

Children's Literature in Knowledge Valorisation Practices: a Comparative Study of Selected Public Universities Worldwide

La letteratura per l'infanzia nella valorizzazione delle conoscenze: uno studio comparativo fra università pubbliche internazionali

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Nel quadro della Valorizzazione delle Conoscenze in ambito accademico, la letteratura per l'infanzia si configura come un dispositivo privilegiato per attivare esperienze di incontro, dialogo e scambio. Essa si estende alla comunità locale ed è accessibile anche nella prima infanzia, promuovendo pratiche di cittadinanza attiva. Il contributo analizza una selezione di iniziative di Public Engagement promosse da Università pubbliche a livello internazionale e incentrate sulla letteratura per l'infanzia. L'obiettivo è evidenziarne il potenziale nel sostenere processi di partecipazione culturale e, attraverso un approccio comparativo, mettere tali progetti a confronto con la proposta Uni in Fabula dell'Università degli studi di Bergamo, riflettendo sul ruolo dell'università come agente di mediazione culturale e sociale.

PAROLE CHIAVE: VALORIZZAZIONE DELLE CONOSCENZE; LETTERATURA PER L'INFANZIA; CITTADINANZA ATTIVA; PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT; UNI IN FABULA.

Within the framework of Knowledge Valorisation in higher education, children's literature can serve as a powerful means of fostering encounter, dialogue and exchange. It extends to the wider community and is accessible even in early childhood, while also promoting active citizenship practices. This article examines a selection of Public Engagement initiatives promoted by public universities at international level and focused on children's literature. The aim is to highlight its potential to support processes of cultural participation and, through a comparative approach, to examine these projects in relation to the Uni in Fabula initiative at the University of Bergamo, reflecting on the university's role as an agent of cultural and social mediation.

KEYWORDS: KNOWLEDGE VALORISATION; CHILDREN'S LITERATURE; ACTIVE CITIZENSHIP; PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT; UNI IN FABULA.

Theoretical Framework: Children's Literature in Public Engagement

Why is children's literature considered a field of public engagement? What approaches are adopted to disseminate knowledge and research on children's literature beyond university settings? What comparative perspectives emerge across different countries worldwide?

This research aims to identify and analyse knowledge exchange projects and events on children's literature promoted by public universities worldwide.

The study adopts a purposive and non-comprehensive sampling strategy, selecting at least one illustrative case per continent based on its relevance to the defined criteria and its degree of completeness in relation to the research focus.

Knowledge valorisation has been defined as 'the process of creating social and economic value from knowledge by linking different areas and sectors and by transforming data, know-how and research results into sustainable products, services, solutions and knowledge-based policies that benefit society'. [...] Knowledge valorisation is also understood as the creation of societal value from knowledge by translating research findings into innovative products, services, processes [...]. This process often involves knowledge-related collaborations between academic researchers and non-academic organizations [...], utilizing various informal and formal channels that reinforce each other¹.

In particular, university knowledge valorisation aims to reduce the distance between academia and society, fostering closer and more meaningful interaction: «University Public Engagement is a wide range of initiatives to engage stakeholders [...]». *The National Coordinating Center for Public Engagement* defines it as «the myriad of ways in which the activity and benefits of higher education and research can be shared with the public»².

This construct emerged in 1985 from the *Public Understanding of Science Movement*, which aimed to promote the dissemination of scientific knowledge beyond academia and was formalised in the *Bodmer Report*. During the 1990s and early 2000s, this approach was gradually replaced by a more dialogic model that emphasised the active involvement of citizens. In this sense, public engagement

¹ M. Grębosz-Krawczyk, M. Sowa, *Where is the social impact? Key barriers to knowledge valorisation*, «Marketing of scientific and research organizations», LX, 1 (2025), pp. 2-3.

² A. Cammarota, F. Avallone, V. Marino, R. Resciniti, *University activism: a new dimension of the university public engagement?*, EISIC, Verona 2023, p. 3.

seeks to strengthen the relationship between science and society, while making research more socially relevant, transparent, and accessible.

The shift from the Public Understanding of Science (PUS) to public engagement reflects the recognition that, as articulated in the *Bodmer Report*, PUS assumed a lack of scientific knowledge among the public and therefore promoted one-way communication from experts.

[...] the act of building relationships and of breaking down barriers that separate experts from their public communities. In a higher education (HE) milieu, it is a term and practice associated with [...] reconnection [...] of scholarly interests with ordinary lives and concerns. It is also a concept with many influences and iterations, such as third sector work, outreach, public education, science communication and participatory research³.

