

Bridging Borders with Books: The Rise of Romanian Diaspora Libraries

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Abstract: The Romanian migration of the last decades has generated in the world, but especially in Europe, a significant population of Romanian origin, but far from the cultural sources in Romania. The appearance of activities that would bring together the Romanian community appeared inevitable; among them, the initiatives of some Romanian libraries were born naturally, in various forms, sometimes structured on local public libraries or just as personal initiatives. The present article maps and evaluates several European cases of Romanian libraries: three in the Kingdom of the Netherlands and one in Prague, which already has countless branches, especially in the European Union. The investigation shows a strong connection between the Romanian libraries and their communities, especially with the parents of minor children, and a strong appreciation of these libraries' educational and social impact.

Keywords: diaspora library; Romanian library; readers; library community.

Introduction

The Romanian diaspora is one of the largest in the world, according to an OECD Report (2019). After the fall of communist regimes, but especially after the 2007 accession of Romania to the European Union, the Romanian diaspora grew significantly. In 2015, more than 3.5 million people born in Romania lived in OECD countries, most of them in Italy, Germany and Spain (OECD, 2019). Almost two-thirds of the Romanian migrants are economic ones looking for better employment, but family is also an essential drive for living abroad. Educational levels of the Romanian migrants vary with the country they are in, but generally it is higher than in the case of other ethnic groups. The highest levels of education are observed in North America, while Italy attracts more lower-educated individuals.

Migrants face several common challenges while working and living in other countries. They could struggle to maintain their cultural identity and connections. Maintaining a connection with the mother country, with family and friends from Romania, is also challenging for many. These obstacles might lead to homesickness and isolation. Especially children born abroad could find it challenging to learn the language and assume the traditions and values of their parents. Many Romanians in the diaspora could also face difficulties finding employment adequate to their skills and qualifications. Language, bureaucratic, and legal barriers could also affect their access to healthcare and social services (Boangiu, 2022; Moise, 2023). At the same time, the economic impact of migration is positive, both on the diaspora as well as on the country of origin (Moreno & Zilibotti, 2021). These networks are complex and never static. Nevertheless, the development capacity and the ability of long-term action seem to be limited.

In such a complex context, a sense of community gathering and interest in preserving the original culture, including at the family level, is understandable. Diaspora networks have been observed, including various businesses, NGOs, media, churches and representatives

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of the Romanian state. Most of these support structures are in the migration country, followed by Romania (Martinescu & Burlacu, 2019). Libraries catering to diaspora communities might play an essential role in this context.

Considering that since 2020, the number of Romanian libraries in the diaspora, especially in the European Union, increased significantly (Cristea, 2023; Occidentul Romanesc, 2022), the present study aims to map these libraries, especially considering their role in the communities. The methodology analyzes Romanian libraries established by diaspora members in the European Union, focusing on their distribution, operations, and user perceptions. Employing a mixed-methods approach, the research began with a comprehensive online search and content analysis of social media platforms to identify and document these libraries' locations, founders, activities, and community engagement, resulting in a detailed map. Qualitative insights were then gathered through in-depth interviews with key library figures, exploring their management practices and challenges and addressing these libraries' development, support structures, and usage. Finally, a survey conducted at the Romanian Day Science Fest in Eindhoven assessed user experiences and perceptions, with data analyzed using SPSS to provide demographic insights and suggestions for library improvements.

Literature review – a general framing of the libraries in diasporas

Libraries could support ethnic communities in many ways. They serve as hubs for preserving the cultural heritage, traditions, and native languages of immigrant and minority groups. They provide access to literature, media, and resources that help community members maintain their cultural identity but also be more involved in their host society (Kong, 2011). Public libraries addressing local minority ethnic groups could lead to more inclusion and cultural diversity and provide a third place for these groups to freely connect and develop networks (Okechukwu, Charity, & Jacinta, 2024; Sakhari, 2023). Thus, libraries serving various communities, ethnic or other types, might facilitate community engagement. They propose cultural events, educational programs, and social activities that foster connections and mutual understanding among the community members and various participants.

