

Purchase of books via institutions

Concept

A scheme for the massive purchase of books (in all formats) on behalf of public institutions (libraries, etc.). Such a scheme will revitalise the entire book value chain while replenishing and updating the collections of libraries, schools and other institutions, and ultimately increase citizens' access to books.

Context

The entire book sector has been severely hit by the closure of or limitations in access to bookshops, and by the cancellation of literary events, including book fairs. Among many measures to help authors, publishers, and booksellers, a very effective one would be to finance and carry out a scheme for the massive purchase of books on behalf of public institutions in every EU Member State. Several governments have already implemented such measures or are envisaging this kind of plan, and it would be very helpful to make it a generalised policy across the EU.

The book sector is traditionally privately financed, with little or no public subsidies. With the crisis, the sector has no choice now but to ask for – at least temporary – public support. All cultural sectors are affected to different degrees by the crisis. The book sector asks the public authorities to assess the impact and to help each of them as much as possible, with targeted measures to limit the damage and kickstart a recovery.

This paper is meant to inform the discussion around the best solutions to help the book sector, and encourage their adoption. A massive purchase of books by libraries would accomplish several objectives: providing a lifeline to the whole book value chain (authors, publishers, booksellers) with an injection of much needed liquidity, updating and upgrading the collections of libraries and institutions of all kinds, and more generally incentivise reading. The benefits of reading not only for the cultural development of citizens, but also in terms of their improved democratic participation and economic prospects are well known¹; moreover, participation in cultural activities, and especially reading and frequenting libraries, are proven factors of economic resilience to crises².

Development

The measure here recommended is to step up public investments toward book, ebook and journal purchasing/licensing/subscription plans for institutions, particularly public libraries, schools and school libraries, university libraries and research institutions.

Such purchases should be channelled through local bookshops whenever possible and focus on books published by a diverse range of publishers, allowing libraries and other institutions involved

¹ Cfr. Brunello G., Weber G. and Weiss C.T., 2015, "Books are Forever: Early Life Conditions, Education and Lifetime Earnings in Europe", *Economic Journal*, vol. 127(600), pp. 271-296.

² Cellini R. and Cuccia T., 2019. "Do Behaviours in Cultural Markets Affect Economic Resilience? An Analysis of Italian Regions", *European Planning Studies*, vol. 27(4), pp. 784-801.



maximum freedom and flexibility in the choice, based on the knowledge of their patrons, students, etc.

Procedures for public procurement should be accelerated and simplified accordingly, including legislative changes if necessary. In general, the process should be fast and simple. Where possible, existing plans for the purchase of books and licences should be fast-tracked and could serve as a basis for expansion. The provision should not affect the allocation of funds to the same end in the following years.

In parallel, schools should receive sufficient funds for a smooth transition to remote learning, especially for purchasing learning materials. Similarly, public libraries should have enough funding to enrich their offer of e-lending and academic libraries should be allocated appropriate budgets including for undergraduate oriented digital resources.

The initiative should be supported with an appropriate amount of funds. The EU could recommend such a measure to the Members States under the Recovery Fund.