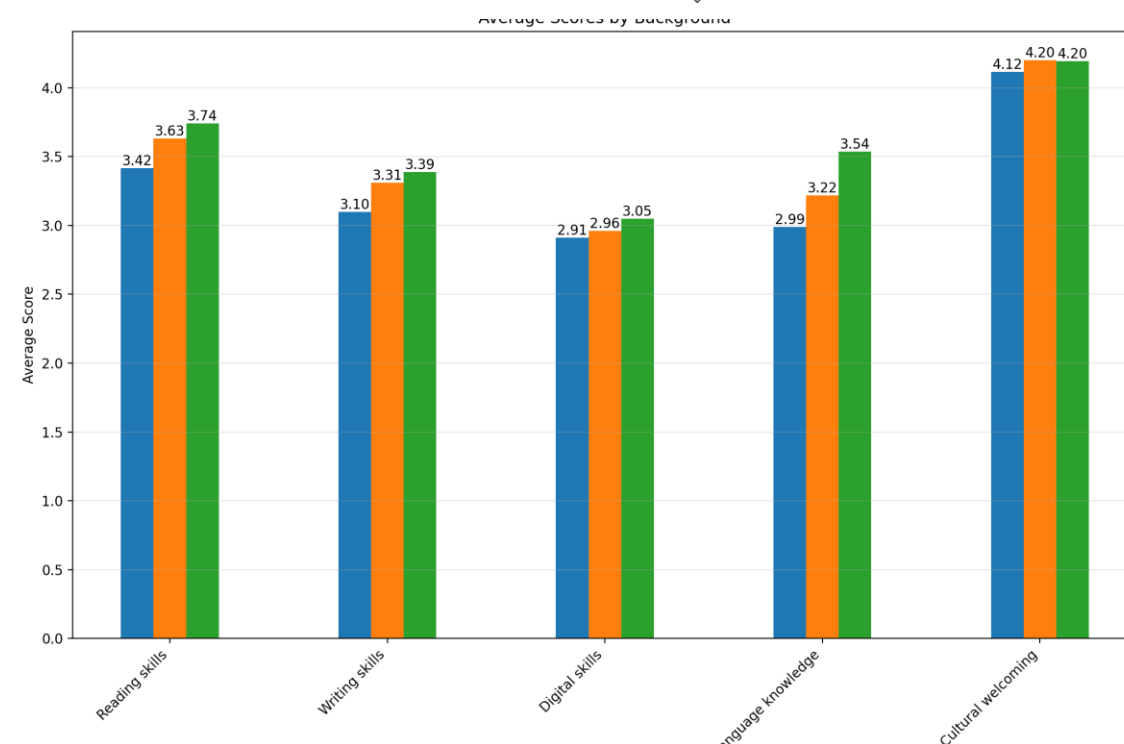
Libraries perform strongly across the board, with a clear peak in the perception of the library as a **culturally inclusive** space. This aligns closely with the high score for the library as a safe haven, discussed in the chapter on the Impact Compass model.

**Reading skills** received a score of 3.46 out of 5, indicating that users generally agree the library contributes to the development of their reading abilities.

**Writing skills** and **language proficiency** received similar scores, just above 3.0. **Digital skills**, however, scored slightly lower at 2.93.

It is particularly insightful to examine how these perceptions differ across various subgroups within the population.

Average Scores for Different Library Services Impact

Average Scores by Age Groups

Legend: Younger than 26, 26 to 45, 46 to 65, Older than 65


Average Scores by Background

Legend: Native, Second genera..., First generation
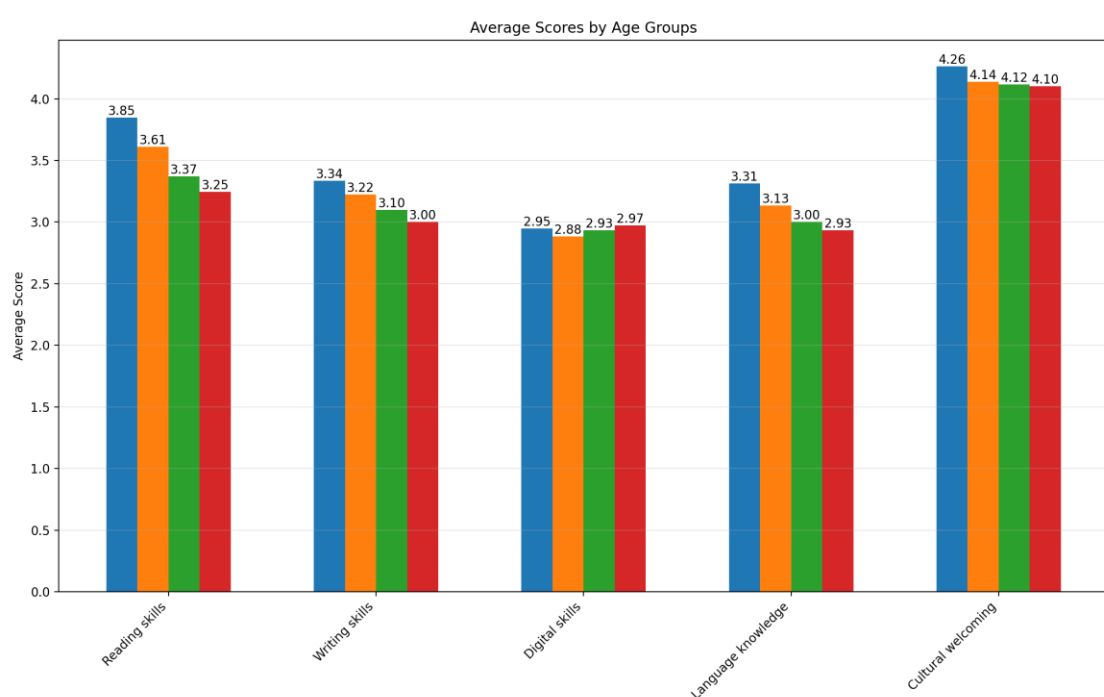
**Age-Based Analysis**

Younger respondents (under 26) consistently gave higher ratings across most statements, ranging from 2.95 to 4.26. The largest age-related gap was observed in **reading and writing skills**, which seems intuitive as one could presume younger groups are in a stronger learning phase.

**Digital skills** showed a notable pattern: the group between 26 and 65 shows the lowest scores, suggesting that the youngest AND the oldest group remark the highest impact on digital skills by the library.

**Cultural inclusivity** scored consistently high across all ages (4.10–4.26), indicating broad recognition of the library's inclusive role.

Respondents aged 46 and older generally gave lower ratings overall.

**Analysis by migration background**

We notice a clear pattern looking at migration backgrounds of respondents. The positive impact on skill development by the library is recognized by all groups, but grows for the non-native groups. This confirms the intuitive assumption that libraries have an important role in skill development and integration of newcomers.

The largest gap is seen in **language skills**, with a 0.55-point difference between natives and first-generation newcomers. **Digital skills** show the smallest variation between groups. All differences are statistically significant, underscoring the library's particularly strong impact on users with a migration background.

**Cultural inclusivity** receives high and stable ratings across all backgrounds, highlighting the library's inclusive role and its recognition amongst different background groups.

# 3. Children & youngsters

The Sentobib study primarily targeted adult participants. However, there was a clear interest in involving children and youngsters as well. Engaging children in research poses specific challenges: on the one hand, parental consent is required; on the other hand, quantitative surveys are generally less suitable for younger children. As a result, there are very few examples of quantitative studies conducted directly with children, since many are (too) young to participate meaningfully, even with parental permission.

To address this, the adult survey included a mechanism for indirect participation by children. Respondents were asked whether they have children, whether those children were present while completing the survey, and whether they would be willing to involve them in answering selected questions. As an added motivation, participants were informed that each completed child response would contribute to the protection of an additional square meter of endangered rainforest (see introduction).

To our delight, many parents chose to involve their children in this way and 22,600 of them were reached.

## What do kids like about the library?

2 (nonobligatory) open questions asked for children's opinions via an open field where anything could be written:
1) What do you like about the library?
2) What do you dislike about the library?

A topic analysis on the first question, shows that books and reading materials are overwhelmingly the most important aspect of libraries for children.

Children value the ability to borrow items and the variety of materials available. Games, media, and activities are also significant attractions.

The library environment (quiet, cozy spaces) is mentioned, but less frequently. Social aspects (staff, other children) are important to a smaller percentage of children.

Children's Library Preferences - Treemap Visualization



Social Aspects
779 (6.4%)

Borrowing
1936 (15.9%)

Books & Reading
9271 (76.2%)

Media
1755 (14.4%)

Library Environment
981 (8.1%)

Activities
1984 (16.3%)

**What do kids like about the library? Topic analysis**

An analysis of children's feedback identified key areas of dissatisfaction.

The most frequent issue was a **limited selection of books** (44.8%), particularly the lack of favorite titles and genre variety. **Rules and restrictions** (21.5%)—such as borrowing limits and fines—were also commonly criticized.
**Noise and disturbances** (13.0%) negatively impacted the experience, as did aspects of the **physical environment** (7.6%) like uncomfortable seating and poor climate control.
A smaller group mentioned **accessibility issues** (5.4%), including location and limited digital access.
Importantly, **13.6% of children reported no dislikes**, suggesting overall satisfaction among many users.
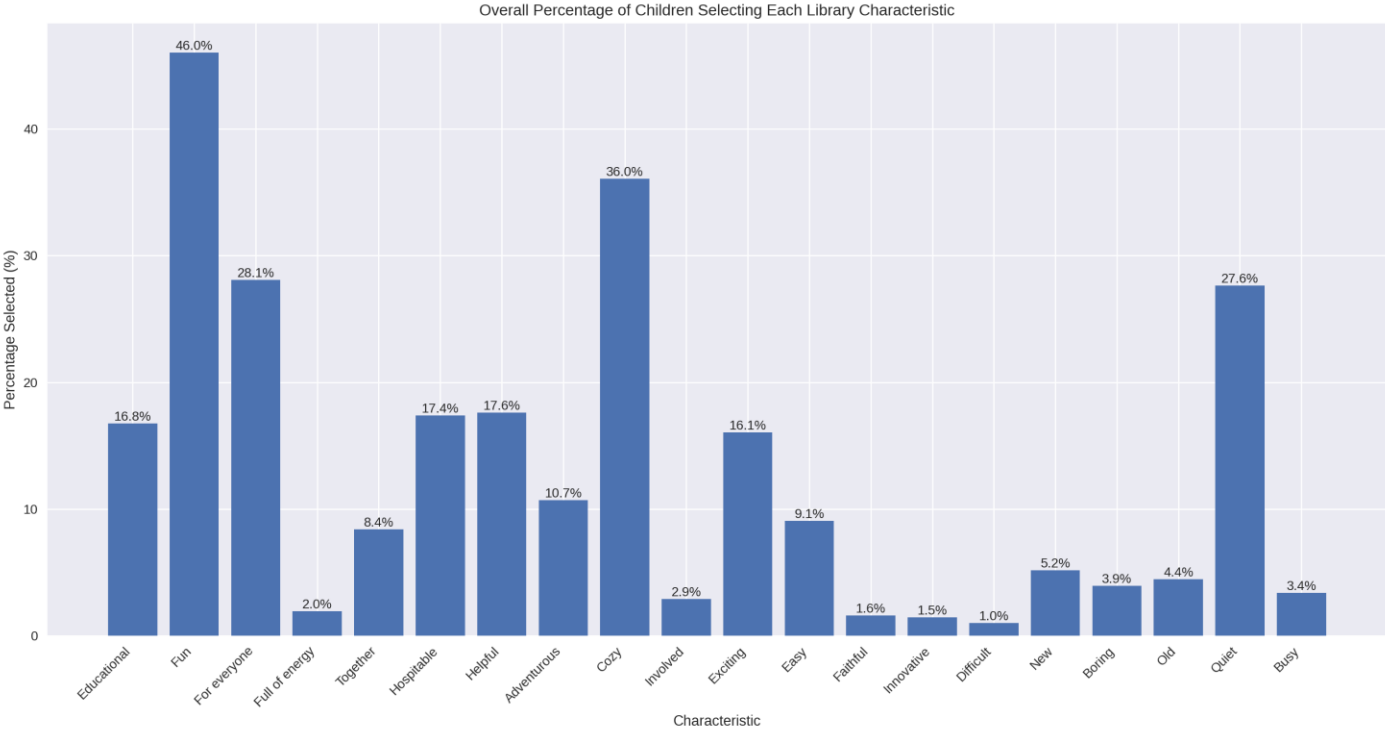
To improve children's library experiences, libraries could expand and update the book collection to better match their interests. Borrowing rules should be reviewed for greater flexibility. Libraries should offer both quiet and active zones, improve physical comfort, and ensure better accessibility, particularly outside school hours.

As indicated before, it remains important to look at these results on a local library level, as local differences can be very relevant.

## Children's perceptions and sentiment

We asked children "what do you think about the library", making them choose up to 3 options in a list of 20 associations. Positive and negative words were included, making sure all 'oppositions' were available.

Children most commonly associate them with positive and welcoming qualities. The top five characteristics identified are: **fun** (46.0%), **cozy** (36.0%), **for everyone** (28.1%), **quiet** (27.6%), and **helpful** (17.6%). These responses highlight the library's role as an inclusive, enjoyable, and supportive space for young users.



Overall Percentage of Children Selecting Each Library Characteristic



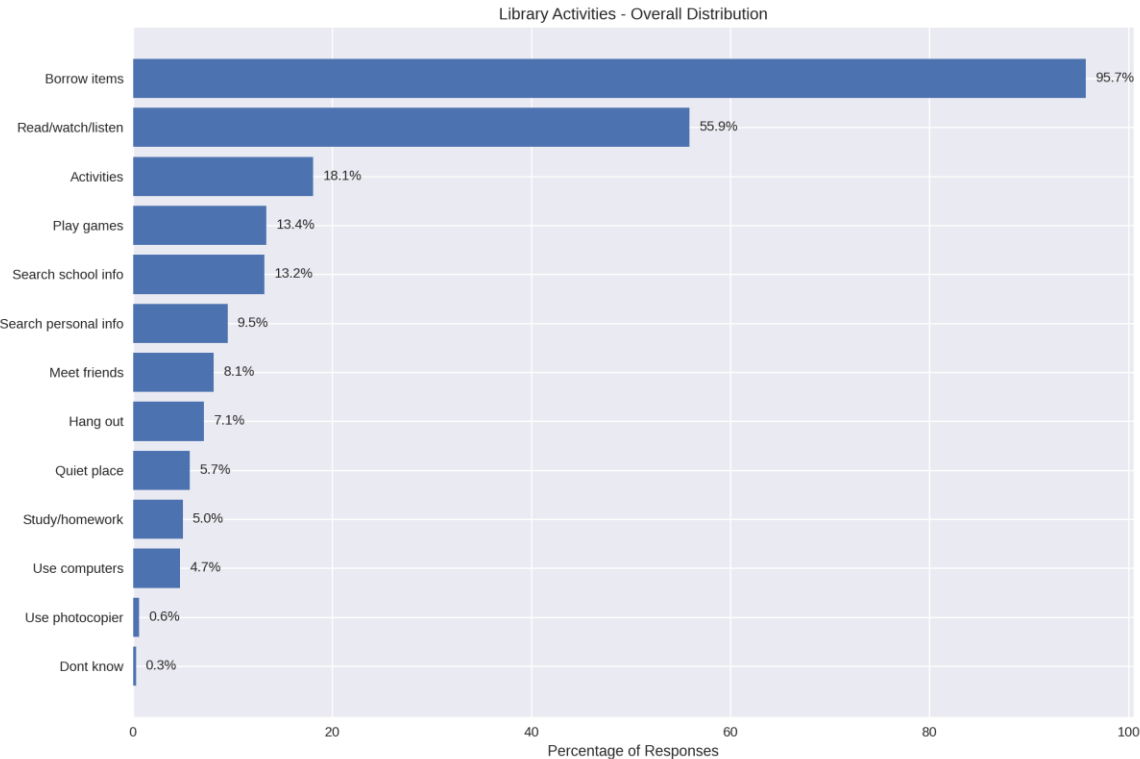Library Activities - Overall Distribution

## Top Activities Among Library Users

The most common activity among the youngest users is **borrowing items**, reported by 95.7% of respondents.

This is followed by **reading, watching, or listening on-site** (55.9%), **participating in activities** (18.1%), **playing games** (13.4%), and **searching for school-related information** (13.2%).

The least common activities include **using the photocopier** (0.6%). A small group indicatd **not knowing** what they did at the library (0.3%).

## Library Visit Companions - Overall Distribution
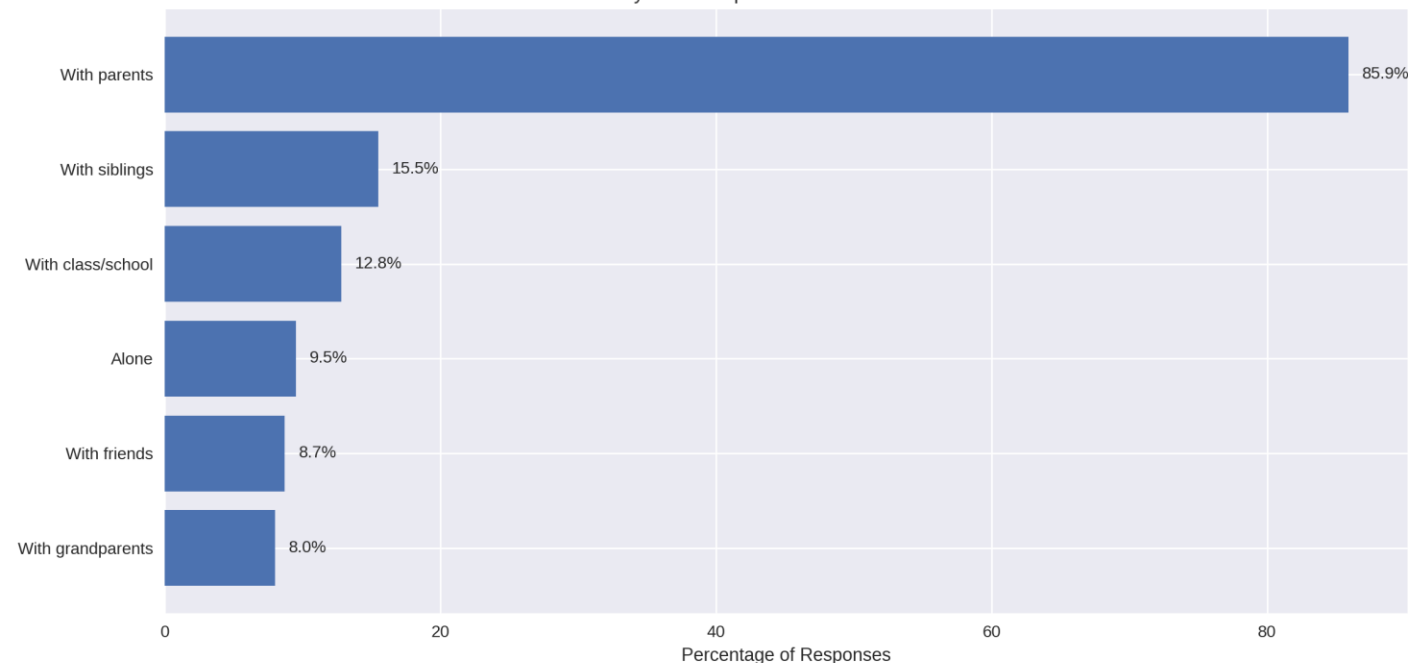


**Primary companions for Children at the library**

Children most commonly visit the library **with their parents**, cited by 85.9%. Other companions are reported far less often, with **siblings** (15.5%) and **class or school visits** (12.8%) as the next most common.

Less frequent companions include **visiting alone** (9.5%), **with friends** (8.7%), or **with grandparents** (8.0%).

The large gap highlights the central role of parents in children's library engagement.

**Age Distribution of children reached in the survey**

The data identifies three main user groups. **Primary education users (ages 6–12)** represent the majority, making up 76% of the sample (45.5% are aged 6–9, and 30.5% are 10–12). **Secondary education users (ages 13–18)** account for 23.8%.

**'Peripheral age groups'** in this sample include children aged 3–5 (26.2%), those under 3 (7.4%), and adults over 18 (1.2%).

58.2% of the young respondents in this sample are boys, 61.5% are girls, 0.3% other. As parents could ask the opinion to multiple children, the sum is higher than 100%.
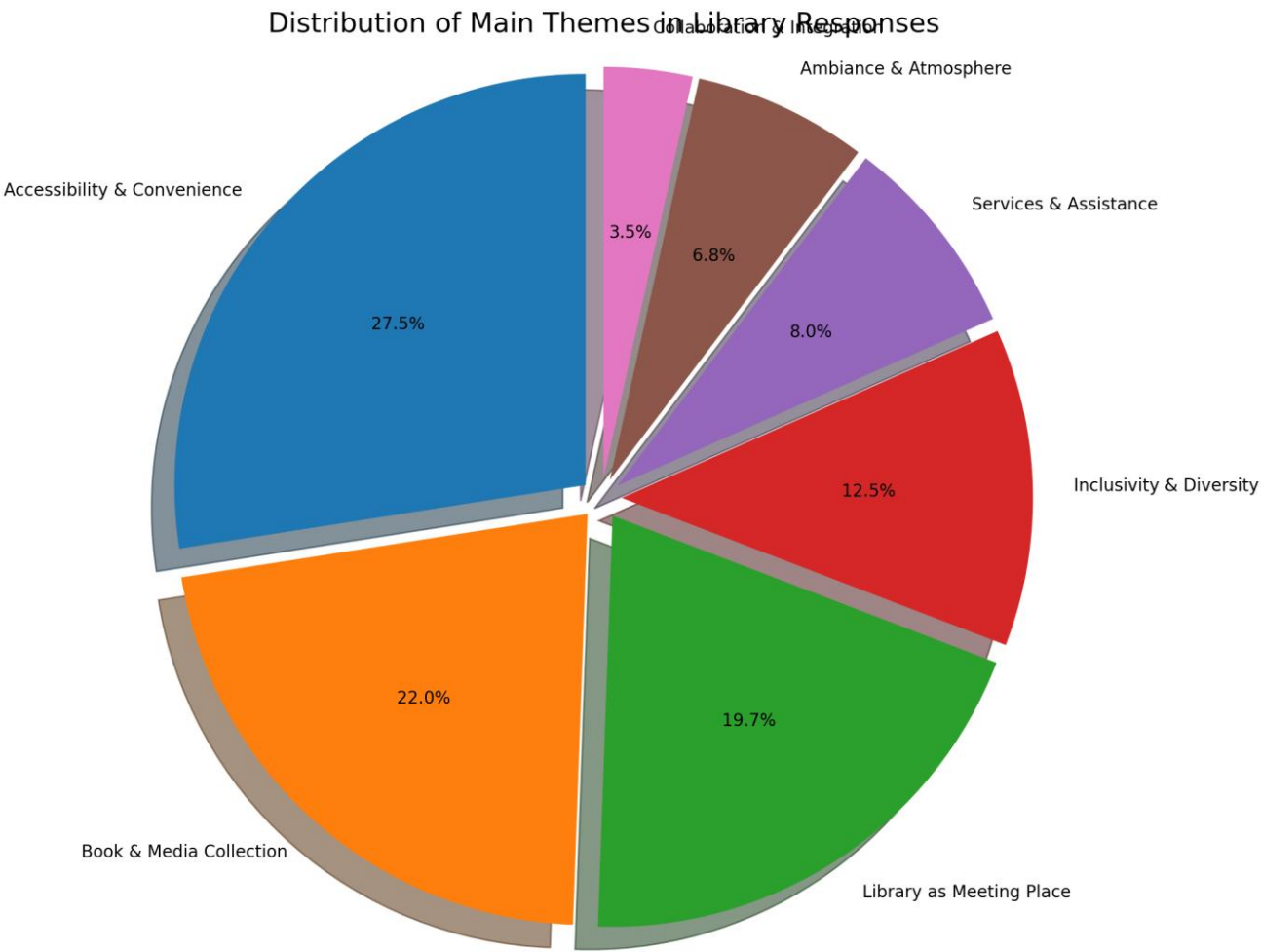
## Age Distribution of Library Users
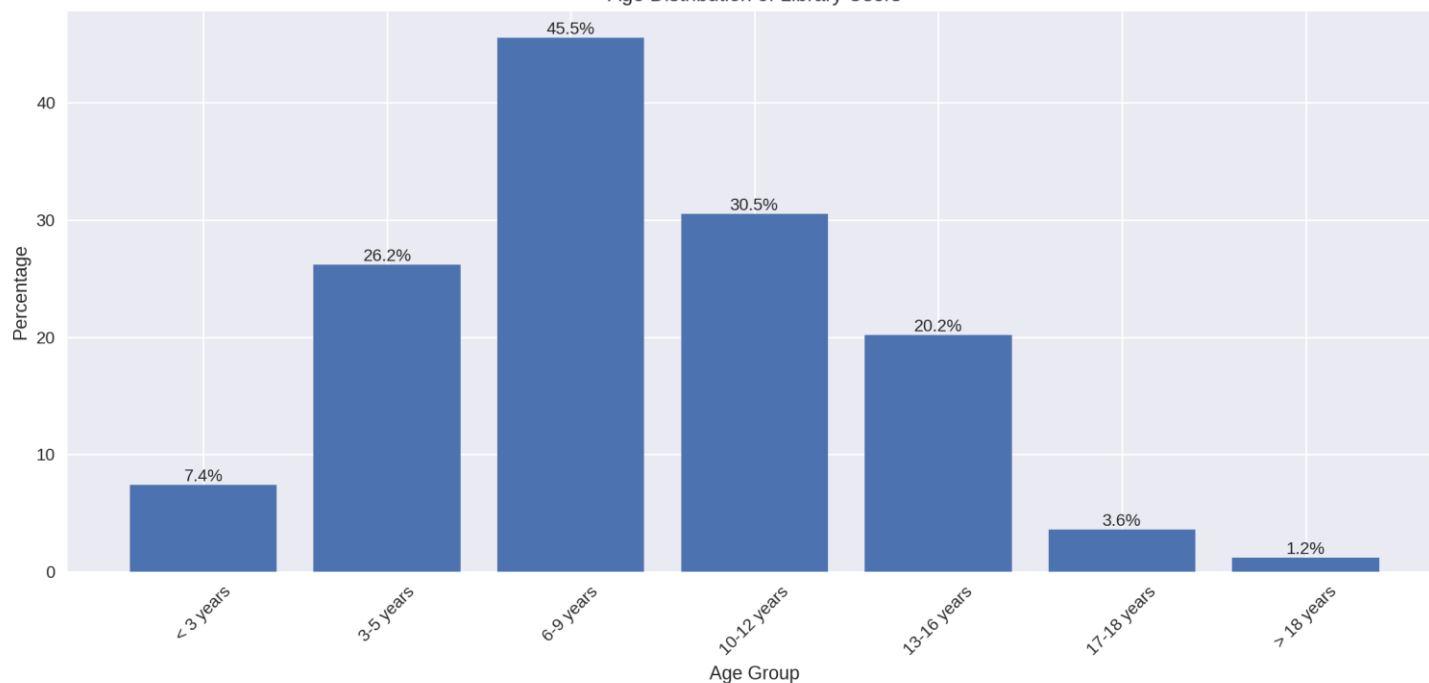
# 4. Library of the future

