



Prototyping Innovation Policies with(in) cities

Innovation Area:

Digital Inclusion and Democracy:

The Library's Path Forward

Lund, Sweden



Photo by Kasper Dudzik

How does “prototyping...” work?

This City Case Description is the outcome of a policy prototyping exercise within a city ecosystem. Once the ekip research team has explored a policy area and its connection to cultural and creative industries (CCIs) and innovation, we ask: what would this mean in a local city context?

Together with local stakeholders, we test how a draft policy recommendation might stimulate innovation. Using Portfolio Sensemaking, stakeholders simulate an innovation portfolio, analyse the strengths and gaps of the local support system, and identify what resources are needed to realise the portfolio.

Lund, Libraries & Digital Inclusion

Lund is a city with deep academic tradition and strong civic values. Home to one of Scandinavia's oldest universities and a network of public libraries with a clearly articulated democratic mandate, Lund has both the infrastructure and the institutional ambition to address one of the most pressing challenges of our time: digital inclusion.

Under Sweden's Library Act, public libraries are mandated to promote democratic society through knowledge dissemination and free opinion-forming. They are specifically charged with focusing on those groups in society who need the most support.

Yet the pace of digitalisation is creating enormous pressure. Many people no longer have the capacity to manage their everyday digital obligations — banking, healthcare, taxes, transport. When citizens cannot manage them alone, they increasingly turn to the library.

The library has become the last resort for the problems created by a digital society not designed with all its users in mind.



Banks, health services and tech companies build digital systems and outsource the consequences to libraries when those systems fail their users.

In an era of disinformation and polarisation, libraries face deeper questions too: how to support media and information literacy while remaining neutral? How to help citizens not only use digital tools, but critically evaluate them? These are not questions libraries can answer alone.



Portfolio sensemaking

THROUGH THE LENS OF LIBRARIES, DEMOCRACY AND DIGITAL COMMONS

In what way can 'digital commons' be a key complement to building digital sovereignty and democratic participation? Digital commons are collectively managed digital resources governed by communities, prioritising open access, transparency, and collective governance over private profit.

The public library is, in many respects, a pre-digital version of this commons — non-profit, low-exclusivity infrastructure providing open access to information, knowledge and culture for everyone.

Sweden's AI Commission has proposed an investment of 100 million kronor per year in public libraries for 2025–2029, to strengthen their mandate to promote the use of information technology and to enable the public to try AI tools free of charge. This signals a recognition that libraries are the right place for this work — but it also intensifies the question of how libraries should approach it.



“Democracy, AI, trust and trustworthiness - those were the things we kept coming back to. And literacy in the broad sense: not just reading, but civic literacy, health literacy, digital literacy.”



Four working groups explored the challenge of digital inclusion from different but complementary angles. Each group developed a draft portfolio: a scope, a set of subareas for action, a vision of success, and an analysis of what happens if nothing is done. Here we have integrated the four portfolios into one portfolio with the aim to reposition the library as a proactive contributor to digital inclusion and democratic resilience: The Divate Portfolio.

All four groups identified the need for structural change — in procurement law, in funding frameworks, in national and regional policy — to recognise the library ecosystem as a genuine partner in digital inclusion, not just a safety net.



The Digivate portfolio

FROM REACTIVE LIBRARY TO PROACTIVE DIGITAL COMMONS



DIGIVATE — a new verb combining digital + innovate — was coined by participants to capture the shift they are proposing: from the library as problem-absorber to the library as co-designer of an inclusive digital society.

Subareas:

•**The individual always at the centre:** Digital inclusion is not about efficiency. It is about empowerment, self-confidence, agency — and joy. Play and curiosity are as important as functional literacy.

•**Building the testbed:** Establishing the physical and relational infrastructure — spaces, processes, networks, agreed protocols. The library and partners provide the venue, the trust and the reach; external actors provide technical expertise and development capacity.

Main idea and Scope:

The library — in tight partnership with municipalities, universities, civil society, banks, and tech companies — contributes to the design and shaping of digital development by focusing on user-driven, user-centred co-creation. By doing so, it transforms its reactive role as a fixer into a proactive role as a civic innovation hub.

DIGIVATE works through two channels: existing digital systems that are failing citizens come to the library ecosystem to be tested and co-improved; and citizens who have needs, ideas or frustrations can bring them to the library's innovation space, where they connect with developers and expertise to generate new solutions.



•**Developing incentives:** Creating compelling reasons for companies, authorities and services to engage — through procurement conditions, quality standards, efficiency gains, or reputational benefit.

•**Trust as the foundation:** The library's most important asset is the trust citizens place in it — trust that other institutions are rapidly losing.

•**Ecosystem, not institution:** No single organisation can solve this. DIGIVATE requires a coalition: libraries, municipalities, universities, civil society, banks, tech companies, and public agencies, all with agreed roles.

•**Innovation Week pilot:** Lund's Innovation Week is identified as the first concrete test of the DIGIVATE concept — a cross-sector proof of concept before the Swedish election in September 2026.

“By building up an ecosystem, libraries can focus on their core tasks and even be more visionary about the future, instead of just managing many things in a reactive way.”

— Workshop participant

What if nothing is done?

If nothing is done, each digital system continues to be developed in silos. Libraries remain reactive — absorbing the result of other organisations' failures. The most vulnerable citizens fall further behind. The gap between those who participate in democratic life and those who are left out grows wider. And the library — one of the last truly open, trusted, non-commercial public spaces in democratic society — is slowly consumed by tasks it was never designed to perform.



Who was there?

