Defending Knowledge Access: Academic and Public Libraries in Times of Austerity, Financialization, and UnDemocratic Pressures

The 2nd Edition of the International Conference "Libraries, Knowledge, and Information"

April 22–23, 2027

Sibiu, Romania

Universities, academic libraries, and public libraries stand at a critical crossroads. While digital transformation and openness are often framed as opportunities for innovation and inclusion, libraries increasingly operate under conditions shaped by austerity policies, market-driven reforms, and the growing financialization of knowledge production and access. These structural pressures profoundly affect not only academic institutions, but also the broader public infrastructures that sustain education, culture, and democratic life.

This conference approaches academic and public libraries as interdependent actors within a shared knowledge ecosystem, one that is essential for equitable access to information, critical inquiry, and lifelong learning. Rather than treating openness, collaboration, and public engagement as purely technical or managerial challenges, we invite contributors to examine the political, economic, and institutional conditions that shape contemporary library work.

We seek to foreground libraries not only as service providers, but as public institutions negotiating scarcity, inequality, and competing logics of marketization and public value.

Keynote Speakers

Jesper Christian Mørch
Library Director
University Library UiA – University of Agder, Norway

Ioan Milică
Library Director
“Mihai Eminescu” Central University Library of Iași, Romania

Suggested Panels

1. Libraries under Austerity: Public Funding, Institutional Survival, and Inequality

Over the past decades, austerity measures and shrinking public investment have reshaped the landscape in which both academic and public libraries operate. Budget cuts, staff reductions, and project-based funding models have altered core library functions and intensified inequalities between institutions and regions.

We welcome contributions that explore:

- The impact of austerity policies on academic and public libraries' collections, staffing, and infrastructures
- Precarization of library labor and its consequences for knowledge work and institutional memory
- Uneven access to information resources across universities, cities, and regions
- The effects of underfunding on collaboration between academic and public libraries
- Libraries as sites of institutional resilience, care, and resistance under conditions of scarcity
- Alternative models of sustainability, solidarity, and shared resource management

Contributions may include critical analyses, comparative perspectives, and case studies that situate libraries within broader public policy and welfare-state transformations.

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2. Financialization of Academic Publishing and the Political Economy of Access

The increasing concentration of academic publishing in the hands of large commercial actors has transformed scholarly communication into a highly financialized market. Libraries – both academic and public – are positioned at the intersection of rising subscription costs, restrictive licensing regimes, and expanding but uneven open access models.

This theme invites critical engagement with:

- The financialization of academic publishing and its impact on library budgets and access strategies
- "Big Deal" licensing, vendor lock-in, and institutional dependency on commercial platforms
- The hidden costs and inequalities of open access models (APCs, hybrid journals, global asymmetries)
- The role of libraries as intermediaries between commercial interests and the public good

- Consequences of restricted access for education, research, and informed citizenship

- Non-commercial, community-based, and public infrastructures for scholarly communication

We encourage perspectives drawing on political economy, critical library studies, science and technology studies, and related fields, as well as reflections grounded in professional practice.

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3. Academic and Public Libraries as a Shared Democratic Knowledge Ecosystem

Against the backdrop of austerity and financialization, collaboration between academic and public libraries becomes not merely desirable, but necessary. Together, they form a distributed infrastructure that supports education, cultural participation, and democratic engagement beyond institutional boundaries.

This theme focuses on:

- Collaborative models between academic and public libraries under constrained conditions

- Shared infrastructures, collections, and services as strategies for widening access

- Libraries' joint role in lifelong learning, critical literacy, and civic education

- Knowledge access as a democratic right rather than a market privilege

- Community-oriented initiatives that connect research, education, and public culture

- Libraries as spaces for public debate, inclusion, and social responsibility

We are particularly interested in contributions that conceptualize libraries as relational institutions, embedded in local contexts while responding to global pressures.

Submission Guidelines

Abstracts of up to 300 words should clearly state the research question, methodology, and expected contribution. We welcome academic papers, practitioner reflections, panels, and workshops.

Please submit your abstracts to biblioteca@ulbsibiu.ro.

Key Dates

- **Submission deadline:** December 31, 2026
- **Notification of acceptance:** January 20, 2027
- **Conference dates:** April 23–24, 2027

Join us in Sibiu, a city of cultural exchange and intellectual tradition, for a critical conversation on how academic and public libraries can collectively sustain knowledge, culture, and democracy in challenging times.

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Lucian Blaga University Library of Sibiu
ASTRA Sibiu County Library

Partners:
"Mihai Eminescu" Central University Library of Iași

Scientific Library of the Technical University of Moldova, Chișinău

Bartin University, Bartin, Türkiye

The UNESCO chair on ICT in Library Studies, Education, and Cultural Heritage at the University of Library Studies and Information Technologies (ULSIT)

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