Different groups, different expectations…

Through an (nonobligatory) open question, we asked respondents on how their library of the future would look like. The many responses are analyzed and reveal seven primary themes and 21 subthemes that collectively reflect the evolving needs and priorities of library users.

**Key Findings**

1. **Accessibility and Convenience** emerged as the most prominent theme, representing 27.5% of all mentions. The most frequently cited suggestion was to extend opening hours, particularly during evenings and weekends. Online reservation systems also featured prominently, indicating strong demand for user-friendly digital access.

2. **Book and Media Collection** remains central to the library's identity, accounting for 22.0% of mentions. The desire for more new books was the second most cited subtheme overall. Users expressed continued interest in both physical media (e.g., books, CDs and DVDs) and digital formats (e.g., e-books).

3. **Library as Meeting Place** is an increasingly important role, highlighted in 19.7% of responses. Suggestions included more study and social spaces and the addition of a reading café (in some form), reflecting the library's growing function as a social and collaborative environment.

4. **Inclusivity and Diversity** was also a notable concern (12.5% of mentions), with particular emphasis on serving all age groups. Respondents emphasized the need for programming and spaces that are accessible and welcoming to a broad demographic.

5. **Services, Ambiance, and Collaboration** were identified as contributing factors to the overall user experience. Respondents valued friendly staff, a cozy and comfortable atmosphere, and partnerships with schools and community organizations.



Distribution of Main Themes in Library Responses

- Accessibility & Convenience — 27.5%
- Book & Media Collection — 22.0%
- Library as Meeting Place — 19.7%
- Inclusivity & Diversity — 12.5%
- Services & Assistance — 8.0%
- Ambiance & Atmosphere — 6.8%
- Collaboration & Integration — 3.5%

Based on this one open question "What should the library of the future offer you?", we see the following Potential recommendations:

1. Extend opening hours, especially during weekends and evenings

2. Regularly update and diversify the book and media collections

3. Extend online services, such as reservation systems

4. Create flexible spaces for both quiet study and social interaction

5. Develop age-specific programs and inclusive facilities

6. Invest in staff training to ensure friendly and helpful service

7. Enhance the physical environment to be more welcoming and comfortable

8. Foster community partnerships and collaborative initiatives

The future of libraries seems to be in their ability to balance their traditional functions with evolving roles as inclusive, multi-purpose community hubs. Priorities include enhancing accessibility, diversifying collections and services, and fostering an environment that is welcoming to all users, regardless of age or background.



All Subthemes Ranked by Frequency
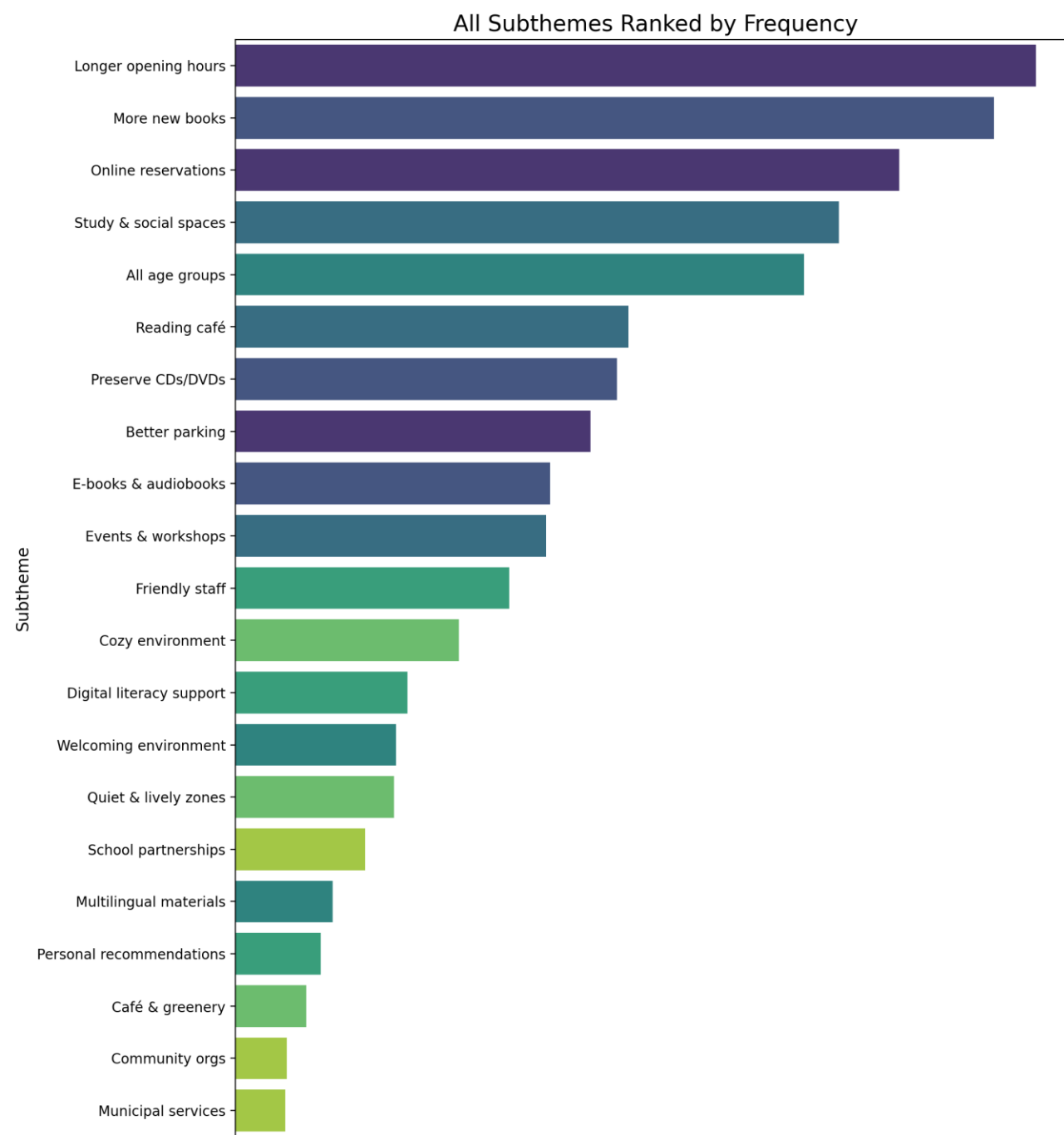
**Theme detailing**

Making abstraction of the importance of the topics and subtopics (the number of mentions), we created the wheel in the left side of this page.

It shows a "map" of how more general themes in the inner circle relate to more specific answers and topics in the outer circle. It gives another angle of mapping and structuring the various thoughts and ideas that people wrote down on how they see the library in the future.

# Future library preferences – "aided options"

Alike conclusions are drawn from "aided" questions: multiple choice questions with potential features of the 'library of the future'. Respondents were asked to select up to five services they would like to see in their "library of the future" from a list of 32 options. The list of items was created looking at actual offers in libraries and the more innovative ideas that some libraries experiment with.

The most desired services in the list of 32, highlight a clear demand for social and educational offerings. The top five include:
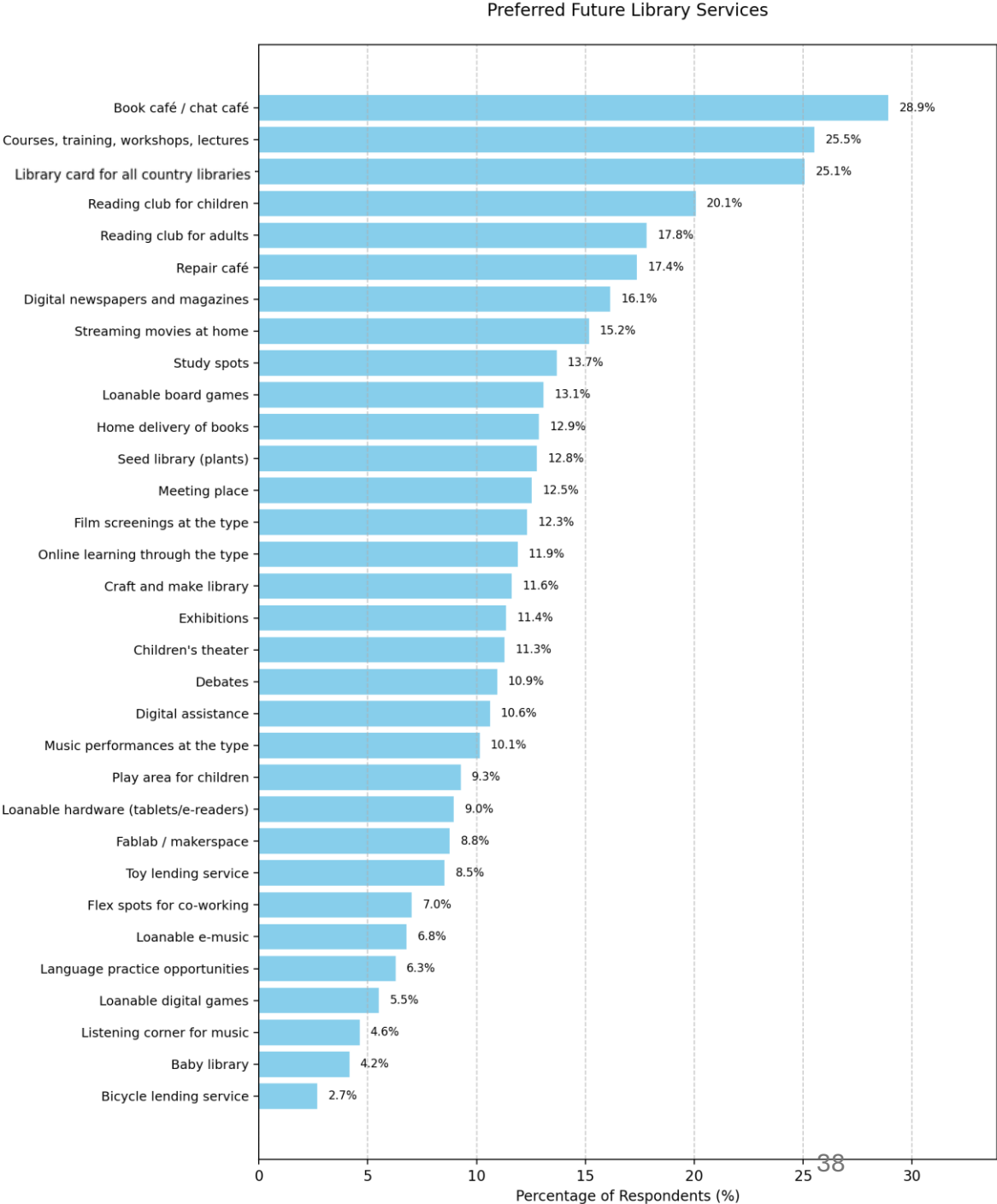• **Book café / chat café** (28.90%)
• **Courses, training, workshops, lectures** (25.52%)
• **Library card valid across multiple libraries** (25.07%)
• **Reading club for children** (20.06%)
• **Reading club for adults** (17.81%)
These preferences reflect a strong vision of the library as a **social and learning hub**. We could interpret these chosen items as "a traditional offering with a modern touch".

In contrast, the least desired services include:
• **Bicycle lending service** (2.69%)
• **Baby library** (4.16%)
• **Listening corner for music** (4.63%)
• **Loanable digital games** (5.52%)
• **Language practice opportunities** (6.28%)

The overall results suggest that future library development should prioritize community-building and educational functions over niche or auxiliary services. But carefulness is important: 'desire' often relates to the actual offer, implicating that the limited offer in the library landscape of certain services could influence the lower desirability by the current library users of those services.



Preferred Future Library Services

| Service | Percentage of Respondents (%) |
|---|---|
| Book café / chat café | 28.9% |
| Courses, training, workshops, lectures | 25.5% |
| Library card for all country libraries | 25.1% |
| Reading club for children | 20.1% |
| Reading club for adults | 17.8% |
| Repair café | 17.4% |
| Digital newspapers and magazines | 16.1% |
| Streaming movies at home | 15.2% |
| Study spots | 13.7% |
| Loanable board games | 13.1% |
| Home delivery of books | 12.9% |
| Seed library (plants) | 12.8% |
| Meeting place | 12.5% |
| Film screenings at the type | 12.3% |
| Online learning through the type | 11.9% |
| Craft and make library | 11.6% |
| Exhibitions | 11.4% |
| Children's theater | 11.3% |
| Debates | 10.9% |
| Digital assistance | 10.6% |
| Music performances at the type | 10.1% |
| Play area for children | 9.3% |
| Loanable hardware (tablets/e-readers) | 9.0% |
| Fablab / makerspace | 8.8% |
| Toy lending service | 8.5% |
| Flex spots for co-working | 7.0% |
| Loanable e-music | 6.8% |
| Language practice opportunities | 6.3% |
| Loanable digital games | 5.5% |
| Listening corner for music | 4.6% |
| Baby library | 4.2% |
| Bicycle lending service | 2.7% |

## Top 5 future preferences - by Age Group

Preferences for future library services vary by age group. **The age group 26–45** shows the highest interest in **children's reading clubs** (31%), likely reflecting their stage of life with young families. **Age group 46–65** express the strongest interest in **book cafés** (32%) and **educational offerings** such as courses and workshops. The **youngest group (under 26)** shows the highest support for a **library card valid across multiple libraries**, pointing to a preference for flexibility and mobility in library access.

These patterns suggest that life stage influences service expectations, with younger users focused on accessibility and families, and older users valuing learning and social interaction some more than the other groups.

### Top 5 Services by Background
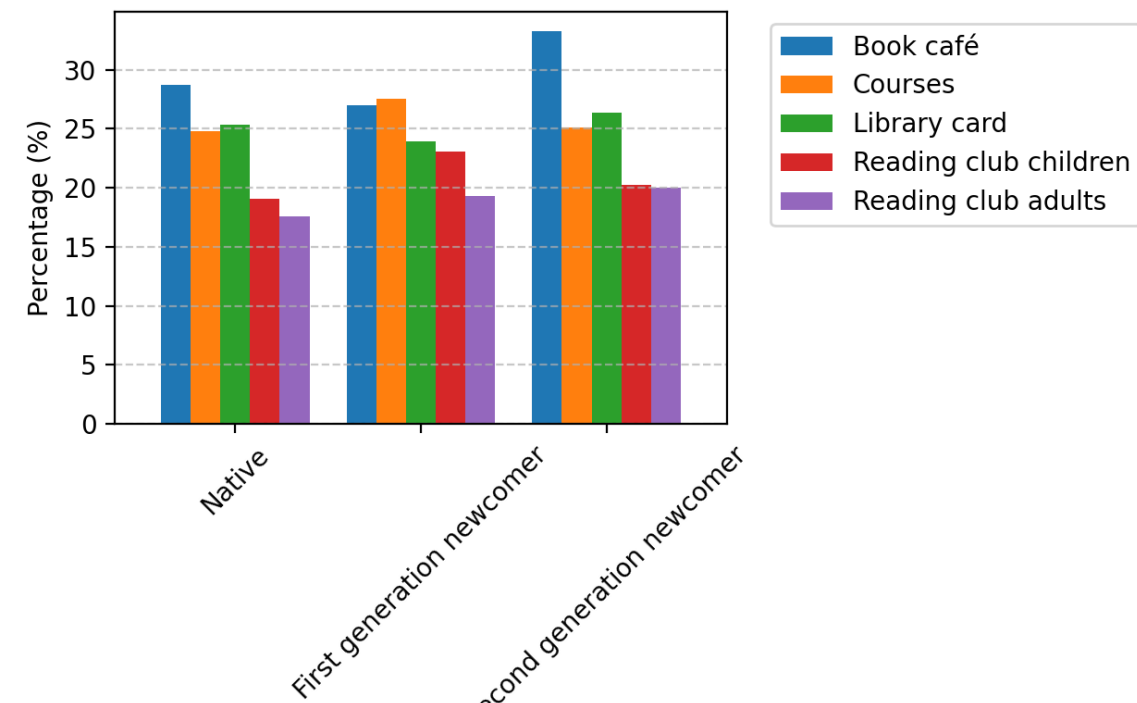


### Top 5 Services by Age Groups
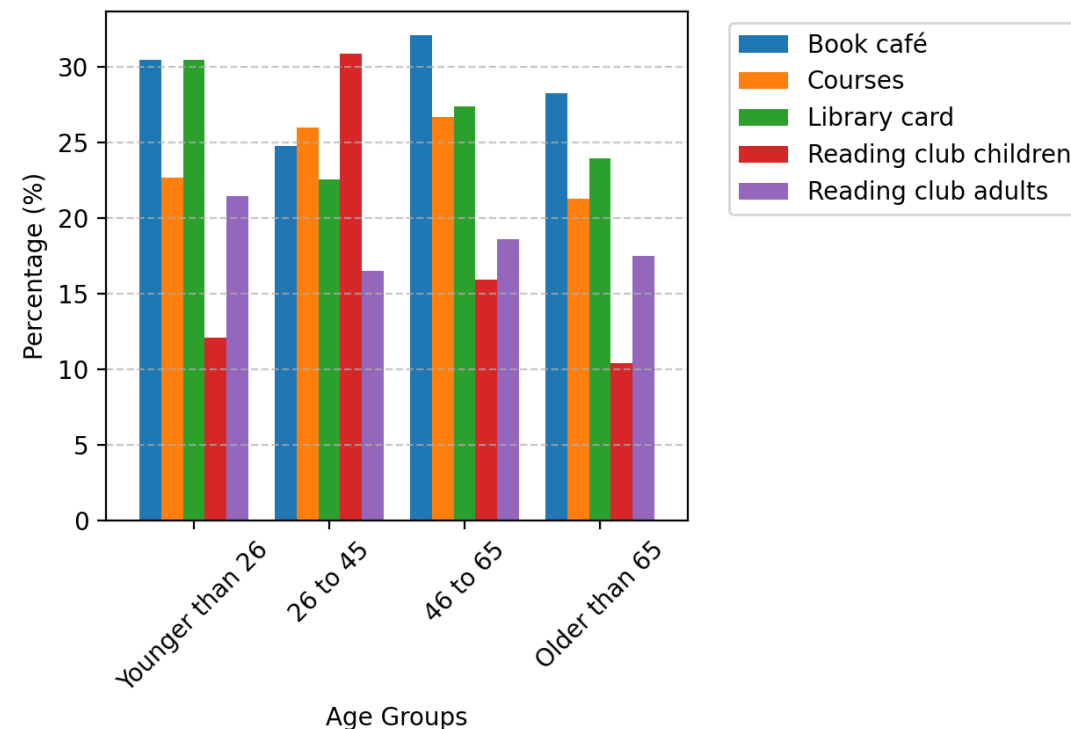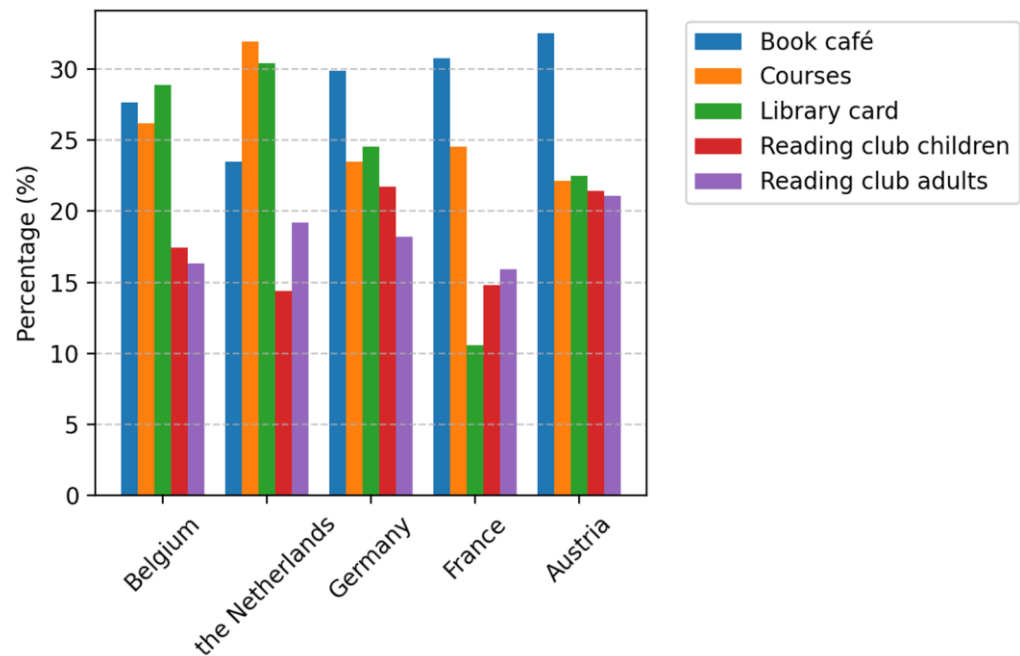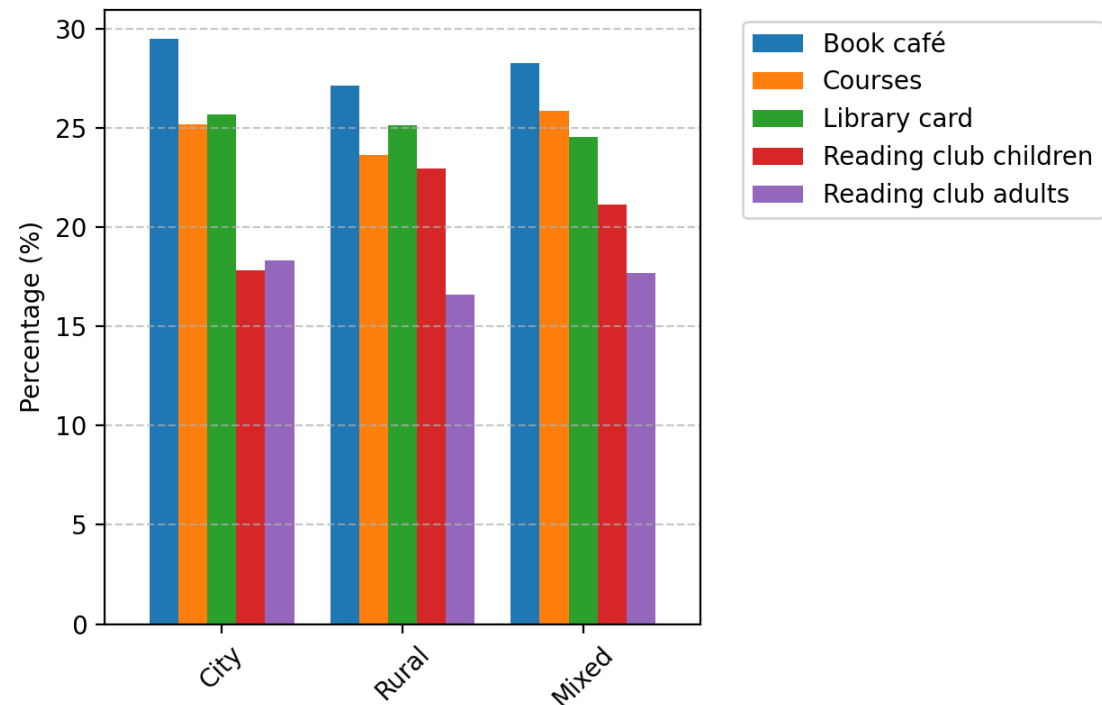


## Top 5 future preferences - by background

Relevant differences emerge in visions of the library of the future depending on the respondents' background. Courses are most frequently requested by **1st generation newcomers**, as are children's reading clubs. This highlights the library's role in supporting the integration of newcomers into society.

