Press release:
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Libraries are not only part of the information society and cultural life; they are also essential to local economic activity. Libraries are becoming a place for doers!

In times of financial downturn and uncertainty, diminished options and blurred prospects, the Future Library Network of libraries and library lovers has paved new ways and created new choices, empowering people and positively affecting life in local communities.

Future Library emerged as a living community and constantly embraces new libraries and new locations. Day by day, more and more people of various ages and backgrounds, from pre-school toddlers with their parents, teenagers and university students, to freelancers, creative professionals, volunteers and even senior citizens connect to their local public libraries through this rapidly growing network, which at this moment consists of 140 Public and Municipal Libraries and approximately 7.000 members from across the country.

Beyond Greece: Launch of the project INELI-Balkans

After three years of fertile work in Greece, with funding from the Stavros Niarchos Foundation, Future Library has now received a grant from the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation to reach out to Balkan libraries through the new project INELI-Balkans (International Network of Emerging Library Innovators in the Balkan region).

The INELI-Balkans project will bring together public library communities from: Albania, Bosnia & Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Croatia, Greece, FYR of Macedonia, Kosovo, Montenegro, Romania, Serbia and Slovenia, to develop a sustainable network that will encourage collaborative innovation, e-learning and experimentation with new ideas.

Harnessing the innovative potential available among library workers and capitalizing on the Future Library model, the INELI-Balkans will act as an “incubator” of the skills necessary to achieve library innovation and transformation in the Balkan region.

The INELI-Balkans will build its network capacity through the following key project areas:

- Library needs and impact
  - Through the work of a group of country contacts (Ambassadors), INELI-Balkans will take into account the particularities of Balkan countries and will stay attuned to library issues at national level.

- Online leadership skills training
  - Through a dedicated e-learning platform with specialized content and with guidance from Mentors from the library field and beyond, the training will focus on the ability of emerging library innovators to provide strategic planning and new service development.

- Innovation Awards
Selected trainees’ proposals for new projects and services will receive seed funding for their implementation.

- Networking events
  - Convenings and live training workshops, study visits and interaction with field experts will enrich the experience of and the trust between project participants.

INELI-Balkans will set up a framework for continuous pursuit of partnerships and co-funding, working with the library community, training partners, technology and service providers, and, above all, local creatives.

**Today across the Balkans, local communities and people within them need more than ever strong public libraries that strive to equip them with the tools, knowledge and networks to succeed in a diversified economy.**

INELI-Balkans is envisaged as a unique platform that motivates and brings together new talents, grassroots movements and established organizations that use Balkan libraries to help reinvent and sustain their communities. This enduring Balkan library partnership will support the openness of mind and human adaptability that are fundamental for designing solutions both for people and for social, cultural and economic growth.

**11 “Ambassador” organisations:**

- **Albania**: Albanian Library Association
- **Bosnia & Herzegovina (Federation of Bosnia & Herzegovina)**: Public and University Library “Dervis Susic” Tuzla
- **Bosnia & Herzegovina (Republika Srpska)**: National and University Library of Republika Srpska
- **Bulgaria**: Bulgarian Library and Information Association
- **Croatia**: Rijeka Public Library
- **FYR of Macedonia**: INNOVA Lib
- **Kosovo**: Eventor Hub
- **Montenegro**: Montenegrin Library Association
- **Romania**: The National Library of Romania
- **Serbia**: Belgrade City Library
- **Slovenia**: Zavod Jara

Find out more about INELI-Balkans | [www.futurelibrary.gr/INELI-Balkans](http://www.futurelibrary.gr/INELI-Balkans)

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