Libraries addressing specific diaspora might provide access to information and services to the members of those communities that might otherwise feel estranged in the receiving country due to language barriers, and social, cultural, and bureaucratic reasons. Therefore, these libraries could help ethnic minorities navigate systems and access opportunities in their host countries. This includes language classes, job search assistance, and connections to social services. Still, the process is not without challenges, among which management-related barriers, perceptual and communication barriers, environment-related barriers, and barriers related to the nature of minority communities (Zardary et al., 2019). Part of these challenges would be overcome in libraries managed by members of the ethnic minority for the benefit of their community, but others might arise in this specific context.

In general, these libraries might act as vital hubs that foster inclusion and empowerment in their communities while preserving the specific language and culture. They could also contribute to safeguarding that particular community's history and new traditions. They could develop partnerships and networks with other community organizations or actors (Martinescu & Burlacu, 2019). Still, this approach brings both benefits and challenges since they may lack the time and capacity to develop and maintain these relationships. Limited funding can also create barriers to collaboration.

Considering the above, ethnic libraries could be part of cultural diplomacy. They contribute to preserving cultural heritage and language among all community members and facilitate community engagement and intercultural exchanges (Moise, 2023). A study by Dolea (2024) on the Romanian diaspora in the UK shows that organizations need to strengthen their internal structures, transparency, and accountability, moving

beyond reliance on individual leaders and short-term visibility to achieve sustainable development. Collaborative efforts with local organizations and targeted training can enhance capacity, leadership, and resilience against misinformation. Joint grassroots approaches and strategic campaigns are necessary to address issues like disinformation, modern slavery, and the emotional challenges faced by migrants, fostering integration and policy influence in a diverse, multicultural context. All these could be successfully achieved by Romanian libraries acting locally. Ethnic libraries could act not only for cultural preservation and language support, to provide educational resources and community engagement. They can contribute to information dissemination and capacity building, they can counter disinformation and fake news. They can also offer support for vulnerable groups in those communities.

They are part of the cultural diplomacy, as well as fostering mutual understanding and goodwill between the Romanian diaspora and the host society. This can improve the diaspora's visibility and influence, aiding in long-term advocacy and policy influence. Therefore, they should be supported by their origin country and be considered in their diplomatic efforts in various ways and by various organizations in their motherland, such as cultural organizations, businesses or NGOs.

Methodology

The primary objective of this investigation was to comprehensively map and analyze the Romanian libraries developed by diaspora representatives, primarily within the European Union, to understand their distribution, operations, and user perceptions. This complex research design integrated qualitative and quantitative approaches to achieve a multifaceted understanding of these libraries and their role within the Romanian communities they serve.

The research design considered both qualitative and quantitative approaches. The first step involved mapping all the Romanian libraries developed by diaspora representatives, mainly in the EU. The method involved a comprehensive online investigation coupled with a content analysis of the social media platforms of the identified libraries. This approach included systematically searching for Romanian libraries through search engines, library databases, and relevant social media platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, and LinkedIn. Once identified, these libraries' social media profiles and posts were analyzed to gather information on their locations, founders, activities, and community engagement. This process enabled the creation of a detailed and up-to-date map of Romanian diaspora libraries, highlighting their distribution and the cultural services they provide within the EU.

The second step consisted of qualitative research to understand better the managerial approaches and the challenges these libraries face. This qualitative research aimed at reaching three main objectives:

- O1. to evaluate the development of the Romanian libraries in the Diaspora;
- O2. to analyze the support structure of the libraries;
- O3. to assess the usage of the libraries.

Four in-depth interviews (Table 1) have been conducted with key figures associated with various Romanian libraries and cultural initiatives in the EU to gather insights for this study. The selection process focused on individuals who play significant roles in the management and operations of these libraries, ensuring that their perspectives would be both informed and relevant.

Table 1. Participants in the interviews

Name	Library, location	Function
Ana Engrth Răduleț	Biblioteca Prichindeilor, Prague, Czech Republic	Founder
Maria Dicieanu	Romanian Library section, part of the Public Library of Amsterdam, Netherlands	Curator of the Romanian library
Vlad Niculescu-Dincă	Romanian School, which partners with the Public Library of Eindhoven, Netherlands	Coordinator of the Romanian School
Simona Popa	Cărți pentru Matei (Books for Matei), Hoofddorp, Netherlands	Founder and librarian

The third step was a survey to understand the perceptions and experiences of users of the Romanian library in Eindhoven. The questionnaire was administered to the Romanian Day Science Fest event participants in Eindhoven. This event attracted around 150 attendees, primarily families with children. Due to the family-oriented nature of the event, generally, only one member from each family completed the survey, limiting the number of responses. At the same time, most families present at the event are covered by responses in this way. The questionnaire was distributed in digital and paper formats, and survey administrators encouraged participation and assisted throughout the event. The collected responses were entered into a database for analysis. Using SPSS, descriptive statistics summarized the respondents' demographic characteristics, usage patterns, and perceptions. Additionally, suggestions for library improvements were gathered and analyzed.