A BROAD MIX OF STAKEHOLDERS CO-CREATED THIS CASE

CCI ORGANISATIONS

Public Libraries in Lund and Helsingborg,
The National Library of Sweden (Kungliga
biblioteket), Netherlands Institute for Sound &
Vision



ACADEMIA

Lund University
University of Edinburgh



LOCAL AUTHORITIES

Lunds kommun: Kultur och
fritidsförvaltningen,
Seniorverksamheten / Vård och
Omsorg
Region Skåneskulturförvaltning



OTHERS

Handelsbanken
Medborgarskolan
Future by Lund



Analysis

THE LOCAL INNOVATION SUPPORT SYSTEM

The library ecosystem in Lund already has significant assets underpinning the portfolios developed at the workshop. Public libraries provide trusted, accessible physical infrastructure with broad reach across diverse populations, including existing digital inclusion programmes.

Lund University contributes research capacity, technical expertise through LTH, humanities scholarship on ethics and inclusion, and service design research through LU Service Management. Future by Lund provides cross-sector convening capacity, process expertise, and connections to the broader ekip European network. Funding mechanisms include Region Skåne's experimental programme and Länsstyrelsen's digital inclusion funding, while studieförbund, senior networks, and community organisations extend reach into communities that public institutions cannot always access directly.

At the national level, Digiteket, PTS, MTM, and KB supply digital literacy platforms, regulatory frameworks, and policy anchors.

Yet the innovation support system is not designed for the kind of purpose-driven, ecosystem-wide, citizen-centred innovation these portfolios require. Most critically, current funding instruments are project-based and short-term, whereas the challenges identified across all four groups demand sustained investment over five to ten years. No shared infrastructure currently exists for testing digital services with diverse user groups before launch — the gap the DIGIVATE testbed concept would fill, if properly resourced.

Internally, staff need broader competence profiles and dedicated time for innovation work, and a dedicated coordination function is needed to maintain ecosystem relationships beyond personal connections. Finally, infrastructure for reaching citizens in digital exclusion who never come to the library — the in-between spaces — remains absent.

“This is an important step. When we saw the four different presentations, something happened. It is not anything I can do by myself — it is something we do, all of us, together.”

— Catharina Isberg,
Head of Lund Public Libraries



Conclusions

& RECOMMENDATIONS

Recognise Libraries as Innovation Infrastructure.

The single most important structural change required is formal recognition of the library ecosystem as innovation infrastructure for digital inclusion. This means including libraries and equivalent civic spaces in regional Smart Specialisation strategies, in public procurement frameworks (LOU), and in national digital inclusion policy. Companies and public authorities developing digital services that affect citizens should be required — or at minimum strongly incentivised — to work with libraries and their user communities in the development process.

Clarify Roles and Build the Ecosystem

Before any testbed or programme can be sustained, the playing field needs to be defined. A systematic mapping of actors, roles and responsibilities — locally, regionally and nationally — is a necessary first step. Alongside this, opinion-forming work is needed: a public and political conversation about what digital inclusion means and who is responsible for it.

Pilot DIGIVATE as a Proof of Concept

The DIGIVATE concept — the library ecosystem as a proactive testbed for co-designing digital services — is the most concrete and actionable idea to emerge from the workshop. It has two dimensions: testing existing systems with diverse users, and generating new solutions from citizen-identified needs. A pilot can demonstrate value quickly and provide the evidence base for scaling.

Centre the Citizen and Embed Joy

All four portfolios converged on the importance of keeping the individual citizen — their confidence, agency and sense of joy — at the centre of any digital inclusion initiative. The risk of reducing the work to a series of transactional problem-solving exercises is real. Building play, creativity and curiosity into the library's digital programming is not a soft add-on; it is a strategic necessity for building sustainable engagement.

“I interviewed a librarian from the future — and that librarian said that in the future we will feel more self-confident: we are shaping the digital future of our democratic societies.”

— Workshop participant





Our methods

THE INNOVATION PORTFOLIO POLICY CANVAS

The Prototyping Workshop Methodology and the Innovation Portfolio Policy Canvas guide local stakeholders to analyse their local ecosystem, make an inventory of actors and resources, identify and create a potential innovation portfolio and analyse their local innovation support system.

THE OPSI MODEL

The OPSI-model (Open Public Sector Innovation OECD) is adapted to analyze the innovation character of the policy area. Participants explore whether the policy involves new legislative measures or is more exploratory in nature, allowing for a deeper understanding of how the policy might influence the local ecosystem

THE LIEPT MODEL

The Lund Innovation Ecosystem Portfolio Tracking (LIEPT) model is a tool that provides a framework for tracking changes in innovation portfolios in ecosystems where impact and growth happen not in one organisation but in many. This relies on collaborative efforts by many stakeholders.

What is ekip

The ekip partnership funded by the European Commission consists of 5 universities, 4 consultancies, 4 creative and cultural organisations and 4 cities. Together we develop innovation policies for the cultural and creative industries in Europe. We do that in various ways: through research, consultations and interaction with people in the sector at policy labs and focus groups and assessments in city ecosystems.

Want to know more? Want to do it in your city?

Would you like to explore the topic of Ecodesign further? Visit the [Fashion Transition: Eco-Design for Circularity](#) on ekip website, where you'll find relevant policy posters, presentations, videos, and articles.

You can even host your own session in your city! It's an empowering and insightful way to bring together local stakeholders across sectors and disciplines for a focused discussion on a topic of shared importance. The ekip method and approach are open for anyone to use including a Facilitator's Guide and templates available in the ekip Knowledge Bank under [Tools and Methods](#).

Authors of this report:

Birgitta Persson and Katarina Scott,
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Disclaimer:

Each City Case Description reflects the views of workshop participants. It is a perspective from one city context, intended to inspire and ignite action



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