**Second-generation** newcomers show slightly different preferences: they express the highest interest in book cafés, library cards valid across multiple libraries, and adult reading clubs.

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## Top 5 future preferences - by library type

Service preferences vary by library context. **City libraries** report the highest interest in **book cafés** (29.5%), suggesting a stronger demand for social and informal gathering spaces. **Rural libraries**, on the other hand, show greater interest in **children's reading clubs** (23%), pointing to the importance of family-oriented services in less urban areas.

**Mixed libraries** demonstrate a **balanced interest** across all service types, reflecting diverse community needs. Interest in a **library card valid across multiple libraries** remains stable across settings (24–26%), indicating broad support for enhanced access and flexibility.



## Top 5 future preferences - by country

The preferences in this "top 5" vary across countries. **Austria** shows the highest interest in **book cafés** (32.5%) and displays the most **balanced distribution** across other services. In the **Netherlands**, interest is highest in **courses and workshops** (31.9%) and a **general (Dutch) library card** (30.4%).

In **Germany and France** book cafés are the most preferred option, confirming a broader trend toward social spaces. **Belgium** shows a rather balanced profile, with the strongest preference for a library card valid across the country (or region in the Belgian contet). These findings highlight both shared and country-specific priorities in the future development of library services.
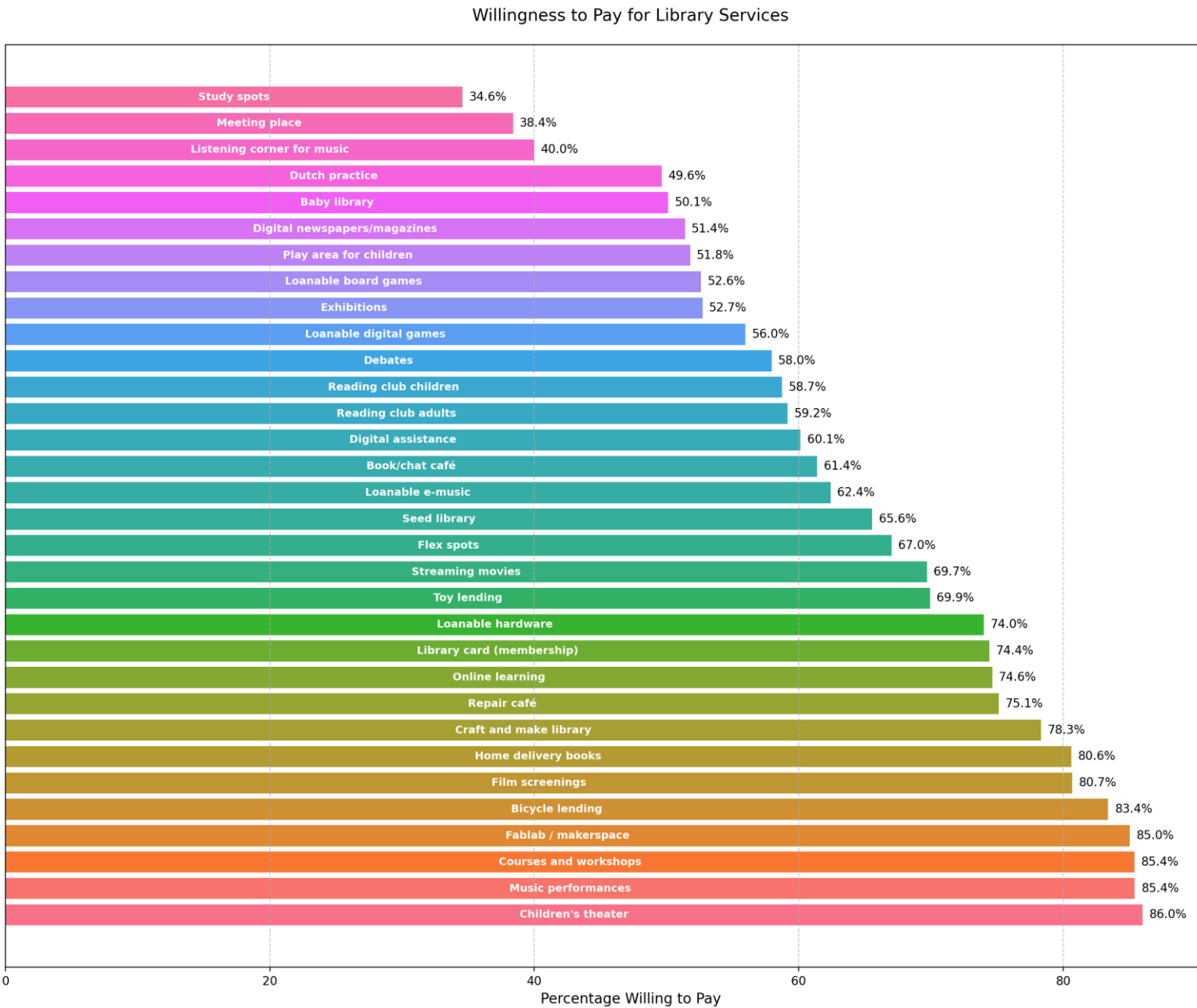


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# 5. Willingness to pay

## Willingness to Pay for Future Library Services

To assess how users value potential services in their "library of the future," respondents were asked whether they would be willing to pay for each service they had previously indicated as desirable. This **Willingness to Pay (WTP)** measure provides insight into the perceived value of services, which may vary depending on both the individual and the nature of the service. The analysis reveals significant differences in willingness to pay.

• **Highest WTP (>80%)**: Users are most willing to pay for **interactive and cultural activities**, including **children's theater (86.0%)**, **music performances (85.4%)**, **courses and workshops (85.4%)**, **fablabs/makerspaces (85.0%)**, and **bicycle lending (83.4%)**.
• **Moderate WTP (60–80%)**: Services such as **film screenings**, **home book delivery**, **repair cafés**, **online learning**, and **loanable hardware** show solid but slightly lower support.
• **Lowest WTP (<55%)**: Basic or traditional offerings—such as **study spots (34.6%)**, **meeting spaces (38.4%)**, **listening corners for music (40.0%)**, and **baby libraries (50.1%)**— receive the least willingness to pay. Language-related services like **language practice (49.6%)** also fall into this category.

Interestingly, high WTP is not always aligned with how frequently a service was selected as desirable. We remark that in general, the 'basic services' of libraries are well desired to remain in the future, but the willingness to pay is rather low. This suggests that some of these services are considered and expected as the basic (and free or cheap) offer of libraries.

### Willingness to Pay for Library Services

| Service | Percentage Willing to Pay |
|---|---|
| Study spots | 34.6% |
| Meeting place | 38.4% |
| Listening corner for music | 40.0% |
| Dutch practice | 49.6% |
| Baby library | 50.1% |
| Digital newspapers/magazines | 51.4% |
| Play area for children | 51.8% |
| Loanable board games | 52.6% |
| Exhibitions | 52.7% |
| Loanable digital games | 56.0% |
| Debates | 58.0% |
| Reading club children | 58.7% |
| Reading club adults | 59.2% |
| Digital assistance | 60.1% |
| Book/chat café | 61.4% |
| Loanable e-music | 62.4% |
| Seed library | 65.6% |
| Flex spots | 67.0% |
| Streaming movies | 69.7% |
| Toy lending | 69.9% |
| Loanable hardware | 74.0% |
| Library card (membership) | 74.4% |
| Online learning | 74.6% |
| Repair café | 75.1% |
| Craft and make library | 78.3% |
| Home delivery books | 80.6% |
| Film screenings | 80.7% |
| Bicycle lending | 83.4% |
| Fablab / makerspace | 85.0% |
| Courses and workshops | 85.4% |
| Music performances | 85.4% |
| Children's theater | 86.0% |

## Willingness to Pay by Country

The average willingness to pay (WTP) across countries is **64.4%**, indicating generally positive support for funding future library services.

**Austria (67.8%)** and **Germany (66.0%)** show the highest willingness to pay, they can statistically be regrouped in "tier 1". **Belgium (63.9%)** and the **Netherlands (61.1%)** cluster in the middle, "tier 2". **France**, at **51.0%**, is located significantly below the average, "tier 3". The tradition of free library services in France supports this conclusion.

This three-tier pattern suggests that national differences in willingness to pay may reflect varying cultural, economic, and institutional contexts related to public service valuation and habits.



Average Willingness to Pay by Country with 95% Confidence Intervals
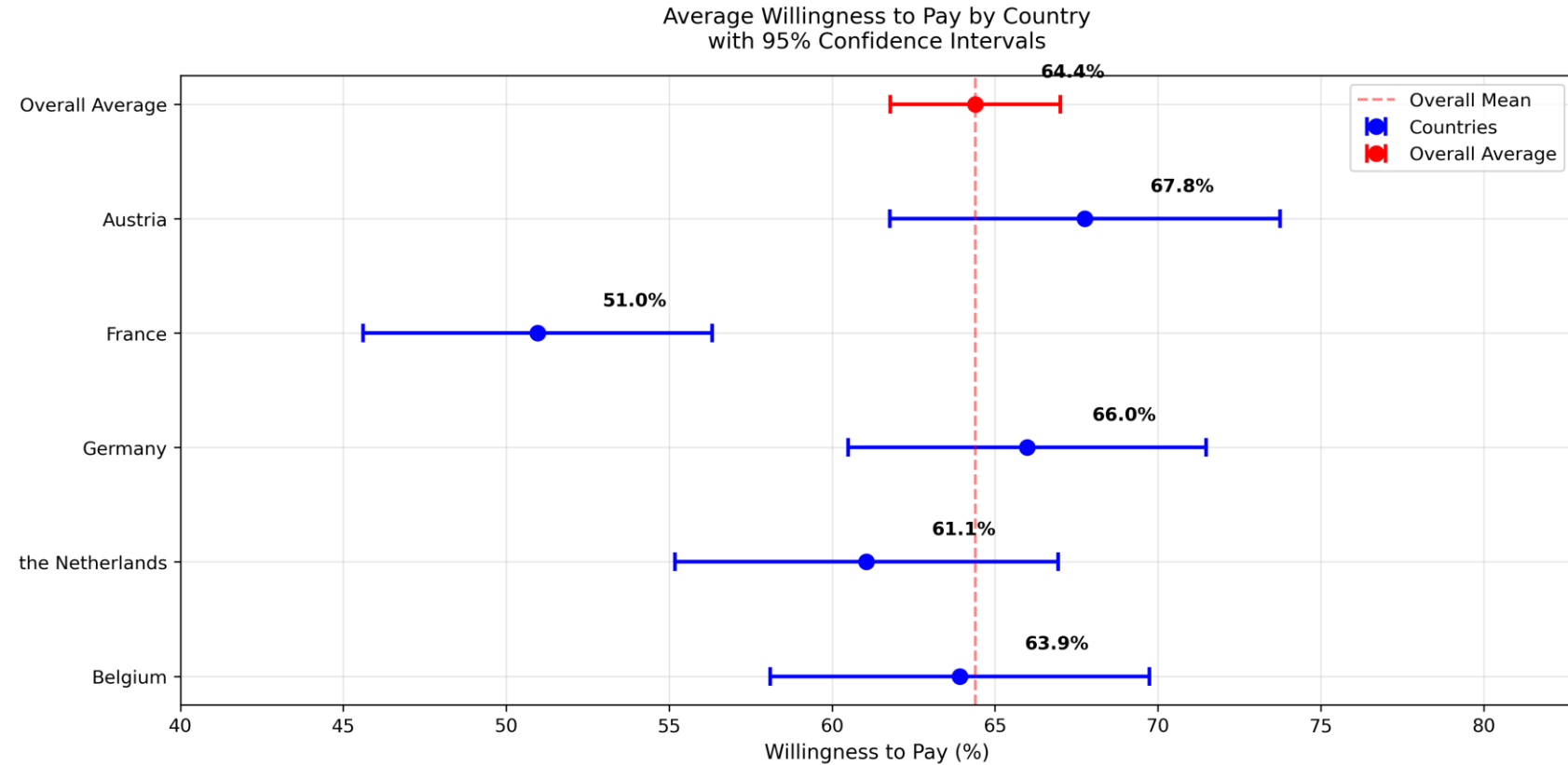
# The ideal library

Through a series of statements, we explored participants' views on what the ideal library should look like. We presented four contrasting pairs, asking respondents to indicate their preference using a sliding scale positioned between the two extremes.

- A place of peace and quiet
  < ------ > A sparkling meeting place

- A place where I borrow materials
  < ------ > A place where I experience, learn or create

- A central place where everything comes together
  < ------ > A small place close to me in the neighbourhood

- A homey cozy space
  < ------ > A sober functional environment

# 'The ideal library': preferences on library atmosphere and function

This analysis examined user preferences along four key dimensions of library experience. The strongest overall preference emerged for **cozy, home-like spaces**, accompanied by a general inclination toward **traditional library functions** and **quiet environments**.

**Looking at the different oppositions:**
• **Peace & Quiet vs. Meeting Place** *(mean: 2.81)*
Respondents showed a slight preference for the library as a quiet place, although responses were evenly distributed. The most frequent answer was neutral, indicating diverse or mixed expectations regarding the library's social function.
• **Borrowing vs. Experience & Learning** *(mean: 2.63)*
A moderate preference for traditional borrowing was observed, reflecting continued appreciation for the core lending function of libraries.

• **Central vs. Neighbourhood Locations**
*(mean: 3.07)*
This is the most balanced dimension, with a very slight preference for neighborhood-based libraries. Responses were nearly evenly split.
 **Cozy vs. Functional Spaces** *(mean: 2.29)*
This dimension showed the clearest trend: users strongly favored cozy and welcoming environments over purely functional designs.

Users generally value quiet, cozy spaces that support traditional borrowing services, while remaining open to different types of library locations. The relatively even distribution of preferences across all dimensions underscores the importance of flexibility and the need to balance modern innovations with the library's traditional role.
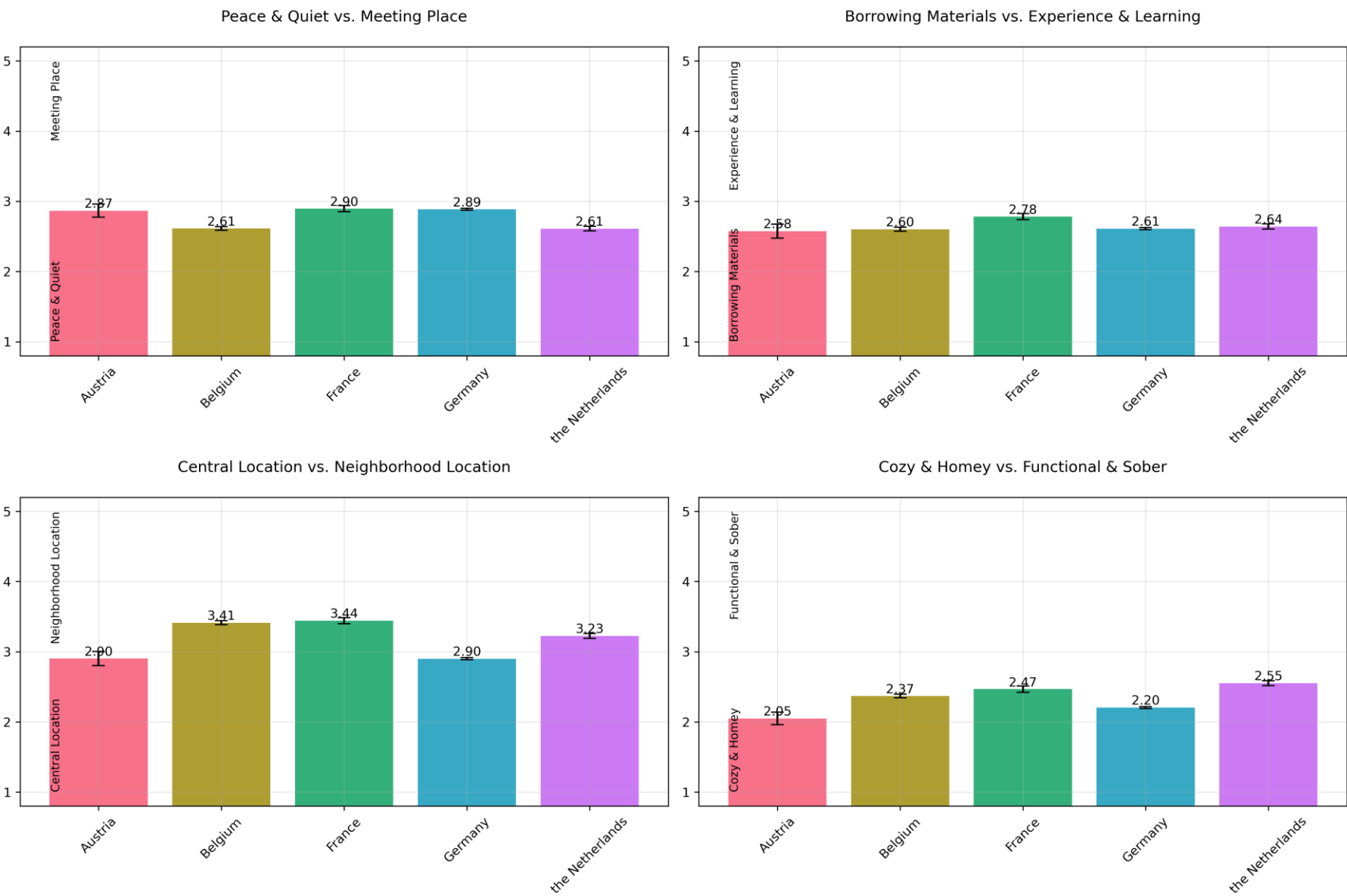

Library Preferences: Average Scores with 95% Confidence Intervals

# Cross-country preferences

Across all countries, users show a consistent preference for **cozy**, **quiet** libraries that support **traditional borrowing**.

• **Peace & Quiet vs. Meeting Place**: Slight overall preference for quiet; France and Germany lean more toward social meeting spaces, but still under 3.
• **Borrowing vs. Experience**: All countries favour borrowing, with France slightly more leaning to learning-focused use.
• **Location** shows the strongest variation. France, Belgium, and the Netherlands prefer neighbourhood libraries; Germany and Austria prefer central ones.
• **Cozy vs. Functional**: All countries prefer cozy spaces, especially Austria; the Netherlands least so.

These results suggest shared core expectations, with key cultural differences in preferred location and social use.

## Peace & Quiet vs. Meeting Place

Austria: 2.87
Belgium: 2.61
France: 2.90
Germany: 2.89
the Netherlands: 2.61

## Borrowing Materials vs. Experience & Learning

Austria: 2.58
Belgium: 2.60
France: 2.78
Germany: 2.61
the Netherlands: 2.64

## Central Location vs. Neighborhood Location

Austria: 2.90
Belgium: 3.41
France: 3.44
Germany: 2.90
the Netherlands: 3.23

## Cozy & Homey vs. Functional & Sober

Austria: 2.05
Belgium: 2.37
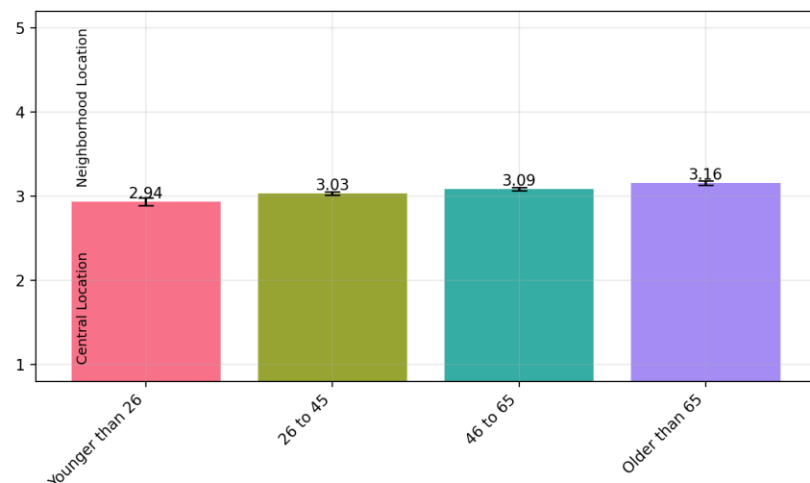France: 2.47
Germany: 2.20
the Netherlands: 2.55

**Peace & Quiet vs. Meeting Place**

**Borrowing Materials vs. Experience & Learning**

**Central Location vs. Neighborhood Location**

**Cozy & Homey vs. Functional & Sober**

**Preferences by age group**

Age influences library preferences across several dimensions.