Findings and discussions

Romanian libraries in diaspora map

We identified 21 libraries serving the Romanian communities from the Diaspora. All these libraries are located in Europe except one in Dubai. Also, all of them but one in the Netherlands, are dedicated to children. This indicates the interest of the Romanian communities to keep their original language and culture alive in their families. Figure 1 shows the location of all the identified libraries.

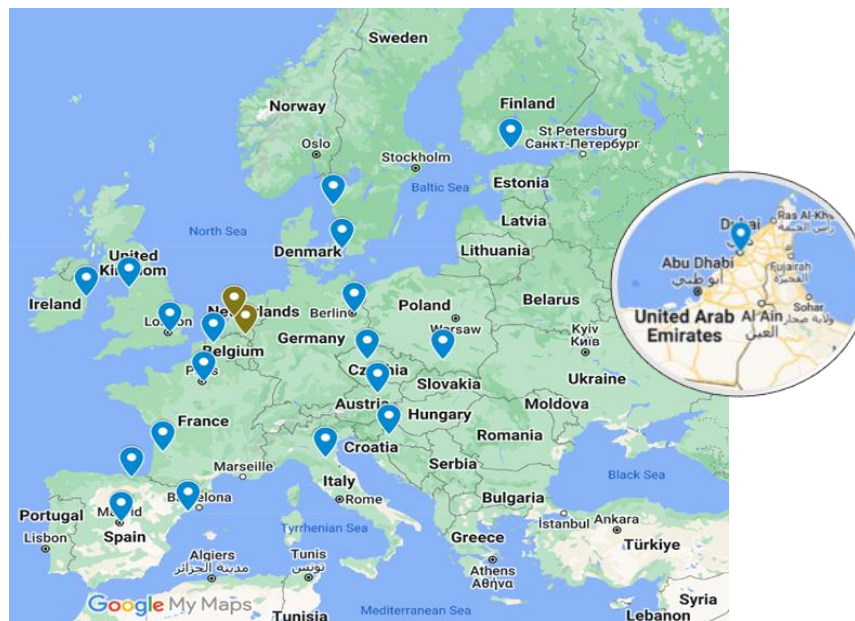


Figure 1. Romanian libraries in the diaspora

With two exceptions, marked with dark green in Figure 1, all libraries are entitled Biblioteca Prichindeilor (the Library of the Little Ones). They are independently run libraries, but all of them have been inspired by the first one, developed in Prague by Ana Engrth Răduleț. From this "chain," only the ones in Prague and Dubai also have a physical space. All others borrow books online, using a digital system. After ordering one or more books, the transfer of books is physically arranged. This system seems to be not very practical, but the reality shows its effectiveness, as well as the great desire of parents to provide Romanian books for their children. This indicates that these libraries have a significant role in their community, contributing to preserving the language and connecting children and their families and their original country.

We looked into the history of these libraries. The oldest one, in the Netherlands, has operated since November 2019, strongly supporting reading clubs for children, managed by the association of the Romanians in the Netherlands, Rompro, which is quite dynamic (Rompro 2021, 2022, 2023, 2024). The second one was set up at the end of 2020 and launched at the beginning of 2021 – the first Little Ones' Library in Prague. It seems that the COVID-19 pandemic was a favorable framework and forced these libraries to be designed as remote and with minimal physical infrastructure. According to our research, the first two libraries are both dedicated to children: Cărți pentru Matei (Books for Matei) in Hoofddorp (Netherlands) and Prichindeilor (For the Little Ones) Library in Prague (Czech Republic). The first books borrowed were from the personal library of Ana Răduleț (Occidentul Românesc, 2022). A year later, a network of eight such libraries, independently run from the first one, followed the example in Belgium, Croatia, Denmark, Finland, Italy, Poland, and Madrid. Starting with 2022, some local communities financially support the book collections, the Romanian Government (Occidentul Românesc, 2022), and various Romanian publishing houses. Some of these libraries also offer books in other languages (Cristea, 2023), adapting to an increasingly multi-ethnic community. Besides borrowing books, some of these libraries are also ordering books directly from publishers for the representatives of the community interested in acquiring books in Romanian for their personal libraries.

After two years after the first library in Prague, there were 15 such libraries established in Europe (Cristea, 2023). Now there are 19 such libraries (Figure 1), as presented in Figure 2. In 2024 an association of all these libraries has also been established to increase the visibility and support their development. In this way, the libraries would have easier access to funding from the Romanian government (Calota, 2022).

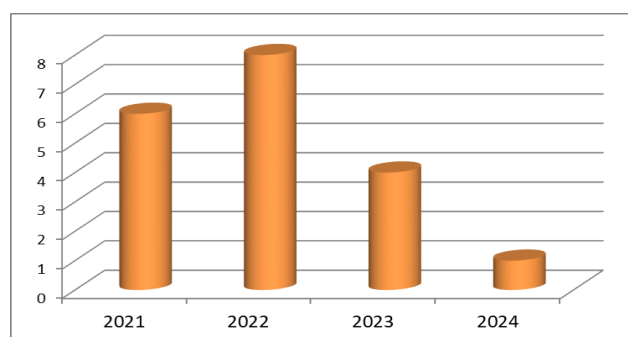


Figure 2. Yearly establishment of the Romanian libraries

All the Romanian libraries in the Diaspora, except for the Books for Matei in the Netherlands, communicate mainly through their Facebook accounts. Some of them have also Instagram accounts and Whatsapp groups. Books for Matei has an Instagram and a YouTube account, presenting their activity and mostly book recommendations. Their most dynamic section is "Ioan's Review". Ioan is not the only child active. Sarah is also featured, reviewing or recommending books. The most followed libraries are those in the Netherlands and Denmark (Figure 3).

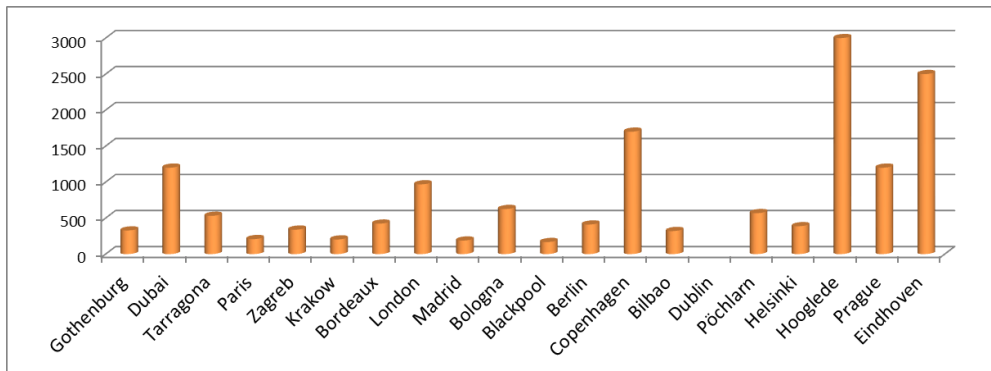


Figure 3. The number of followers on Facebook of the Romanian libraries in the diaspora

Generally there is a correlation between the frequency of posts and the followers' numbers, but not in all cases. The most "talkative" libraries are those in Spain (Tarragona and Bilbao), Denmark, the Czech Republic, and Eindhoven, with more than ten posts in 2 weeks. The libraries in Dubai, Paris, and Madrid, followed by Krakow and Pöchlarn, rarely communicate on Facebook. The content analysis also revealed the wide variety of posts and activities they are developing: announcing new arrivals, book presentations and reviews, workshops – including of Romanian language, book orders for communities, festive days celebrations, various events as well as festivals.

Activity analysis

The first part of the interviews investigated the establishment and development of the Romanian library abroad, including its inception, community response, and engagement levels.

The Little Ones' Library was initiated from a personal need for Romanian books for children in Prague. In 2021, due to the lack of availability and random selection of books, Ana started a book exchange that led to the creation of an online catalog through Libib to facilitate trustworthy book borrowing. This evolved into a Facebook page launched on January 27, 2021, starting with 50 books and expanding to over 500 within a year, thanks to community contributions and support from Romanian and Moldovan publishers. The library operates in 22 locations across 16 diaspora countries, boasting over 12,000 books. Despite not fully complying with Romanian library legislation, it functions with volunteer librarians who manage books from their homes and organize monthly meetings for book pickups and community engagement. Also, various educational and social events are organized for members of the Romanian Community (see, for instance, Figure 4).