- **Peace & Quiet vs. Meeting Place**:
Younger users (<26) show the clearest preference for a quiet and peaceful library, significantly more than the other age groups.
- **Borrowing vs. Experience**:
While significant, age differences are small. Older groups slightly prefer experience-based services more than other groups, yet still under the score of 3.
- **Central vs. Neighbourhood**:
Preference for neighbourhood locations increases with age, though differences remain small.
- **Cozy vs. Functional**:
This shows the strongest age effect, with younger users strongly preferring cozy spaces and older users leaning more to a functional environment.
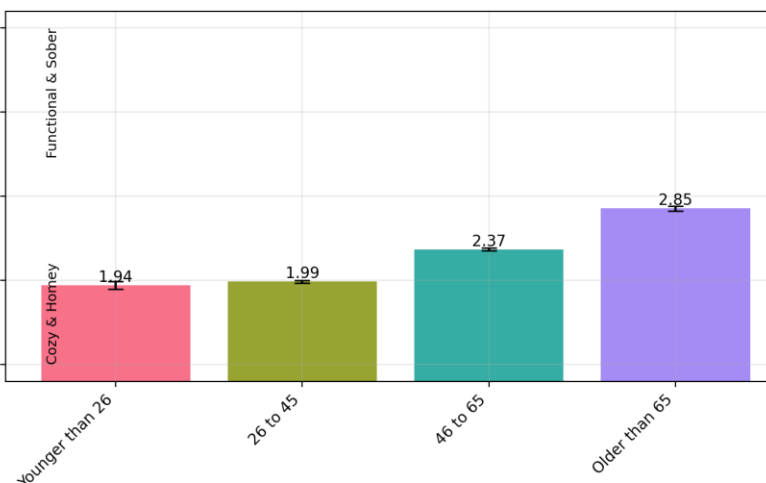
**Preferences by library type**

Library type has **much smaller impact** on user preferences.

The **largest differences** are found in the **Peace & Quiet** dimension, where users of city libraries have the strongest preference towards libraries as a peaceful and quiet place. This could be linked to the more hectic city environment.

Preferences for borrowing vs. experiencing, central vs. local and cozy vs. functional spaces show no meaningful variation across library types.



Peace & Quiet vs. Meeting Place



Borrowing Materials vs. Experience & Learning



Central Location vs. Neighborhood Location



Cozy & Homey vs. Functional & Sober
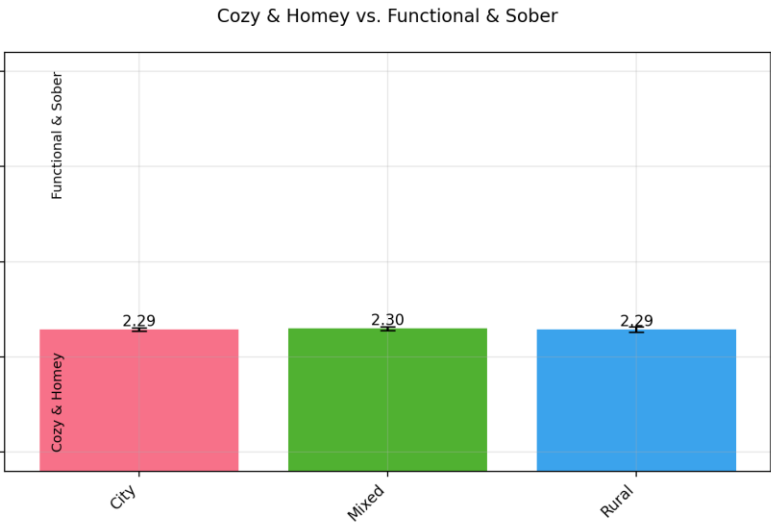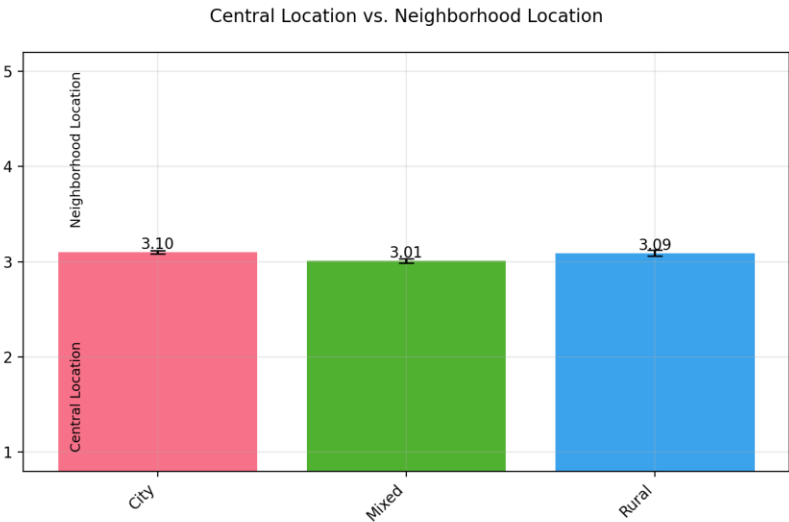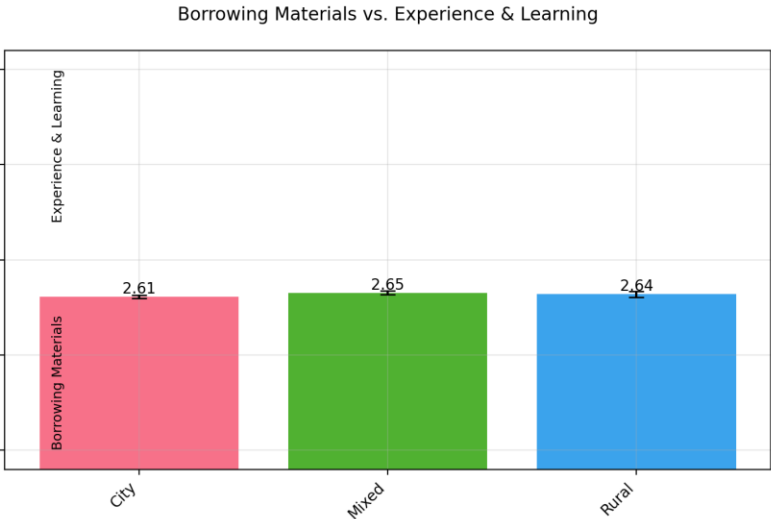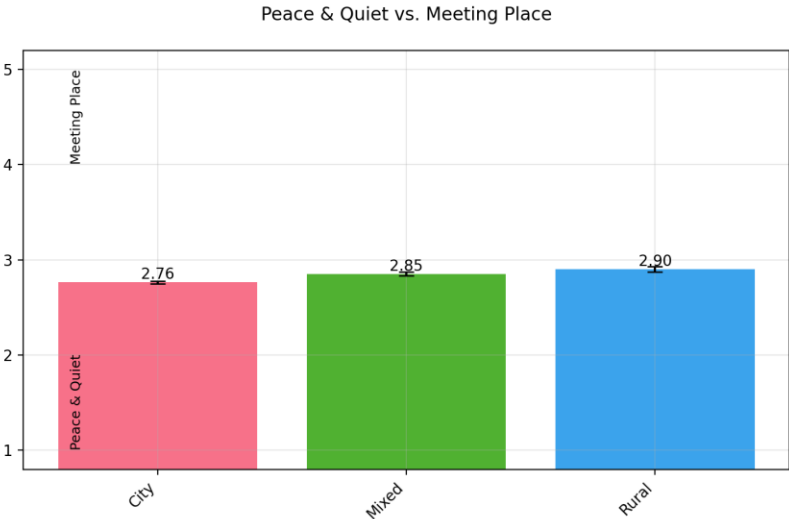
# 6. Non-users

- Familiarity with the library
- Reasons for non-use
- What could convince non-users
- Preferred visit times
- Impact of the library for non-users



**Non-User participation in the Sentobib study**

The Sentobib study also provided an opportunity to gather feedback of **non-users** of libraries. Dedicated communication materials were provided to support this, and the same adaptive survey was used, adjusting to each respondent's profile and behavior. Participation of non-users was optional for the participating libraries.

Non-users were mainly reached through **local city communication channels** and **other (cultural) organizations**. While the study primarily targets users, and the non-user sample is not representative of the full non-user population, their feedback at the local level proved highly concrete and practically useful.

In total, **7,144 non-users** participated, offering valuable insights. However, conclusions drawn relate specifically to the non-users reached in this study, and not to the broader non-user population, which would require a different research approach.

## Non-Users' Familiarity with Library Services

The Sentobib study explored what non-users believe that libraries offer.

We remark that:
- **Books** are by far the most expected service (96.2%).
- **Traditional media** such as magazines, comics, and CDs also rank in the top five.
- **Reading spaces** are also highly expected (68.9%).

These results show that non-users mainly associate libraries with the more 'traditional' services. Most libraries offer today a much broader range of products and services than this traditional offer . There is thus an opportunity for libraries to better promote their broader range of services to attract non-users beyond the "classic" library image.


Expected Library Offerings (Non-users)

Reasons for Not Using the Library (% of valid responses)
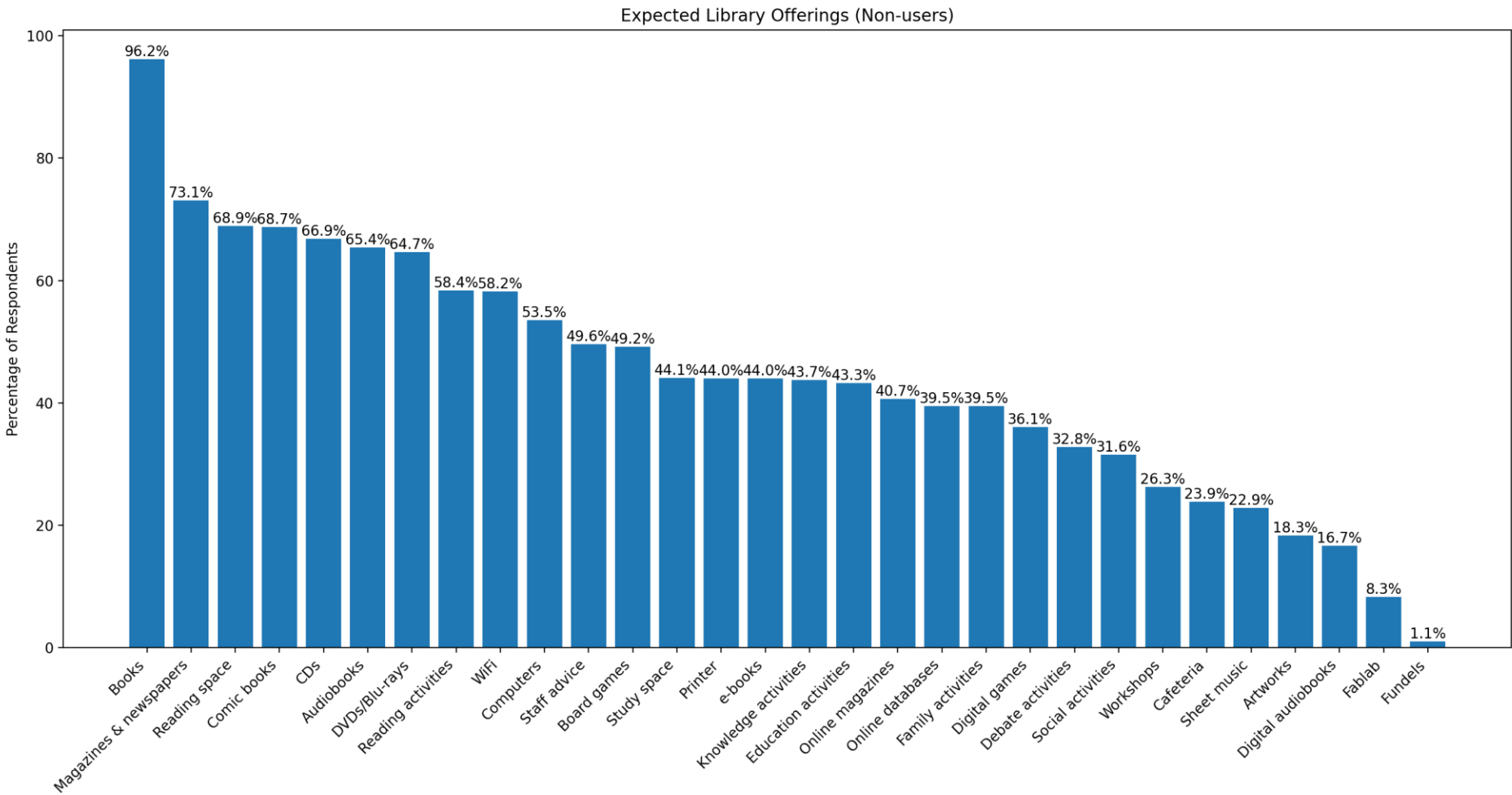
**Reasons for not using the library**

Non-users were asked **why** they do not use the specific library linked to the survey. They could choose reasons in a proposed list, and had the chance to write other feedback via the option "other".

The most common reason, cited by 29.1% of respondents, was that they use a different library (than the library of that specific survey). Additionally, 22.4% indicated that they prefer to purchase books or materials themselves, while 20.6% rely on online sources for information.

A lack of time was also a significant factor, mentioned by 18.8% of respondents. We note that a lack of time often means a 'lack of priority'.

These results suggest that personal preference and convenience, rather than structural obstacles, play a central role in library non-use.
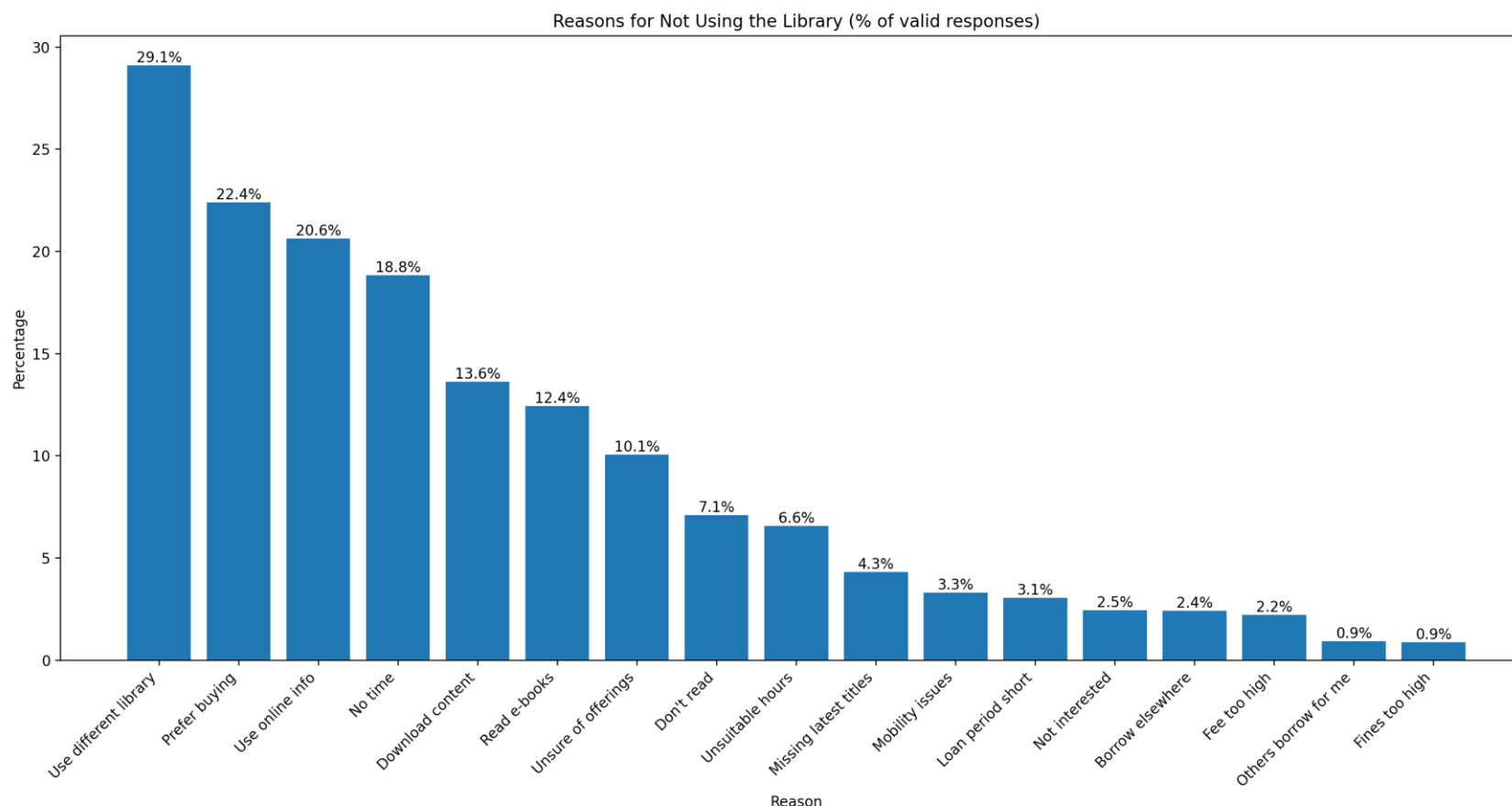
## What Could Convince Non-Users to Visit the Library?

Non-users were asked what might encourage them to begin using the library. Notably, 23% indicated that "nothing" would convince them, highlighting a segment of the population that is particularly difficult to engage.

Among the more actionable responses, the top motivating factors were:
• Improved awareness and communication about library services (19%). This links to the finding that mostly the traditional library services and products are known by the non-users.
• More convenient opening hours, particularly relevant for adults aged 26–65 (15.8%).
• A broader digital offering, such as e-books or online tools (15.1%).

These findings suggest that targeted efforts to raise awareness, increase accessibility through extended hours, and enhance digital services could help attract and re-engage non-users.



What Could Convince Non-Users to (Re)Join the Library

Preferred Visiting Times (% of valid responses)
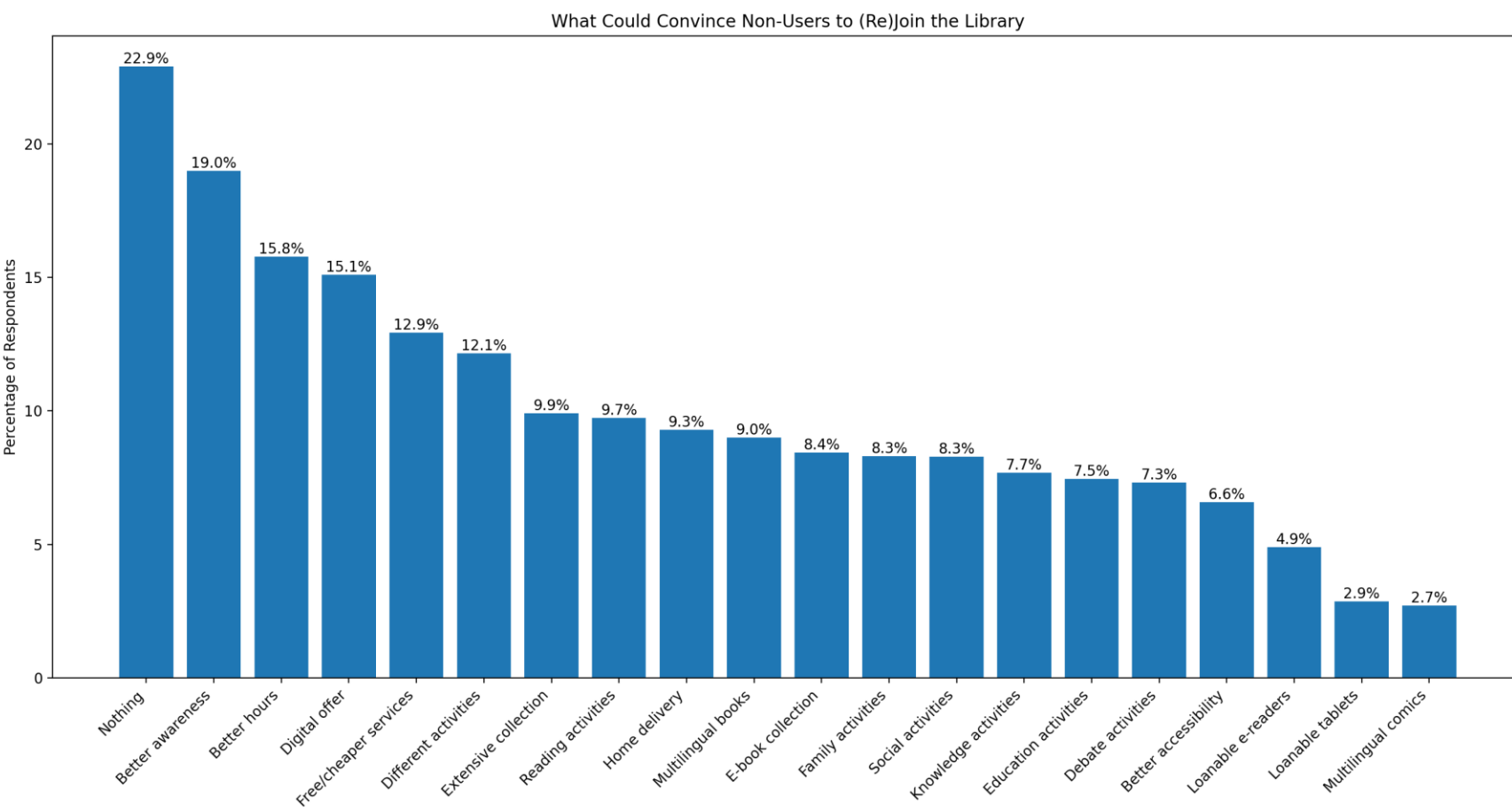
**Preferred visiting times among Non-Users**

As "better opening hours" was indicated by 15.8% of the non-users as something that could convince them to become users, we look deeper into the preferred opening hours of this group.

Non-users show similar preferred visiting times as the actual visiting hours of library users. However, **weekday evenings** are notably more popular among non-users (38.3%) than users (23.8%), likely due to current library opening hours being more limited during that time.

Top Preferred Times:
• Weekday evenings (38.3%)
• Weekend afternoons (32.9%)
• Weekday afternoons (32.8%)

These findings suggest that extending weekday evening hours could help attract more non-users. As local opening hours differ significantly per library, it is important to interprete these results on the local library level.
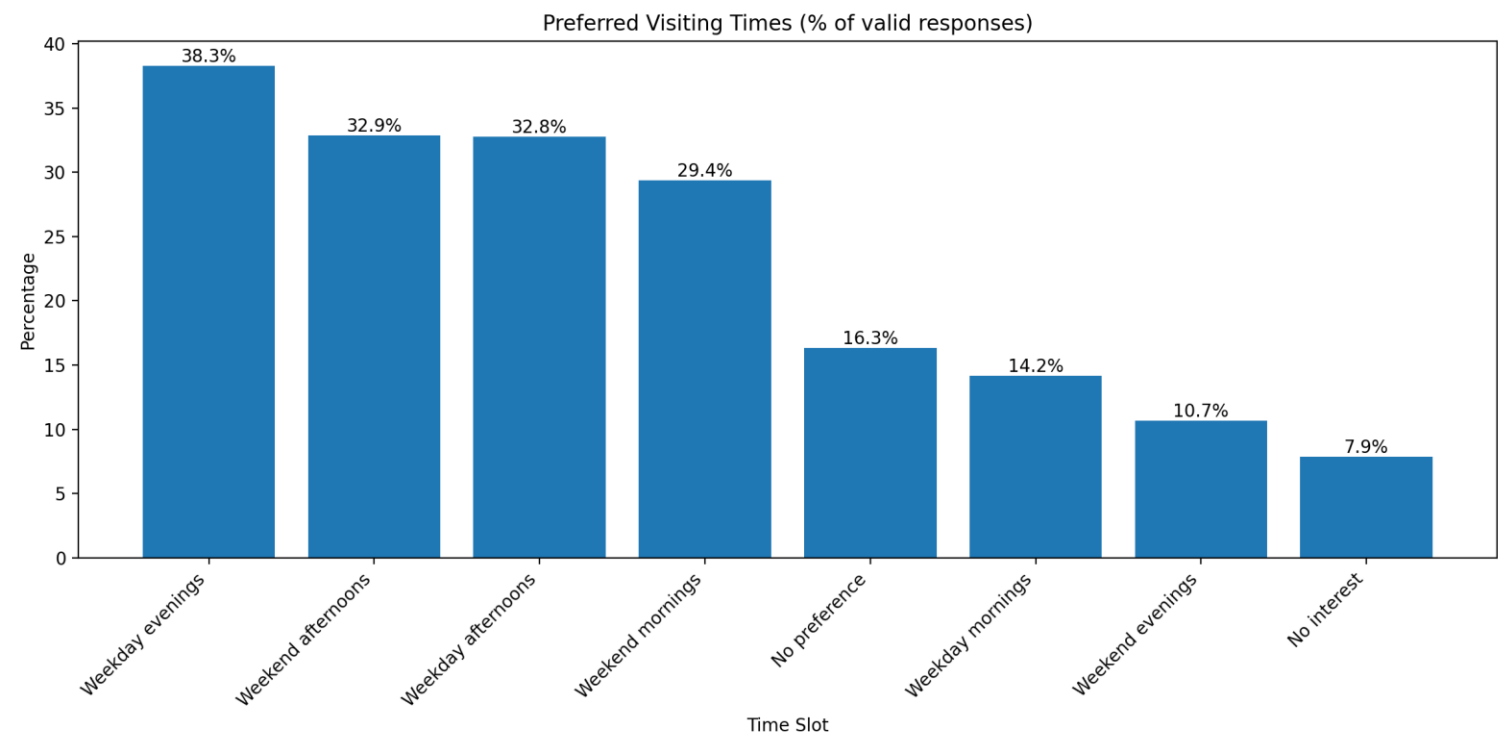
**Demographic differences in preferred visiting times (non-users)**

Visiting time preferences show relevant demographic differences across the non-users. As indicated in the section 'library of the future', the challenge for many libraries is to combine the needs and preferences of different target groups in one building, offer, service package. It is therefore interesting to see which age groups of non-users prefer which specific opening hours. Depending on the local targets to attract non-users of specific groups, adapting opening hours in a targeted way could be an option.