Figure 4. Programs for children proposed by the Little Ones' Library in Prague

Photo credit: Little Ones' Library, Prague

The BiebRO project in the Netherlands began on November 17, 2019, as part of the OBA - Amsterdam Public Library's Huis van Alle Talen initiative. This project aimed to include native language titles from various communities to diversify the library's audience. The Rompro Foundation, led by Cătălina Negru, collaborated with OBA to secure storage for Romanian book donations, joining the first 18 communities in the initiative. BiebRO currently holds 350 adult and 150 children's titles, all focused on Romanian authors or Romania-related content. Despite limited resources due to being one of 30 Huis van Alle Talen partners, the community has been enthusiastic, frequently donating books and taking pride in their representation within the Amsterdam library.

Books for Matei Library in Hoofddorp, Netherlands, transitioned from a home library to a public one in 2021. Simona established this private children's library to provide broader access to Romanian books, promoting self-confidence and community integration through reading. With a current collection of 1,122 books, including 1,010 in Romanian for children, 40 for parents, and 72 in English, the library aims to support parents in maintaining their children's connection to the Romanian language and culture. The community's response has been overwhelmingly positive, appreciating the initiative and recognizing its value in fostering a sense of identity and belonging among Romanian children and their families.

Simona, the founder of this last library, declared the following aspects, which characterize all the other libraries documented:

"Cărți pentru Matei Library is a private library for children, with books in Romanian, mainly based in Hoofddorp, Kingdom of the Netherlands. The transition from a home library to a public library arose naturally, even if not quite easily, due to the belief that it is not enough for one child or several children to access the stories, information, and art or to enjoy them. It is necessary that their friends, current or future, even those they don't want friends, have the same openness, the possibility to choose, to know themselves, and to develop a sense of self-confidence and safety in their community or communities. And the Romanian library has a very important role in obtaining this feeling of self-confidence and security. In addition, it also has the advantage of highlighting the enormous support that all parents can continue to give to their children, no matter where they are, no matter who it is the language of the large community of which they are a part, by reading together and through direct communication with the children in the language, the languages of the family."

The reasons for establishing such initiatives are diverse – from personal to community-related ones. For instance, Ana, the founder of the Little Ones' Library in Prague, which became a model for many other Romanian libraries in the diaspora, mentions the following:

"We believe that, through our actions, we promote reading - from an early age, with attention to the quality of book selection, out loud, for parent-child connection, for community connection, etc. Due to Romanian children's literature's momentum in recent years, we happily also promote Romanian authors through their books and invitations to meet readers when they visit our locations."

All libraries widely acknowledged the contributions of the local Romanian communities to their development. Parents are prominent supporters who are highly engaged in promoting reading and ensuring the libraries thrive. Many parents volunteer to coordinate and plan activities, donate books and money, and cover workshops and space rental expenses. This grassroots involvement is crucial as it maintains the libraries and fosters a sense of community. The collective efforts have helped establish and sustain libraries like Biblioteca Prichindeilor, which started as a personal project and expanded across multiple countries through the dedication of local volunteers and parents.

Still, some problems remain in the relationships with the community, especially when considering attracting an older audience. Maria presents some of these aspects:

"Generally speaking, projects or events around reading for children are quite well received by the community. Unfortunately, projects and events aimed at teenagers and adults are more difficult to achieve. Even after so much time since its foundation, even when we have quite well-known Romanian authors invited, it remains a challenge to ensure a minimum number of participants (a number that is also particularly difficult to estimate)."

Local and municipal libraries in host countries also play a significant role in supporting Romanian libraries in the Diaspora. For instance, the Amsterdam Public Library (OBA) hosts the BiebRO project as part of its Huis van Alle Talen initiative, providing space and resources for Romanian books. Similarly, the Eindhoven Public Library collaborates with the Romanian School in Eindhoven to host a collection of Romanian children's books and supports public events like book launches and workshops (Figure 5). These collaborations offer essential infrastructure, promotion, and event venues, integrating the Romanian libraries into the broader local library systems and enhancing their visibility and accessibility. Nevertheless, this positive cooperation seems to be limited only to some of the libraries, mainly the ones interviewed, which are among the most dynamic and oldest ones.