Younger users (<26) prefer weekday evening visits and weekend afternoons, just like the 26-45, probably linked to their working and family lifestyle. Older users (>65) prefer weekday afternoons or weekday mornings.

Preferred Visiting Times by Age Group (% of valid responses)
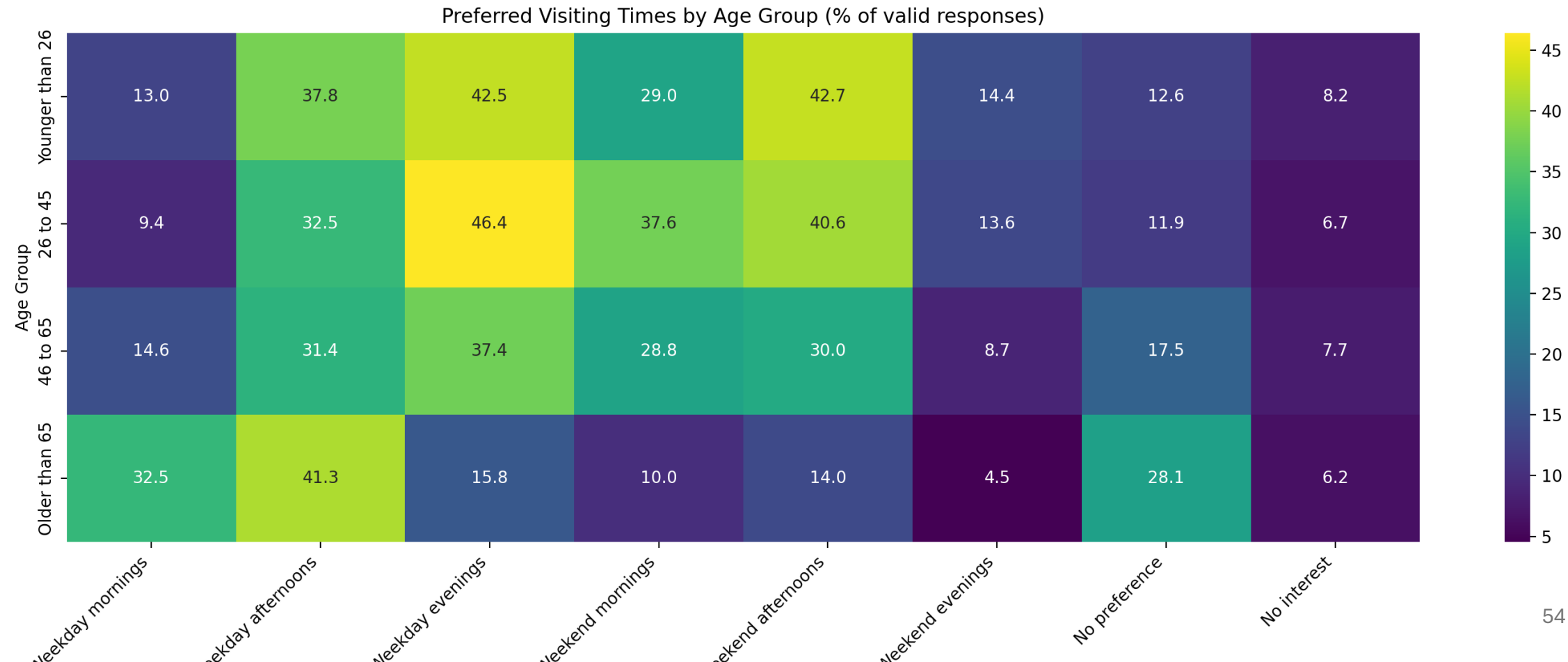
# Perceived value and impact of libraries among non-users

Not using the library personally does not mean people do not value its role and impact on society. To assess this, non-users were asked to respond to a series of statements measuring the **perceived impact of libraries** beyond personal use.

The statements explored perceptions of the library's value:
• **To the individual itself (personal value)**
• **To their immediate environment**
• **To children and youth in general**
• **To broader society**

These responses help reveal how libraries are appreciated by non-users as **public assets with social and educational value**, even if they are not personally used.

- Libraries hold great value for me personally

- Libraries hold great value for my immediate environment (e.g., parents, children, friends)

- Libraries hold great value for children and youth

- Libraries hold great value for the wider society (e.g., other adults, disadvantaged groups, older people, …)

# Perceived value of libraries by non-users

Non-users gave **very positive responses** to all statements assessing the value of libraries. A **clear gradient** emerged: while personal and immediate environment benefits were viewed positively, the impact and value grows as the distance gets bigger, with the **strongest perceived value** attributed to libraries' **societal role**, especially their benefit to **children and youth**.
• Agreement increases from **personal** to **societal** value.
• Negative responses were consistently low across all items.
These findings suggest that even among non-users, libraries are broadly appreciated, particularly for their **social and educational role in the community**.



Distribution of Responses for Library Value Statements
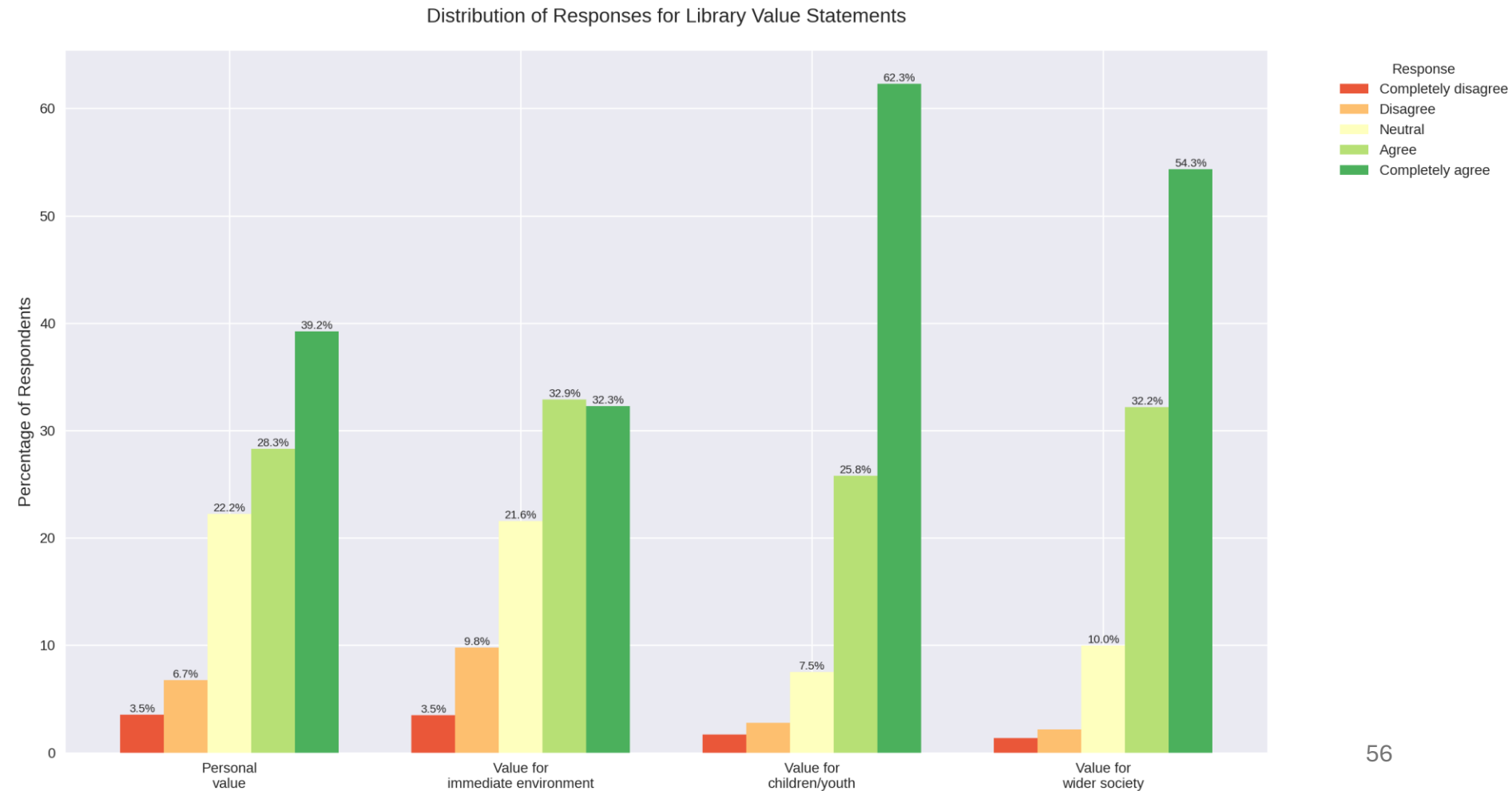
# Impact of the library for non-users (bis)

**How do libraries impact society? (non-user perception)**

A second set of statements asked non-users to evaluate the way that library's bring value to broader society. The focus was on four key contributions:

*"Libraries have great value in...*
* *Spreading knowledge and information*
* *Supporting personal development*
* *Improving language skills*
* *Providing a place for meeting and debate"*

Responses confirm that also non-users recognize libraries as important institutions that **promote knowledge, support growth, enhance language skills**, and **foster community dialogue**.

**How do libraries impact society? (non-user perception)**

The data reveals a clear hierarchy in how non-users perceive different aspects of library value:
• **Spreading knowledge and information** ranks highest (average score: 4.41).
• **Supporting personal development** and **improving language skills** are equally valued (both 4.30).
• **Providing a space for meeting and debate** is seen as valuable but ranks notably lower (3.74).

This suggests that non-users primarily view libraries as places for learning and personal growth, with a secondary role as community hubs. This confirms the findings in the Impact Compass Model amongst the library users, indicating that the library as a meeting place has potential for growth in the future.

Overall Mean Scores for Library Value Statements
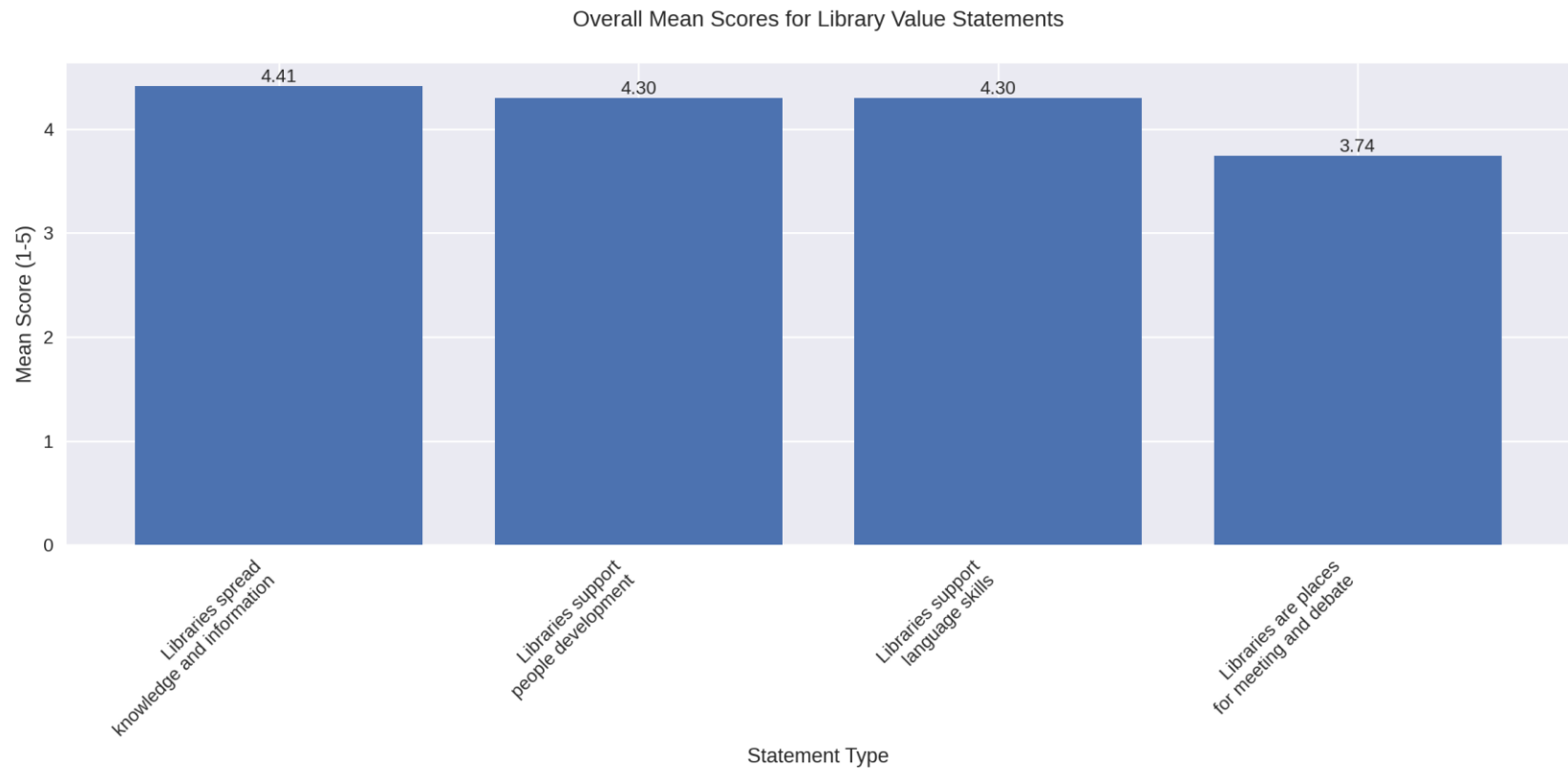
# 7. Activities

# Participation in Library Activities Beyond Borrowing

Beyond lending services, libraries offer a wide range of activities such as reading clubs, workshops for children, concerts, and more. The Sentobib study examined users' awareness, participation, and satisfaction with these activities.

Each library could list its own local activities, to have a concrete evaluation on the local level. As activities are very different, making global comparisons is difficult. However, the study shows that, overall, **42.6%** of adult users at libraries offering activities **participated in at least one**.

There are important differences at the local level: some libraries offer a wide variety of activities, while others offer only a few. Therefore, local comparisons in individual library reports are crucial for interpreting participation rates. Activities for children were investigated separately, and reported in the individual library report.

Participation rates in library activities vary significantly by age. The older the users, the higher their participation, peaking at **52.8% among those aged 65 and older**.

As the local activity offer is always unique, it is highly recommended to **analyze these results locally** using the individual Sentobib report for your library, keeping in mind the specific activities offered in each case and the respective target groups of each activity. The dynamic dashboard of Sentobib allows you to filter all results on activity participation of specific activities, giving full insights in the participating users of that specific activity.



Overall Activity Participation Rate



Activity Participation Rate by Agegroup
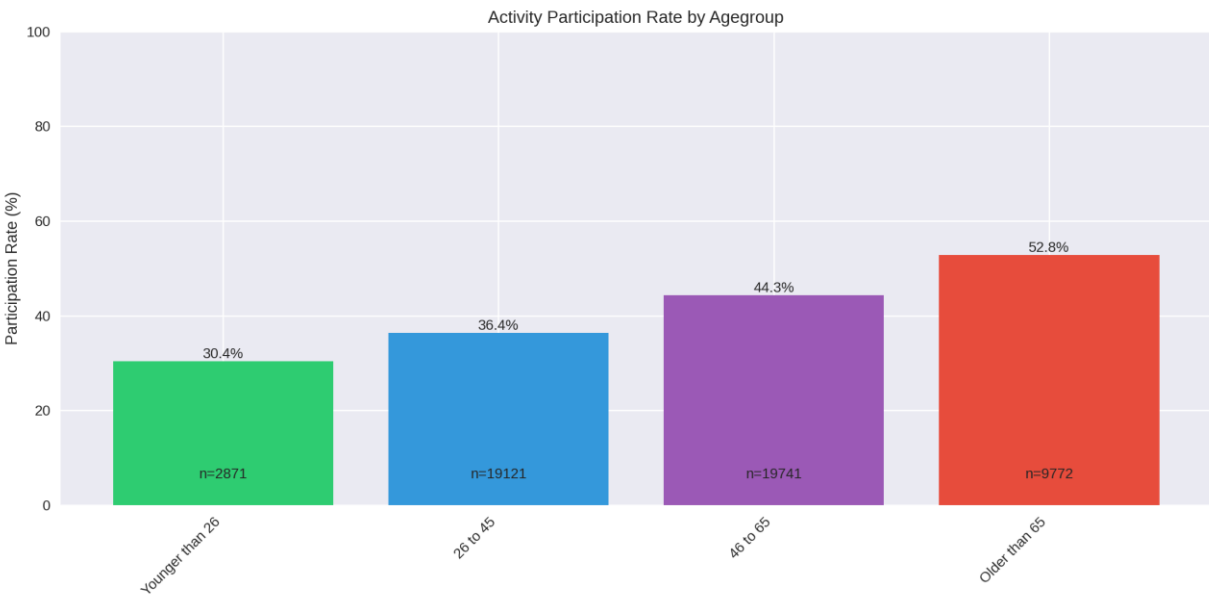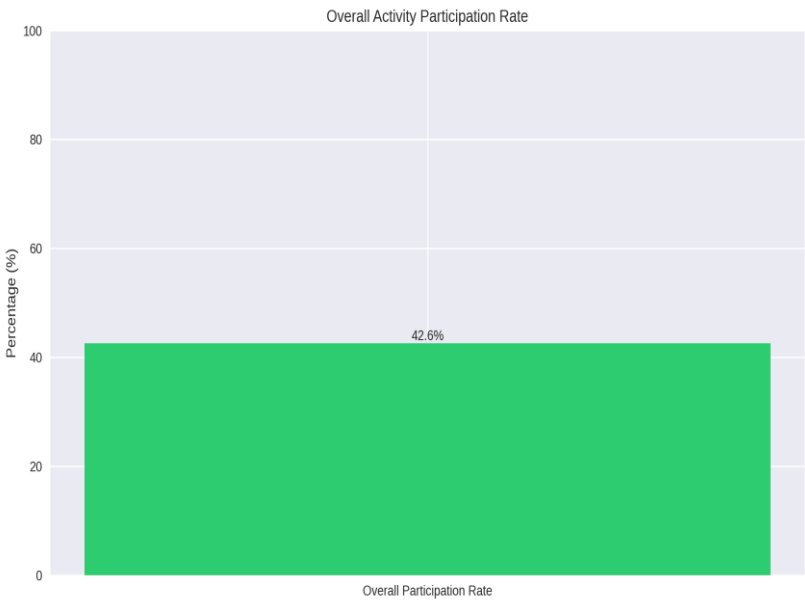
**Reasons for not participating in activities**

Respondents who did not participate in activities were asked "why". The **top reason** was a **lack of time** (40.4%). Other common reasons include the perception that the library is **only for borrowing materials** (28.2%) and that **activity schedules don't fit** users' availability (26.4%). Additionally, **11.6%** of non-participants said they were **unaware of the activities** offered.

These insights offer useful direction for libraries aiming to increase participation, such as adjusting **activity timing**, offering **shorter formats**, or improving **communication** about the available programs.



Overall Reasons for Not Attending Activities (Excluding Italy)



Reasons by Age Group
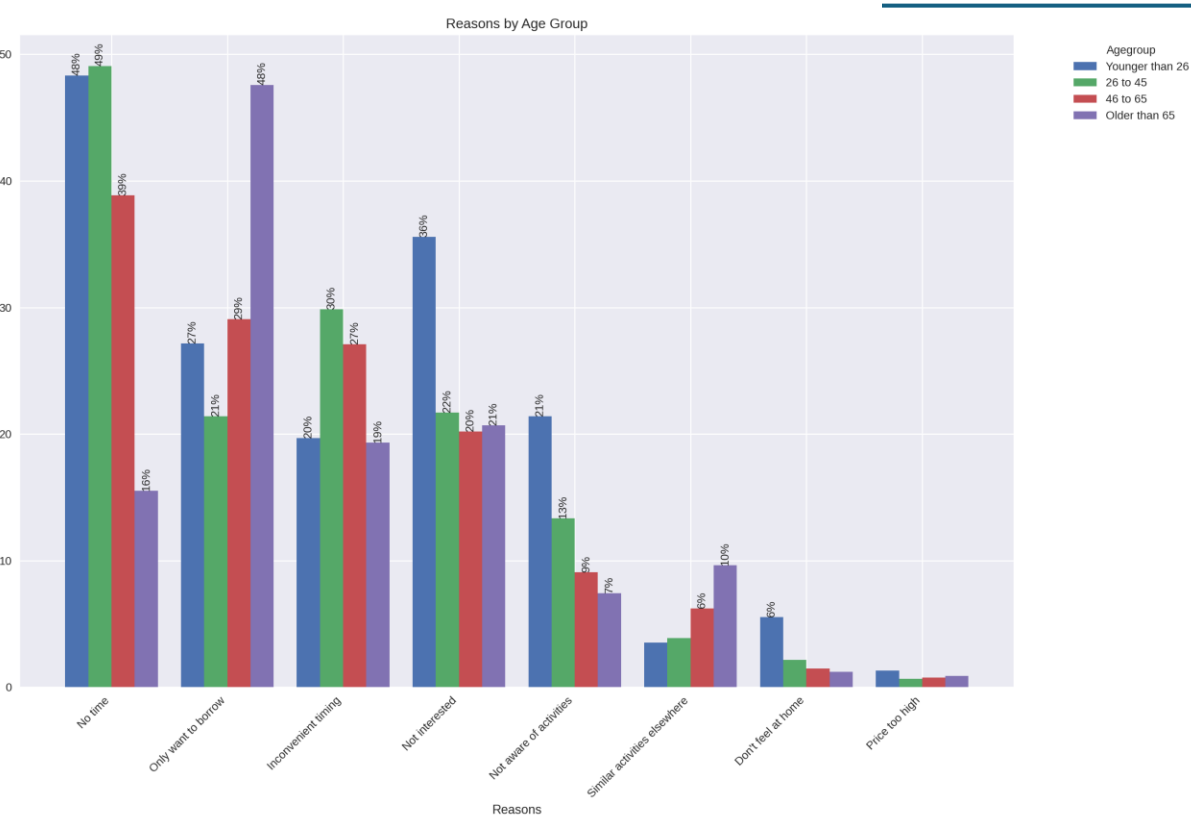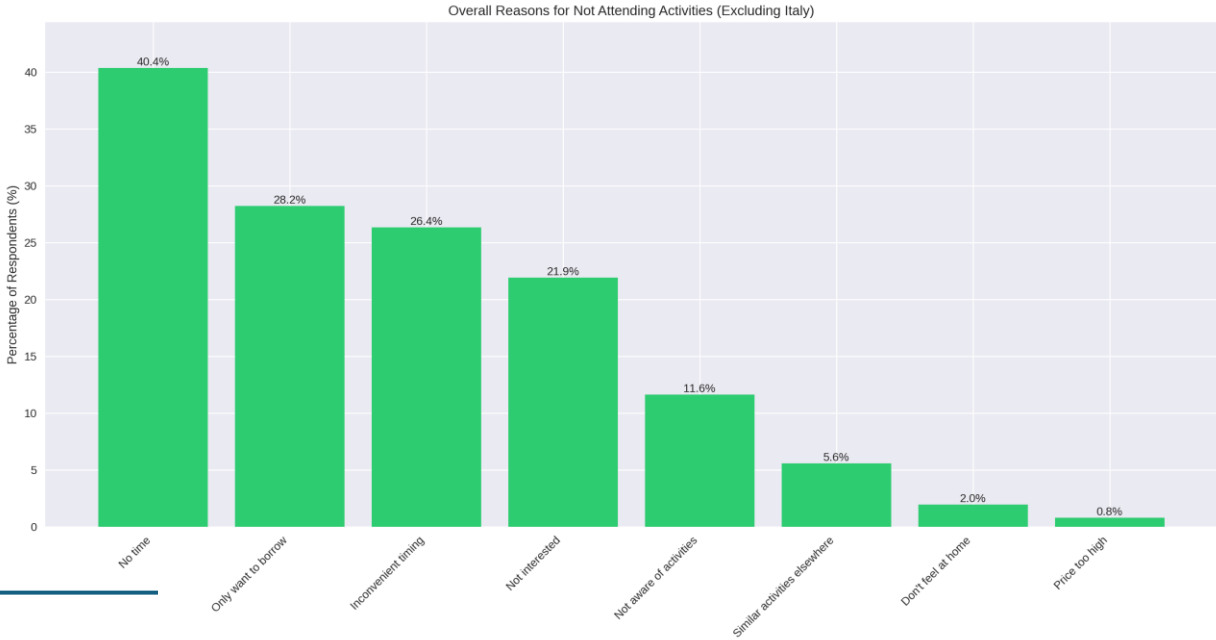
**Age-based differences in reasons for non-participation**

Age plays a clear role in explaining why users do not take part in adult activities. **Younger users** most often cite a **lack of time** and **lack of interest**. Older users are more likely to view the library as a place only for borrowing.

The **strongest age-related difference** appears for the reason **"No time"**, which is especially prevalent among younger respondents.

These findings suggest that motivations and barriers differ by life stage, and that targeted communication and scheduling may help broaden participation.

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# 8. E-books

# Libraries without e-books

**Interest in E-Books Among Users of Libraries Without E-Book Services**

Many libraries offer e-books today, many not (yet). Depending on the availability of e-books, the Sentobib survey proposed adapted questions about this topic.

Among respondents from libraries that do currently not (yet) offer e-books, we asked if the library users would be interested in this offer. We notice that interest is **evenly divided**:
• **"Maybe"** leads slightly with **36.2%**
• **"Yes"** and **"No"** are tied at **31.9%** each

These results suggest **uncertainty** or **mixed expectations** around e-books in these libraries, highlighting the potential benefit of further exploration or pilot initiatives. Looking at the topic with a positive view, one could argue that 32% is interested and 36% is potentially interested, leading to a potential usage of e-books by 68% of users.



Interest in E-books Distribution

## Interest in E-books by Library Type
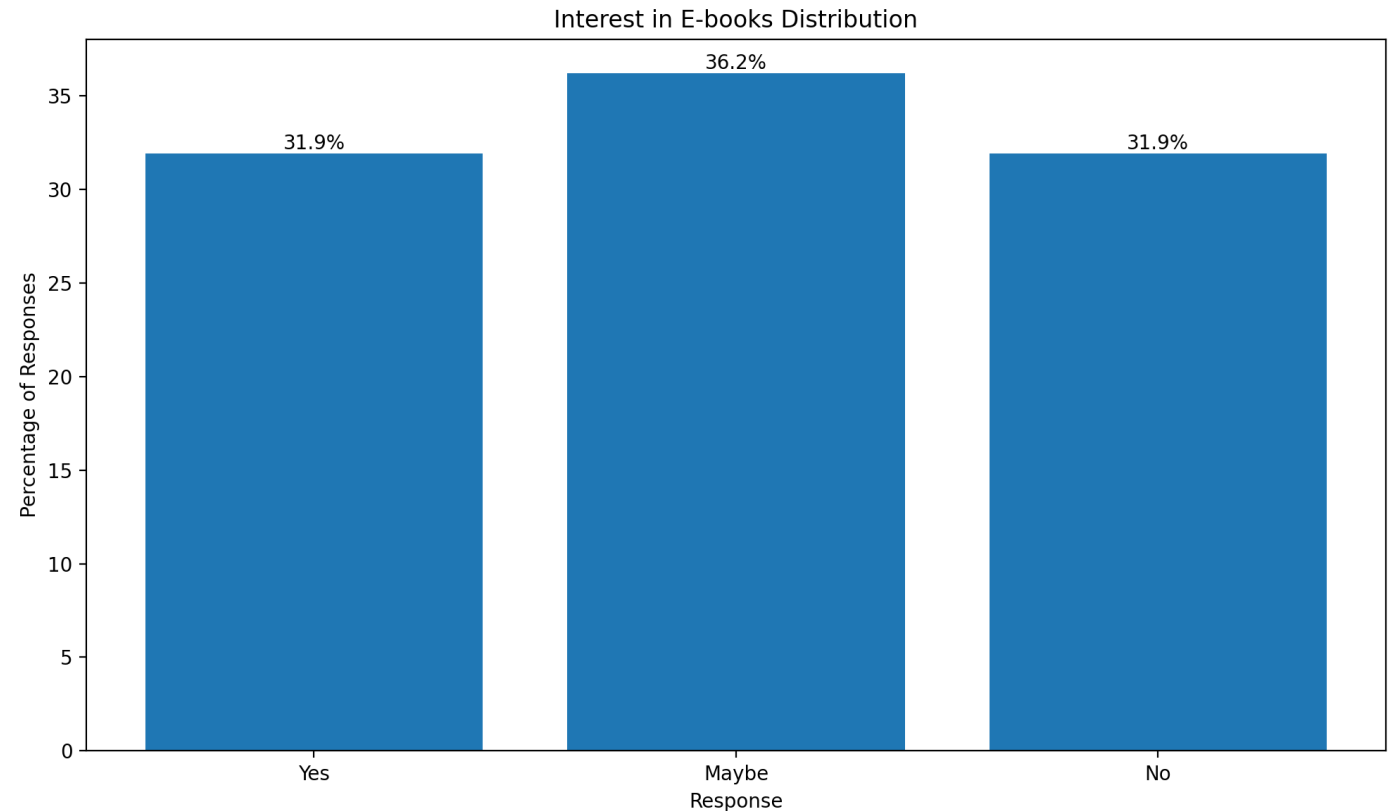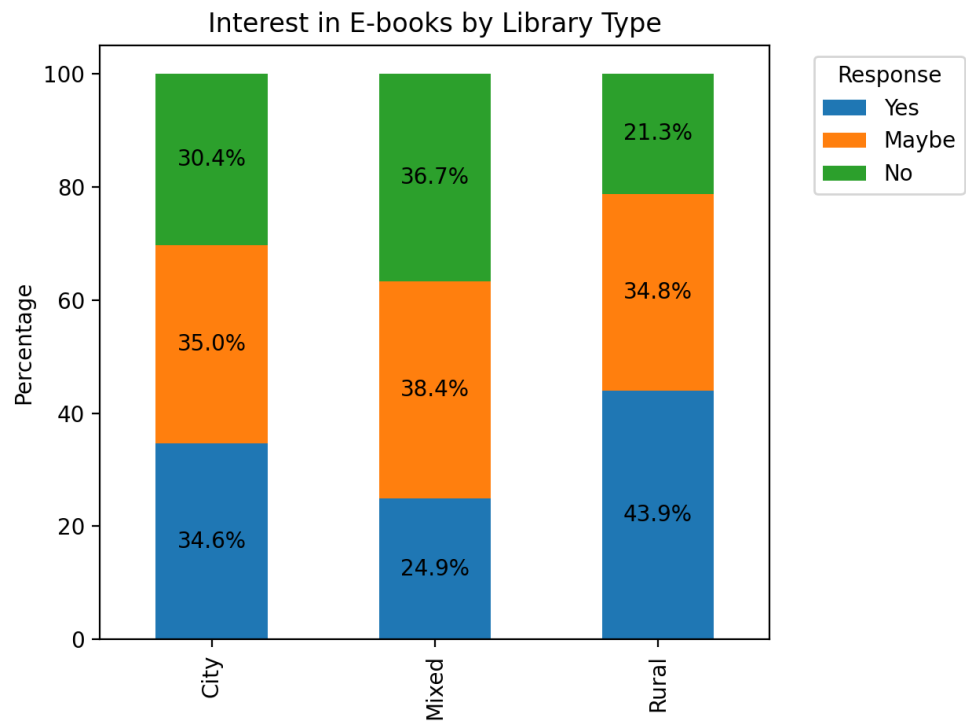


**Interest in e-books by library type**

Are there differences in city areas compared to rural areas? While the differences are statistically significant, we see that the effects are not clear in meaning. **Rural library users** show the highest interest in e-books, with 43.9% responding "Yes", **mixed areas** show the lowest interest (**24.9% "Yes"**) and city areas show a **balanced distribution** across response options.

This suggests that e-book demand may be slightly higher in **rural areas**, possibly due to more limited physical access to library collections.

**Interest in E-Books by migration background**

The analysis reveals statistically significant differences in e-book interest by migration background, though with rather low effect sizes. **First-generation newcomers** express the highest interest, with 40.6% responding "Yes". **Native respondents** are more hesitant, with the highest share of **"No"** responses (33.3%), while **second-generation newcomers** show a more **balanced distribution** across answer options.
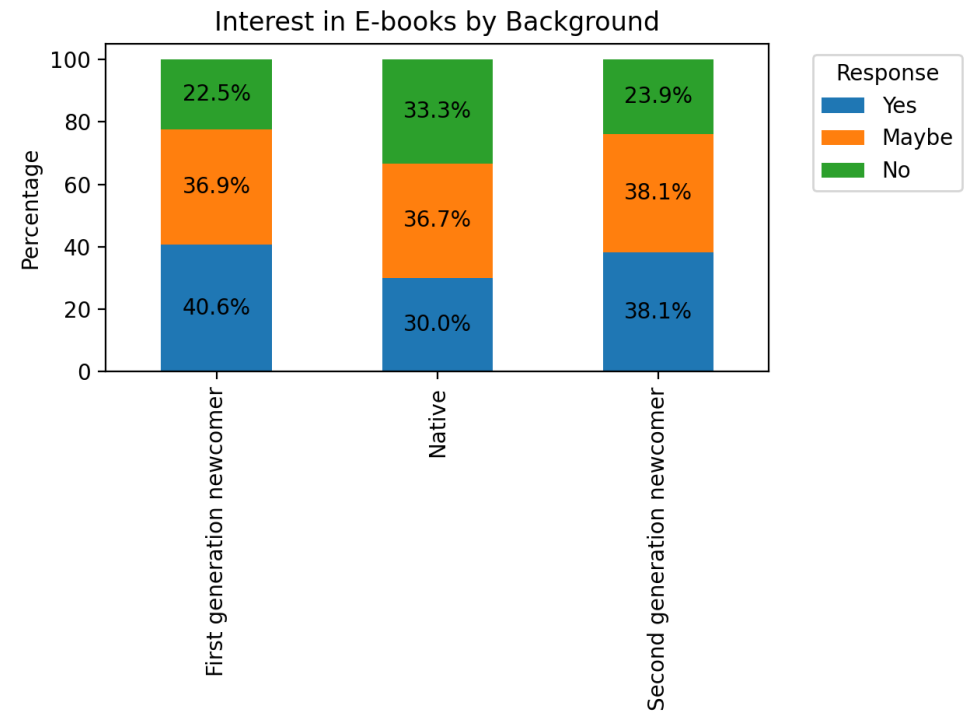
**Interest in e-books by age group**

Looking at the different age groups, the ordered data show a clear age-related trend in interest for e-books:

• **Younger than 26**: Highest positive response (78.4% combined), with 39.8% "Yes" and the lowest rejection rate (21.7% "No").
• **26 to 45**: Strong positive response (70.7% combined) and a moderate rejection rate (29.3% "No").
• **46 to 65**: Moderate positive response (66.2% combined) with a higher rejection rate (33.8% "No").
• **Older than 65**: Lowest positive response (58.2% combined), with the highest rejection rate (41.8% "No").

We thus see clear trends emerge:
• "Yes" responses decrease steadily with age (from 39.8% to 20.9%).
• "No" responses increase steadily with age (from 21.7% to 41.8%).
• "Maybe" responses remain relatively stable across all age groups.

This indicates that interest in e-books is highest among younger users and declines progressively with age. This could make e-books "an offer of the future", as we could expect that the adaptation of e-books by younger groups will not drop as they grow older.



Interest in E-books by Age Group (Youngest to Oldest)
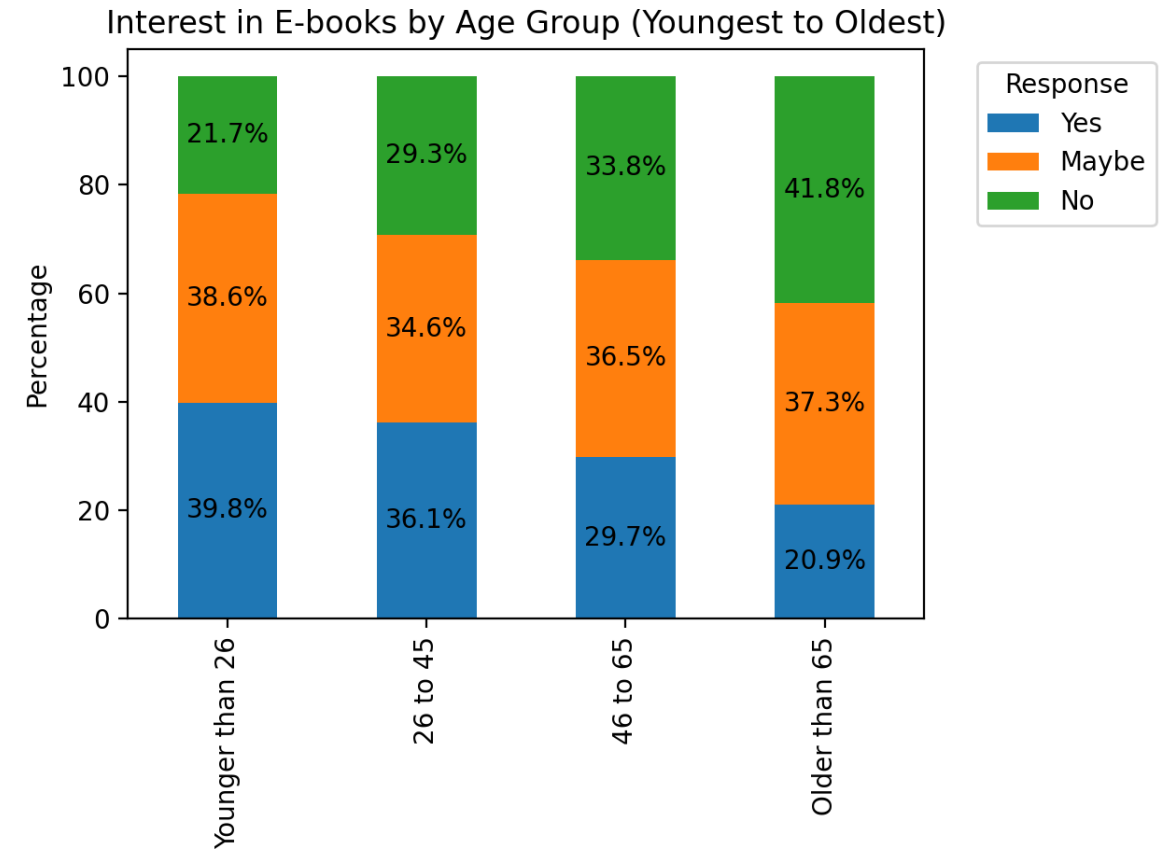
# Libraries with e-books

**E-Book Usage in Libraries Offering E-Books**

Many libraries offer e-books today. Depending on the availability of e-books, the Sentobib survey proposed adapted questions about this topic. Among respondents from libraries that do offer e-books, we asked if the library users make use of this offer.

Among the respondents of libraries with e-books, we notice that:
• **31.5%** are **current users** of the e-book services
• **31.9%** are **interested but not yet using** the service
• **36.5%** report **no interest** in using e-books

These results show a balanced split between active users, potential users, and those not interested, suggesting room for further growth through targeted promotion and support. The high adoption of this offer by users, could convince libraries without e-books to consider offering this service in the future.



Overall Distribution of E-book Usage/Interest
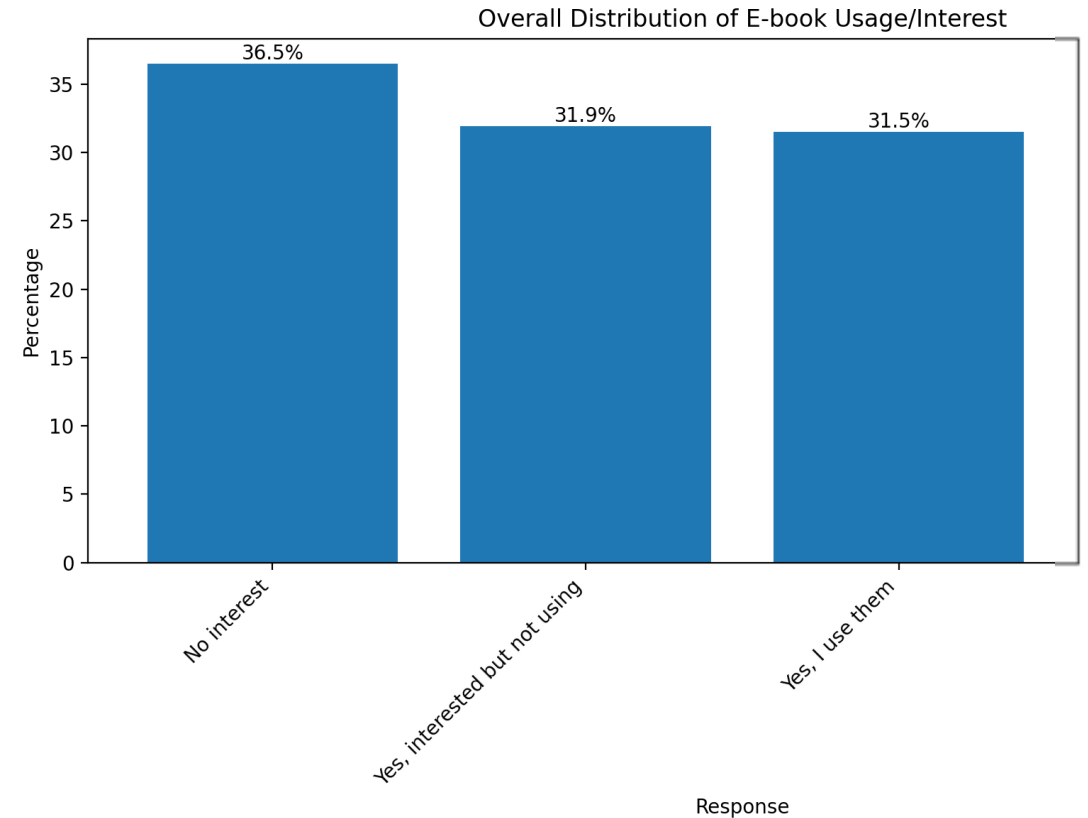
## E-book Usage/Interest by Library Type
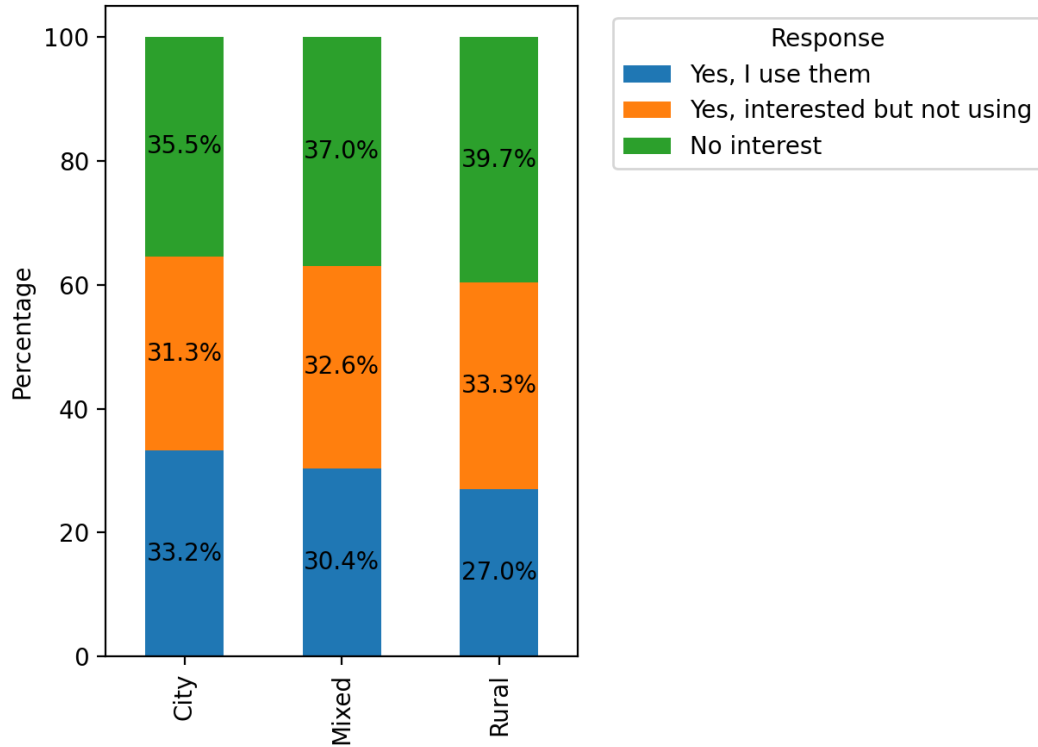


**E-Book usage by library type:**

Among libraries that offer e-books, a **clear urban–rural divide** is observed in the usage of e-books: **city** libraries report the highest usage (33.2% using, 31.3% interested), **mixed** areas show moderate usage (30.4% using, 32.6% interested) and rural areas have the lowest usage (27.0% using), though interest remains high (33.3%). This seems contradictory to the interest in e-books by users of libraries without e-books: we noticed there that rural users seemed more interested in e-books.

These differences are **statistically significant**, though the effect size is **weak**, suggesting other factors may also play a role in adoption.

**E-Book usage by age group:**

Age-related patterns in e-book usage show a more complex distribution: ages **46–65** have the highest current usage (36.1%), users **under 26** show the highest combined potential (66.2% using or interested). Users over 65 show the highest resistance, with 43.9% not interested.

In libraries without e-books we noticed the highest potential interest in e-books by the youngest group. This gets confirmed by the combined potential explained above, but shows that extra efforts could be interesting to get the youngest group starting to use e-books.