Figure 5. A Romanian festival at the Romanian Library in Eindhoven

Photo credit: Bogdan Hrib

Vlad presents the specific situation of the Romanian library in Eindhoven, which might also explain its larger impact on the Romanian community in the Netherlands:

"Eindhoven Public Library is a good host for us as much as it can be for all the communities that live together in Eindhoven. We benefit from hosting the Romanian children's book collection, but space does not allow for a larger Romanian library that includes a wider collection of books. These remain a desire of the Romanian community. However, the collaboration with the library is a good one, illustrative being that we benefit from hosting, promotion, and the infrastructure necessary to organize public events. The fact that a Romanian library is hosted by a Dutch central library and its books are included and inventoried there is a strong sign of the openness of local authorities to the inclusion of international communities in Dutch society."

Romanian and Moldovan embassies and cultural institutions are also vital supporters of these libraries. They provide logistical support, promote events, and sometimes offer physical spaces for bookshelves in embassy waiting rooms. The Department for Romanians from Everywhere (DRP) has been a significant financial supporter, funding book purchases and other library needs for most interviewed libraries. Additionally, Romanian publishers and organizations have contributed books and other resources. Many Romanian publishing houses have been mentioned as supporters: as Cartier, Frontiera, Cartea copiilor, Portocala Albastra, Humanitas, Arthur, Vellant, Nemi, Corint

Junior, Pandora M, Vremea or Curtea Veche. Among other Romanian organizations contributing to the development of these libraries, the following have been mentioned: the Albești Municipal Library, the Municipal Library Șirna, the Pietrari Municipal Library, as well as the Mayor of Bucharest. These partnerships have enabled the libraries to expand their collections, organize events, and maintain operations, highlighting the transnational effort to support Romanian cultural heritage abroad.

The usage of these libraries developed over time, with the diversification of their activities and the increase of their book collections. For instance, now Books for Matei has 1.122 children's books (1.010 books in Romanian for children, 40 books on parenting, and 72 books in English for children). The Romanian library in Amsterdam currently has 350 titles for adults and 150 for children. All are works by Romanian authors or books about Romania. In this case, the collection expansion depends on the polity of the OBA and the 30 Huis van Alle Talen partners. Our most detailed statistics are for the Little Ones' Library in Prague. This library has almost 12.000 volumes. The number of borrowed books amounts to more than 13.000 volumes. The library caters to around 2.500 families. Also, the number of events organized from the beginning of their activity is 443, with more than 4.100 families attending.

Most users of the Romanian Library in Amsterdam are Romanians residing in the area, although the project's activities are accessible to Romanians throughout the Netherlands. The exhibitions are internationally accessible, but the borrowing figures remain modest, especially for adult sections. This may be attributed to a general unfamiliarity among Romanians with library borrowing practices and a hesitance to explore contemporary Romanian literature. However, the library continues to encourage readership growth through events and promotions, hoping to foster a more habitual engagement with the library over time.

In Hoofddorp, the Books for Matei Library primarily serves Romanian families from nearby cities. Most users borrow books monthly, though occasional borrowers also use the services. The library plans to expand its loan services based on growing interest to reach more families and enhance their engagement with Romanian literature. The library also organizes public reading events, strengthening community bonds.

The Romanian Children's Library in Eindhoven serves mainly Romanian children, but its impact extends to the broader community. The library hosts numerous public events open to everyone, conducted in Romanian, English, and Dutch. These events, such as science workshops, cultural fairs, and public readings, not only promote Romanian culture but also facilitate cross-cultural exchanges, integrating the Romanian community more deeply into Dutch society.

Romanian libraries in the diaspora are undertaking several projects to enhance their role as cultural and educational hubs for Romanian communities abroad. These initiatives focus on creating welcoming spaces, promoting Romanian heritage, and fostering community connections. The libraries are working towards building inclusive and safe environments for diaspora families, particularly emphasizing the importance of cultural identity for Romanian children. They aim to provide a sense of belonging and security, encouraging children to read and speak Romanian from an early age.

To sustain and expand their services, the libraries seek to strengthen existing partnerships and explore new funding sources. This includes collaborations with Romanian and local organizations, as well as leveraging support from cultural institutions and municipal libraries. Various cultural and community events are planned, including science festivals, artistic performances, culinary exhibitions, and book launches. These events cater to all ages, promote cultural exchange, and enhance the visibility and integration of the Romanian community within the broader society. The libraries plan to diversify their programs by incorporating non-formal education methods such as theater and cinematographic education. They also aim to develop

educational materials to help parents understand the importance of reading at home with their children, fostering early literacy and a love for books.

For instance, Simona specifies:

"I see the Library of Books for Matthew as an investment in the future, everyone's action and all library activity being likely to contribute in first line to the way families of Romanian origin want their build the integration strategy of their children, then to the promotion and understanding on a larger scale of multilingualism as a force of development, not stagnation or regression in community integration higher or in the academic development of children."

Efforts to promote Romanian literature are being intensified through events such as author meetings, book launches, and public readings. These events are designed to stimulate curiosity and encourage more Romanians to explore contemporary Romanian literature, integrating it into their regular reading habits. Libraries view their activities as investments in the future, aiming to incorporate multilingualism into children's development. Future projects include joining street library networks and developing comprehensive collections of comics to encourage reading in the native language among young members of the Romanian community.

Community perceptions

The profile of respondents is presented in Table 2. As expected, women responded more than men. Most families are Romanian with minor children living close to Eindhoven. Nevertheless, the percentage of the respondents who do not live in the neighborhood of Eindhoven, where the event took place, is relatively high, showing the power of attraction of the library.

Table 2. Structure of the sample

Dimension		Count (%)
Gender	Women	20 (58.8%)
	Men	14 (41.2%)
Age	Min	18 years
	Max	51 years
	Mean	36 years
Family status	Mixed family	6 (17.6%)
	Romanian family	28 (82.4%)
Minor children in the family	Yes	20 (58.8%)
	No	14 (41.2%)
Residency	Eindhoven	11 (32.4%)
	Surroundings of Eindhoven	9 (26.5%)
	Netherlands	13 (38.2%)
Time in diaspora	Less than 5 years	18 (52.9%)
	5 to 10 years	5 (1.7%)
	More than 10 years	11 (32.4%)

Respondents generally appreciate the library's role, especially its educational and social contributions, as reflected in Table 3.

Table 3. Descriptive statistics on the importance of the library

	N	Min	Max	Mean	Std. Deviation
attendance importance	34	1	5	4.00	1.303
social role of the library	34	1	5	4.38	.985
cultural role of the library	34	1	5	4.32	.976
educational role of the library	34	1	5	4.41	.925
informational role of the library	34	2	5	4.32	.768
patriotic role of the library	34	1	5	4.00	1.206
Valid N (listwise)	34				

Although respondents living in the Romanian diaspora between 5 to 10 years tend to evaluate higher the various roles of the library, the ANOVA test shows no significant differences between respondents. The linear regression shows that in the case of attendance, as well as the library's social, cultural, and educational roles, the Age of the respondents has a significant impact, while for the informational and patriotic roles, it doesn't. While men tend to consider the library's informational value higher than women's, and women tend to value more the other dimensions, the ANOVA and T-tests show no significant influence of gender on respondents' evaluations. Independent samples T-test shows that respondents with minor children place more importance on attendance than others. However, there is no significant influence on the assessment of the roles of the library. Respondents with minor children ($M = 4.50$, $SD = 0.688$) place more importance on attending the library than those without minor children ($M = 3.29$, $SD = 1.637$) – T-test score $t(32) = 2.977$, $p = 0.006$. Also, respondents with mixed families do not significantly differ from those with Romanian families in the evaluation of the roles of the library.

We also investigated how attendants evaluate various aspects of the library's activities. The results are presented in Table 4.

Table 4. Descriptive statistics on the perceptions regarding the library's activity

	N	Min	Max	Mean	Std. Deviation
book club	34	1	5	4.00	1.255
courses organized	34	2	5	4.21	.946
Romanian festival	34	3	5	4.74	.567
book launches	34	1	5	4.32	.912
book borrowing	34	3	5	4.68	.589
overall activity	34	3	5	4.29	.760
Valid N (listwise)	34				

The most valued activities are the Romanian festival and the book borrowing, but respondents appreciate all other activities. Age, gender, and having minor children or mixed families do not predict the perceptions expressed, as T-tests attest. Although those spending 5 to 10 years in diaspora tend to be more critical of the library's activity, the ANOVA test shows no significant differences between the groups. Also, those attending the library more frequently evaluate more book launches and book borrowing compared to the other respondents. They also emphasize attendance and the library's cultural and informational roles. They are probably the book lovers.