## E-book Usage/Interest by Age Group
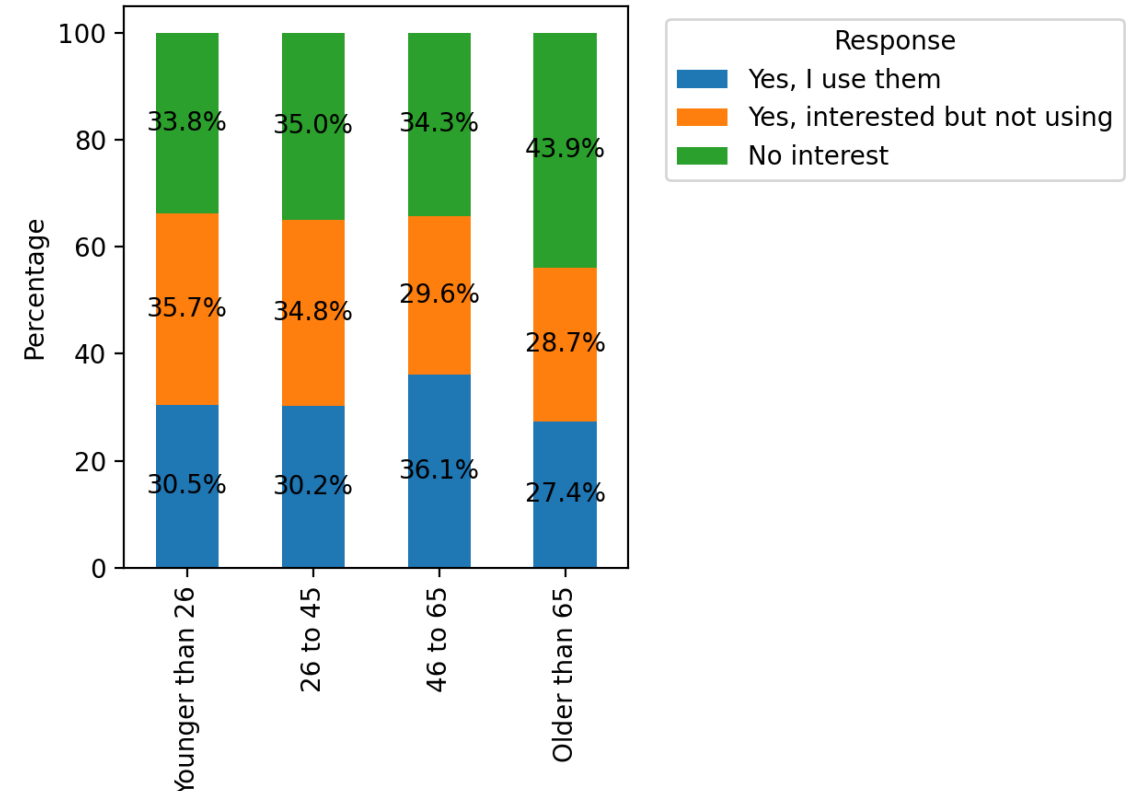
## Reasons for lack of interest in e-books

Among respondents that indicated not to be interested in e-books, the main reasons why that is, are a strong preference for **physical books** (87.2%) and a lack of available **devices** (38.3%).

Other reasons are minor, each cited by fewer than 6% of respondents. This shows that attachment to physical books remains the dominant barrier, far outweighing technical or access issues.



Reasons for Not Being Interested in E-books
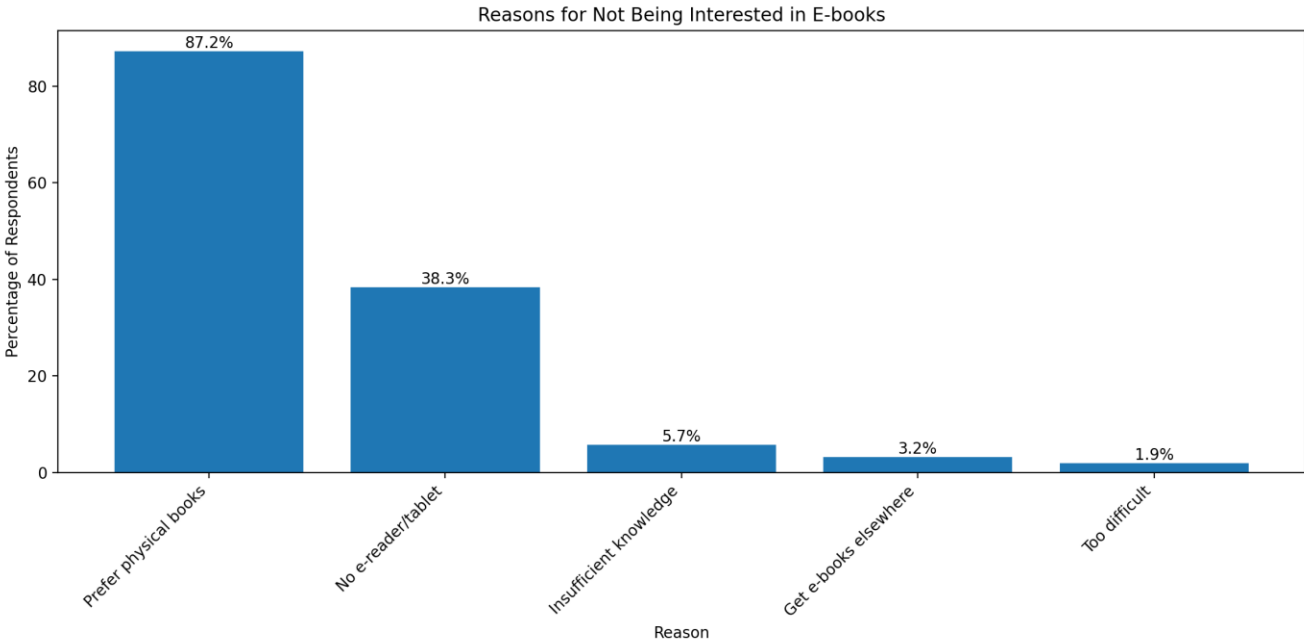
## Reasons by age group

Looking at potential differences for non-interest among different age groups, the analysis reveals clear and statistically relevant age-related trends. **Physical book preference** increases with age, from **81.4%** (<26) to **91.0%** (>65). A d**evice availability issue** peak among users aged 26–45 (46.1%), and are lowest among those over 65 (31.0%)

**Use of alternative sources** (e.g., free online content) is most common among the youngest (6.5%) and declines with age. K**nowledge gaps** (lack of awareness about e-books) are also most prevalent among young adults, decreasing steadily with age.



Reasons for Not Being Interested in E-books by Age Group

68
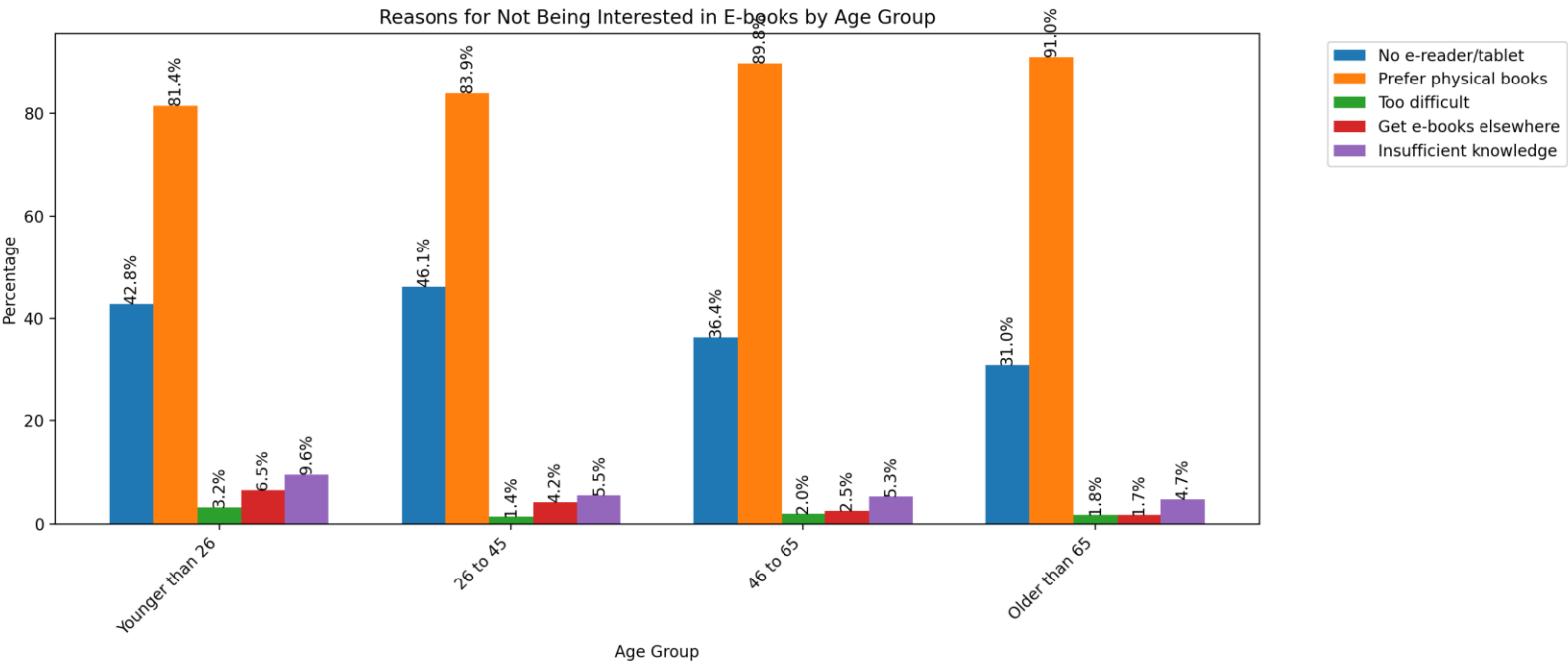
# 9. Communication

**Preferred Communication Channels**

Communication towards users is a recurring topic in this report, showing the impact of good awareness of libraries and their services among users and non-users.

The survey asked users how they would prefer to receive information from their library. The results offer useful insights for evaluating the (local) communication strategies and channels. **Email and newsletters** are the most preferred channel (60.4%), followed by the **library website** (53.7%). **Social media** ranks third (22.2%).

Other channels, such as flyers or posters (15.3%) and blogs (1.0%), are less commonly preferred.

These findings confirm a **clear preference for digital communication**, with email and the library website emerging as the most effective tools for reaching users.
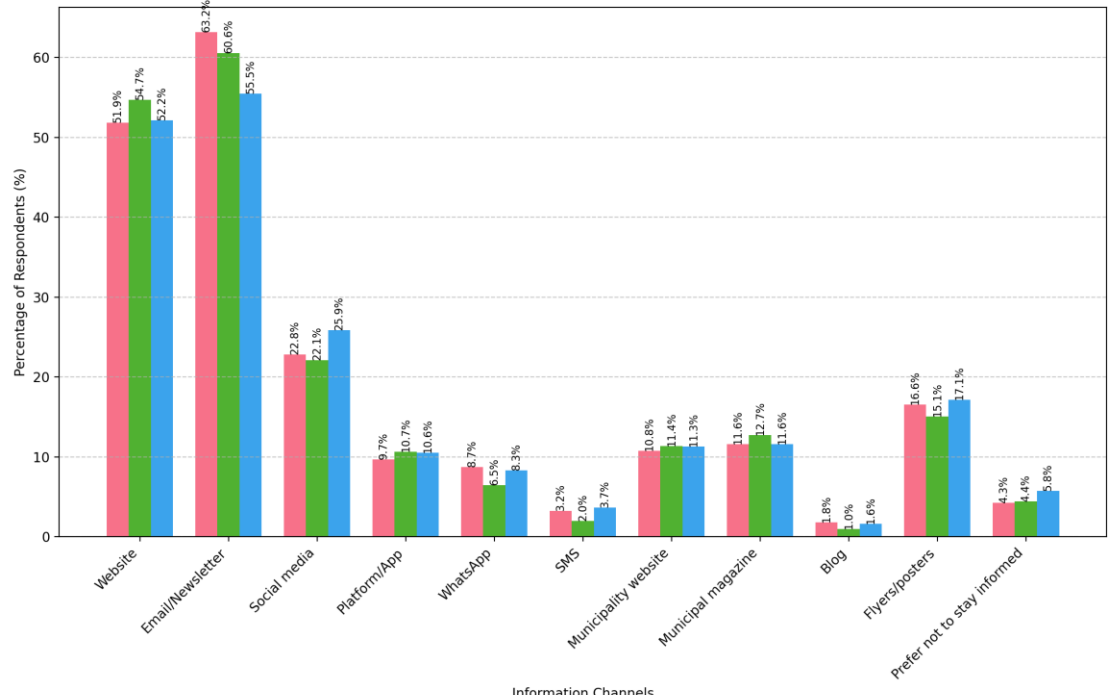
Overall Communication Channel Preferences (n=88,761)
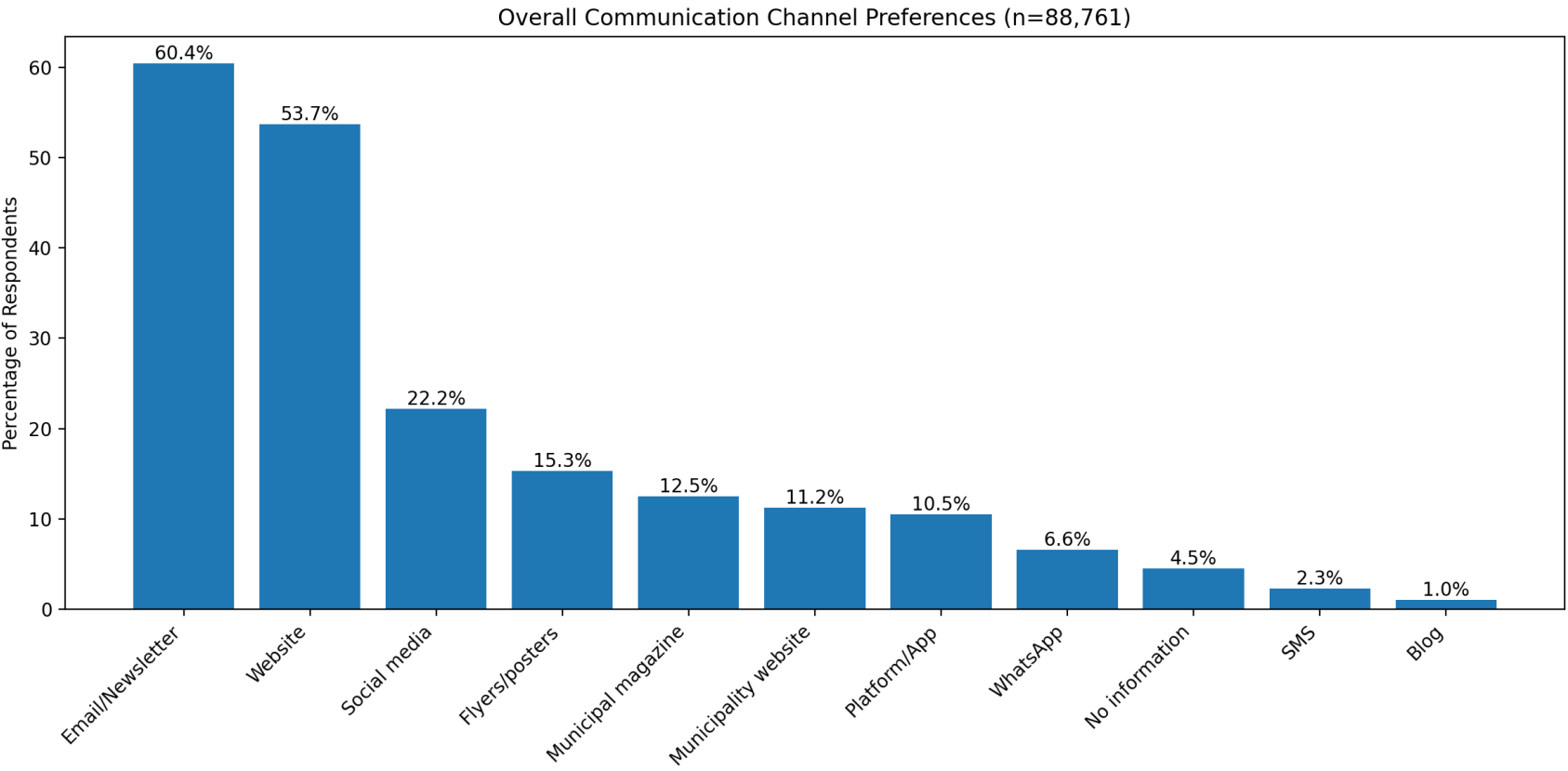
## Preferred communication channels by age group

The data reveals distinct age-related patterns in communication preferences:
- **Social media** usage declines significantly with age, dropping from approximately 40% among the youngest users to just 5% among the oldest.
- **Email and newsletters** become increasingly preferred with age, rising from around 39% among those under 26 to about 72% in the 65+ group.
- The **library website** is consistently valued across all age groups, showing relatively stable usage regardless of age.



Preferred Information Channels by Age Group
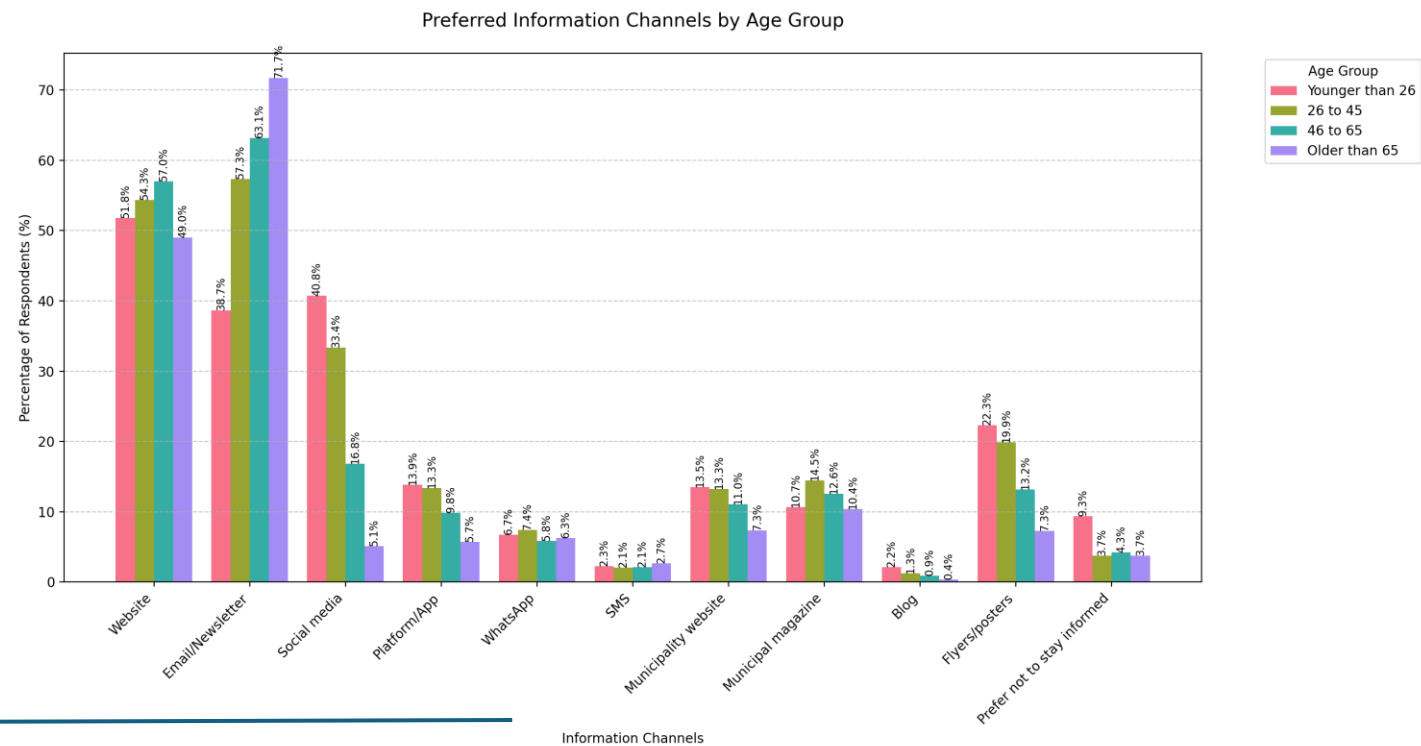


Preferred Information Channels by Background

## Preferred Communication Channels by Background

Across all background groups, email and newsletters are the most preferred communication channels, followed by social media. The similarity in preferences suggests that a **differentiated communication strategy by background is not necessary**.

A consistent digital approach, centered on email and supported by social media, appears effective for reaching all user groups.

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# 10. Profile of respondents

# Respondent sample

The respondents included in this report were reached through the participating libraries themselves, using their own communication channels, such as newsletters, websites, social media, and other local outreach methods. It is important to note that this study does not aim to make statements about the general population, nor does it provide a fully representative picture of "the average library user" at the national or European level. Instead, the focus is on deriving relevant insights from the people who were reached through these communication efforts. For that reason, the analysis focuses on differences between subgroups (e.g., by age, background, gender, or usage patterns), rather than general population-level conclusions. More explanation can be found in the section "methodology" in the introduction chapter of this report.

At the local level, it is important for libraries to interpret their results in light of the demographic profile of their respondents. Comparing the reached sample with known demographic data of members and visitors helps assess where certain groups may be underrepresented and to keep that in mind when interpreting local results. Benchmarking (e.g., comparison with similar libraries, national, or European results) is based on the same sampling methodology, ensuring that local results can be meaningfully compared to those of other libraries.

## Language Proficiency of Respondents

Respondents were asked to self-assess their proficiency in the language of the survey (multiple languages were available, upon the choice of the local library). Those who indicated limited proficiency were shown a shortened version of the questionnaire with adapted questions.

- **Very well**: 93.7%
- **Well**: 4.8%
- **Sufficiently**: 0.8%
- **Not well at all**: 0.4%
- **Not well**: 0.3%

These results confirm that the vast majority of respondents had **high language proficiency**, while a small percentage received an adjusted survey tailored to their language level.



Understanding of Language Distribution (%)

73
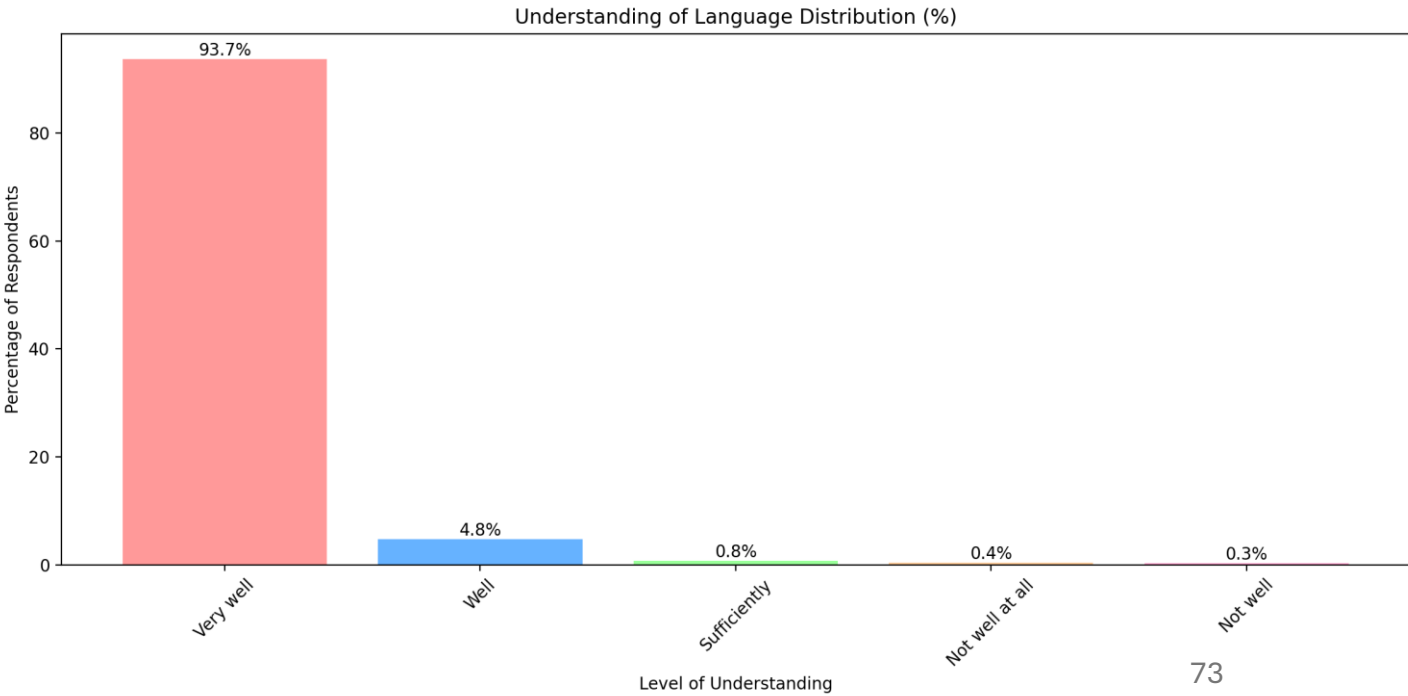
The survey includes a relatively higher proportion of **female respondents**. While this partly reflects actual library usage trends, it also partially reflects a typical **response bias**, where women are generally more likely to participate in surveys.