The respondents were also asked about additional activities to be proposed by the library. Almost all respondents suggested that various courses are welcomed, followed by book launches and conferences. This is coherent with the perceived educational role of the library. Other suggestions referred to festivals, more cooperation with artists and students, and creative writing classes both for adults and children. One of the respondents also suggested that the events tend to be too formal and that more “animation” is needed.

Conclusions

Ethnic libraries are crucial in preserving cultural heritage, traditions, and languages for diaspora communities, acting as hubs for cultural continuity and community engagement. They provide resources and support that help community members maintain their cultural identity while facilitating integration into the host society through educational programs, language classes, and social services. These libraries also foster inclusion and intercultural exchange, addressing challenges like misinformation and social isolation, and can be vital in navigating bureaucratic systems. By enhancing community resilience and visibility, ethnic libraries contribute significantly to cultural diplomacy and long-term advocacy efforts, necessitating support from both the origin and host countries.

The research based on in-depth interviews revealed insightful details about establishing and developing a Romanian library abroad. The idea of creating the library was well-received, with the initiative launched in a specific year and initially stocked with a notable number of titles. Following its establishment, the Romanian community responded positively, showing great interest and support. Collaboration with the local community has been fruitful, fostering a close-knit atmosphere and organizing events to promote reading and Romanian authors. There has been constructive cooperation with local authorities, enhancing the library's integration and outreach. The Romanian state has been supportive, mainly through the Department Români de Pretutindeni (DRP)—additionally, the library benefits from various other partners and local sponsors, bolstering its resources and activities. The library's user base is diverse, with a consistent frequency of book borrowings, indicating a healthy engagement with the community.

Romanian libraries in the diaspora are vital hubs for maintaining cultural connections and fostering a love for reading among Romanian communities abroad. While the user base varies by location, the commitment to promoting Romanian literature and providing community spaces for cultural engagement is a common thread. Overall, they aim for the following lines of action: building inclusive community spaces, forging stronger partnerships and expanding funding sources, expanding educational programs, boosting awareness of Romanian literature, supporting multilingual development and community integration, and organizing cultural and community activities. Through these diverse and ambitious projects, Romanian libraries in the diaspora aim to preserve cultural heritage, foster community bonds, and promote reading among Romanian families abroad. Their sustained efforts and community involvement are essential for ensuring these cultural pillars' long-term success and impact.

The survey does not reflect the opinion of the Romanian diaspora in the Netherlands, being limited to the attendees of the event organized, aiming primarily for a more mature audience. Still, despite this limit and, consequently, the small number of respondents, the study shows a high overall perception of the library's role and activities. Also, figures show that book lovers attend the library more and appreciate book-related initiatives, families with minor children attend more, and the leading perceived roles of the Romanian library in Eindhoven are educational and social. Among the activities, the Romanian festival is appreciated the most.

The research has revealed that Romanian libraries in the diaspora function as instruments of cultural diplomacy, primarily serving the Romanian diaspora rather than fostering intercultural exchanges or integration. These libraries focus on preserving and promoting Romanian culture, language, and heritage among expatriates, aiming to maintain a strong cultural identity within their community. However, the study indicates a limited engagement in broader intercultural activities or initiatives that promote interaction between diverse cultural groups. Additionally, these libraries appear to offer minimal support in addressing social challenges faced by marginalized groups in the Romanian diaspora, such as integration issues or social exclusion. Consequently, while these libraries play a crucial role in cultural preservation, their contribution to intercultural dialogue and comprehensive social support is limited.

To broaden their impact, Romanian libraries in the diaspora should develop programs encouraging interaction between the Romanian community and the wider host society. Expanding services to support marginalized groups within the diaspora, including assistance with integration and access to social services, might also be beneficial, even if it exceeds the current mission of these organizations. Additionally, fostering inclusive community spaces and increasing the range of educational programs, particularly those promoting multilingual development and practical integration skills, will enhance their support. Finally, raising awareness about the libraries' role and services through targeted marketing and participation in local events will strengthen their visibility and advocacy efforts.

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