**Educational Profile of Respondents**

The survey sample shows a **relatively high proportion of respondents with a higher level of education**. Also this partially reflects broader societal trends in library usage, but also corresponds to a typical survey effect, where individuals with higher educational attainment are generally more likely to participate in studies.

It is important to note that the aim of this study is not to define the average educational profile of European library users. Since the research is built from the ground up, based on the participants reached through participating libraries, we report on the characteristics of the people actually reached, not on the general population.

Nonetheless, the dataset includes sufficient representation across all education levels to support meaningful comparisons between groups in the analytical sections of the report.



Distribution of Respondents by Gender (%)



Distribution of Respondents by Education Level (%)
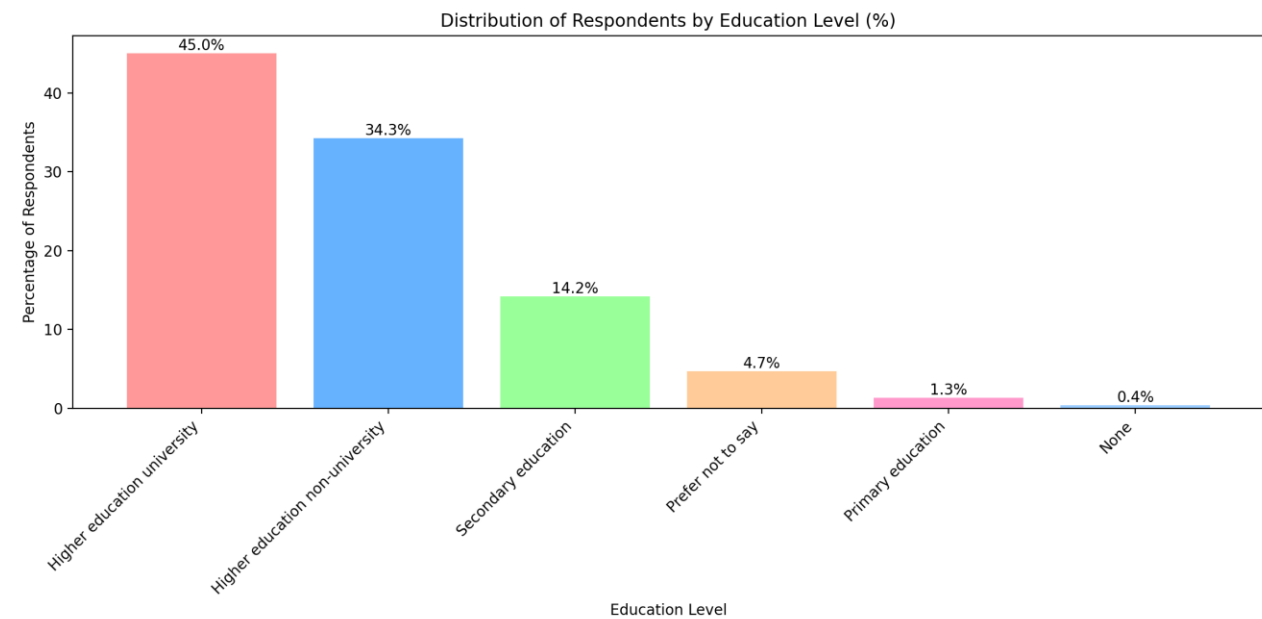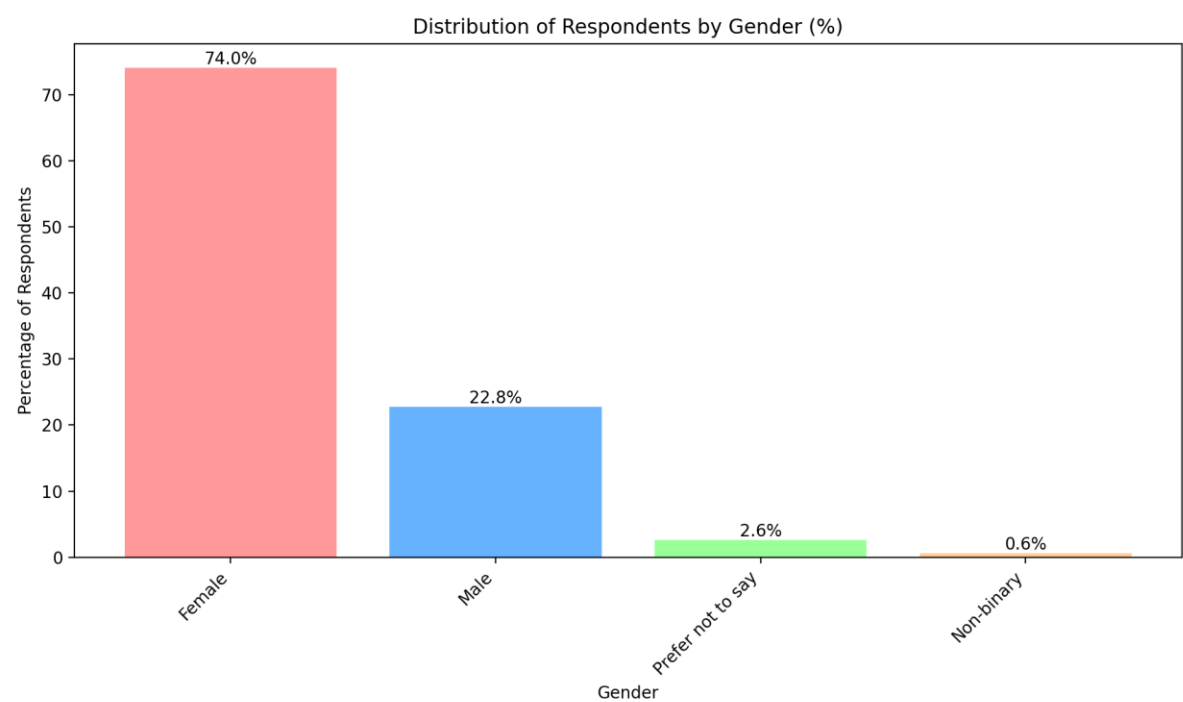
**Migration Background of Respondents**

Among all respondents, **86.6% are native**, meaning they were born in the country of the library and have at least one parent who was also born there. In addition, **4.2% are second-generation newcomers** (born in the country, with both parents born abroad), and **9.2% are first-generation newcomers** (not born in the country of the library).

These proportions enable meaningful analysis of differences in library experiences and perceptions across origin groups.



Distribution of Background by Percentage



Age Distribution of Respondents
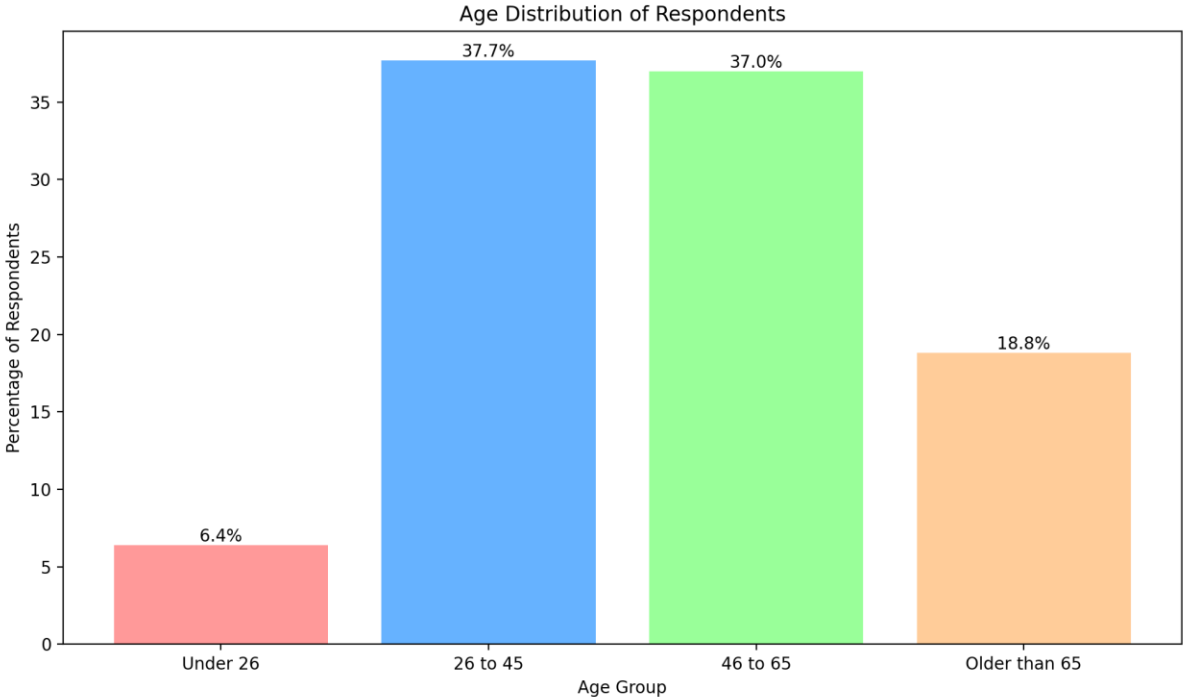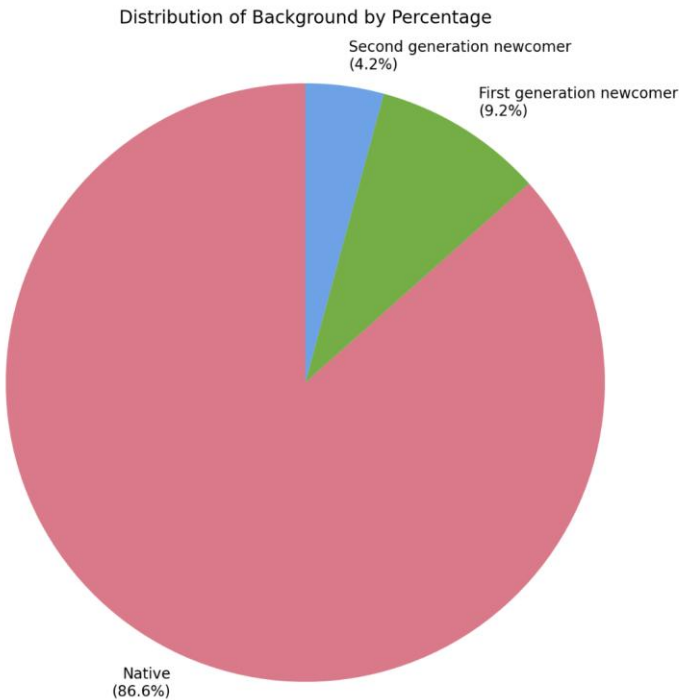
**Age Representation in the sample**

The survey reached a broad range of age groups, allowing for meaningful comparisons across generations. The group **under 26 is less represented**, which is expected given that the survey focused primarily on **adult users**. Nevertheless, there are sufficient respondents in each group to support reliable age-related analysis.

## Living location by library type

The survey asked library users if they live in the city or community of the library that they visit, in an adjacent city (so a city laying next to the city of the library), elsewhere in the country or abroad.

The vast majority (75.0%) of library users lives in the city of that specific library, which seems logical in a library landscape that is represented in almost every city or community. Relevant differences are noted though. **City libraries** attract the most "local" users and the smallest portion of "adjacent city" users. On the other hand, they have the biggest number of visitors from "elsewhere in the country", which seems logical as cities attract people of more distant places than smaller communities do. **Rural areas** attract most users from adjacent cities (or communities), which seems to be in light of the less dense library availability in rural areas. **Mixed areas** find the balance between city and rural areas.


Where People Live by Library Type
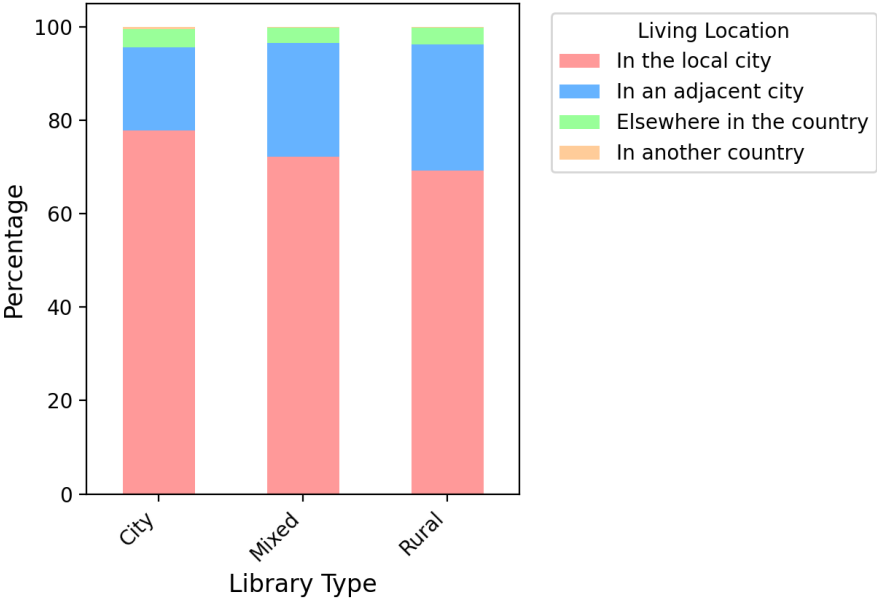

Age Distribution by Library Type
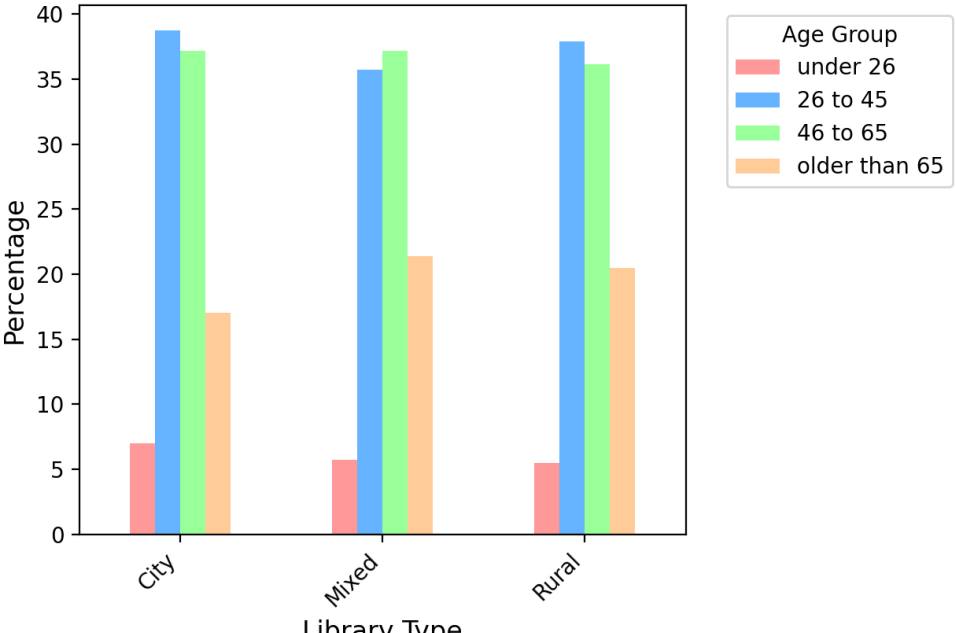
## Age Profile by Library Type

Statistically significant, though modest, differences in age distribution were observed across library types. **City** libraries attract the highest share of users under 26 (7.0%) and a concentration of working-age adults (38.8% aged 26–45), with the lowest proportion of users over 65 (17.1%).
**Mixed libraries** have the most balanced age distribution, including the highest proportion of older users (21.4%).
**Rural libraries** show the lowest youth participation (5.5%) but strong representation of both mid-life (37.9%) and pre-retirement (36.2%) age groups.

These patterns reflect setting-based variation in user demographics, with urban libraries appealing more to younger and working-age users, while mixed and rural libraries engage more older adults.

## Library type and migration background

In terms of background, 86.6% of respondents are considered native, meaning they were born in the country where the library is located, and at least one parent was also born there (see above in this report). However, the study also successfully reached a significant number of **first- and second-generation newcomers.** Thanks to the size of these groups, the analysis allows for meaningful **comparisons between origin groups**, offering insights into how their **needs, preferences, and perceptions** differ from those of native respondents.

City libraries show, not surprisingly, the highest proportion of respondents born outside of the country of that library. Rural libraries show the lowest proportion. Most of the respondents born abroad, are born in Europe.



Place of Birth Distribution by Library Type
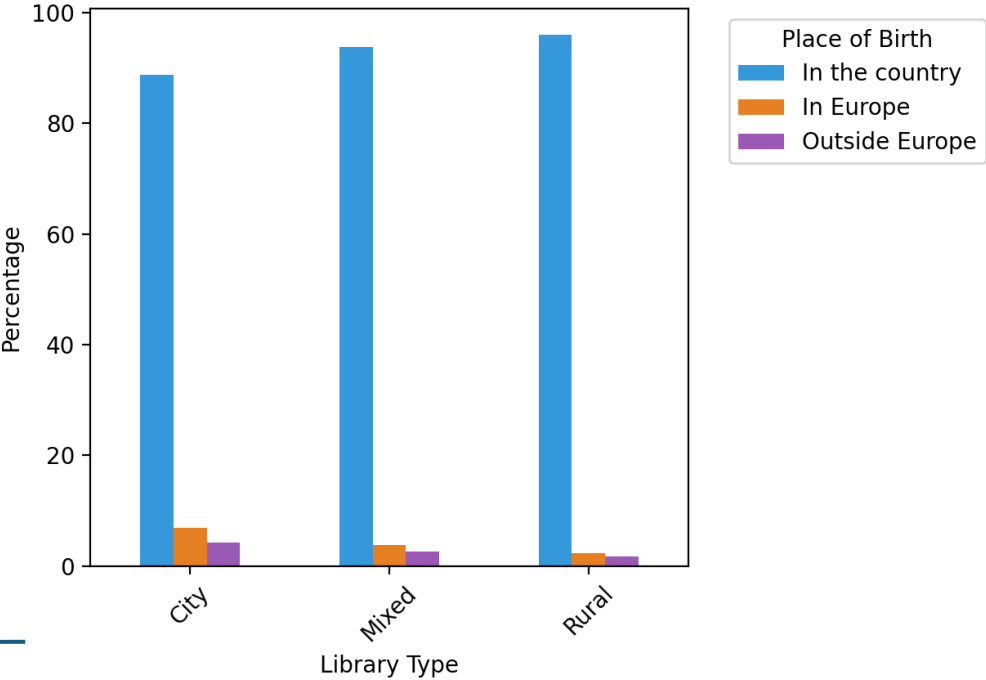


Gender Distribution by Library Type
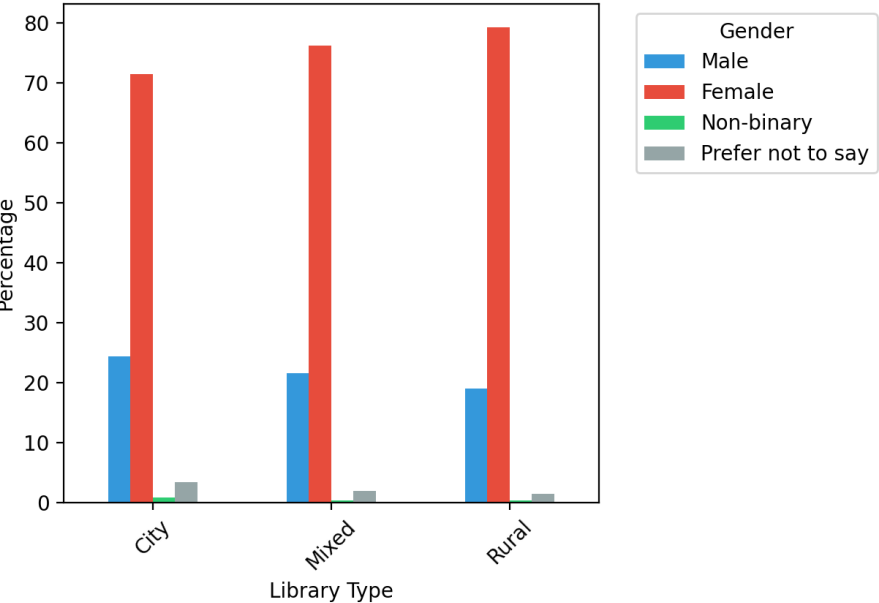
## Gender distribution by library type

The data reveals a statistically significant urban–rural gradient in respondent gender diversity across library types.

**City libraries** show the most balanced gender distribution, with the highest proportion of male users (24.3%) and non-binary respondents (0.7%). **Mixed libraries** reflect an intermediate profile, with 21.6% male, 76.2% female and 0.3% non-binary. **Rural libraries** have the highest share of female users (79.3%) and the lowest male representation (19.0%), and 0.3% identifying as non-binary. These findings highlight how library setting influences gender composition, with urban libraries engaging a more diverse user base.

# 11. Conclusions

# Conclusions

- Library users show very **high satisfaction** scores. They are very satisfied about the library's offer, services, staff and infrastructure.

- The **impact** of libraries on the wellbeing of its users is very **positive**
  - They are seen as a safe haven, providing perspective, stimulating creativity and playing a strong community role
  - A chance may be to further position the library as a place to meet others and as a place where you can learn new skills
  - The impact of libraries is very positive amongst all background groups, but impact even increases for newcomers

- Libraries have a positive impact on **reading, writing, language** and **digital skills** of their users. They are commonly seen as a place of **cultural inclusivity**.

- The **value and impact** of libraries for broader society is also **confirmed by non-users**

- The **library of the future** will be a place where balance is important
  - The "traditional offer" remains important, and should meet new services. Special attention goes to meeting other people, offering courses and workshops and continued involvement of children.
  - The library environment should find a balance between a peaceful and a vivid place, where the traditional offer finds new services. A focus on a cozy environment where everyone feels at home is important.

- **Non-users** could potentially be convinced to come (back) to the library
  - by increasing awareness, especially on the less traditional offer of the library
  - by looking at opening hours and a digital offer

- **Satisfaction and needs often differ** per age group, gender, background, type of library and country.
  - Serving and combining diverse target groups with different needs will be an interesting and challenging exercise

- **Local differences per library** can be very relevant.
  - Every library is different, use your personal report to analyze the local results and to support the local interests of the library.

## Incentives

To encourage participation and to help libraries gathering response, respondents had the chance to win travel vouchers.

Next to the chance of winning a price, every respondent that completed the survey, protected 1 square meter of endangered rainforest. Additionally, Parents were motivated to involve their children by saving an extra square meter per child that answered to the questions.

The saving of rain forest happened through a donation to the recognized organization World Land Trust.

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# CERTIFICATE

## THIS IS TO CERTIFY THAT

# Sentobib

made a donation to World Land Trust's Buy an Acre programme to purchase and protect

## One hundred sixty four thousand two hundred seventy one square metres

### of threatened habitats and their wildlife

### January 2025

Your donation will be used by WLT's conservation partners to create and expand tropical forest reserves. Buy an Acre currently supports land purchase projects in Argentina, Kenya and South Africa.

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February 2025

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