Over time, this model was challenged by scholars such as Brian Wynne, who showed that the public is not simply passive, but can play an active role in engaging with science. As a result, a new approach took hold, also promoted by the *Science and Society Report*, grounded in dialogue, participation, and mutual exchange.

Imagine a university where social engagement, entrepreneurship, innovation, and sustainability are seamlessly integrated into daily life. This vision is increasingly becoming more attainable as universities worldwide undergo a transformative shift, embracing roles that extend beyond traditional boundaries. [...] Today, they are expected to contribute more directly to societal needs through what is known as the third mission. This mission involves active engagement with societal challenges, fostering innovation, and contributing to regional and global issues [...]⁴.

In fact, university is seen as an opportunity, it «[...] is more about an academic 'process' than an academic 'product' and is a potential means for the transportation and translation of knowledge and ideas»⁵.

This process responds to the human need to navigate between theory and practice, to engage actively and take action, while also pausing to reflect and question. Indeed, the approach of *Alternanza formativa* «[...] mostra che [...] è necessario alternare, senza creare gerarchie, le polarità che costituiscono

³ R. Watermeyer, J. Lewis, *Public engagement in higher education: the state of the art*, in J. Huisman & J. Case (eds.) *Investigating Higher Education: A Critical Review of Research Contributions*, Routledge, London, 2015, p. 1.

⁴ S. M. Nhlapo, *Universities as catalysts for change: rethinking their role in society*, «Perspectives: Policy and Practice in Higher Education», 2025, p. 1.

⁵ R. Watermeyer, J. Lewis, *Public engagement in higher education: the state of the art*, in J. Huisman & J. Case (eds.) *Investigating Higher Education: A Critical Review of Research Contributions*, cit., p. 10.

l'essere umano: pratica e teoria, esperienza e riflessione, lavoro e studio. [...] l'importanza di pensare pratica e teoria, corpo e mente, esperienza e ragione al di fuori di ogni gerarchia»⁶.

Participation in public engagement events promoted by universities can be understood as a form of active citizenship, as participants are not merely recipients of content but are involved in processes of dialogue, interpretation, and the shared construction of meaning around socially relevant themes:

Citizenship education deals with the relationship between the individual and political society, between the self and others. The curriculum needs to reflect this: it must help the individual understand both their own identity and the nature of society, and how to actively engage with the complex relationship of rights and responsibilities that exist between the two⁷.

In this field of interaction with society and public involvement in a scientific and academic context, children's literature embraces a particularly meaningful role. It distinguishes itself through its ability of conveying the human experience from different perspectives and to present itself as a bridge between reality and imagination. It guides readers on journeys filled with relationships, emotions and reflections, that stimulate questions and promote a critical outlook of reality.

La letteratura è il luogo per eccellenza dell'ascolto e dell'incontro con l'altro, la letteratura per l'infanzia racconta la complessità umana sempre. Anche quando mette in pagina bolli di colore o topi indaffarati racconta di noi, del nostro mistero, del nostro essere in continuo mutamento, inafferrabili e inquieti attraversatori leggeri di un mondo in divenire di cui non possiamo che cogliere ombre, figure, forme, per meravigliarci insieme della loro metamorfica vitalità.⁸

⁶ «[...] shows that [...] it is necessary to alternate, without creating hierarchies, the polarities that constitute human beings: practice and theory, experience and reflection, work and study. [...] the importance of thinking of practice and theory, body and mind, experience and reason outside any hierarchical framework». L.S. Agrati, A. Potestio, *Lavoro come esperienza e formazione iniziale di maestri e maestre: il modulo 'Alternanza formativa' presso l'Università degli Studi di Bergamo*, «Pedagogia oggi», XX, 1 (2022), p. 87. (Translation by the author).

⁷ R. Alistair, *Education for Active Citizenship: Practices, Policies, Promises*, «International Journal of Progressive Education», VIII, 3 (2012), p. 7.

⁸ «Literature is, above all, a space for listening and for encountering others; children's literature, in particular, always tells about the complexity of being human. Even when it brings to life simple shapes or busy little mice, it is still telling a story about us, about our mystery, our constant change, our elusive and restless nature as we move lightly through a world in flux. We can only grasp glimpses of it, shadows, figures, fleeting forms, and yet we can marvel together at their ever-changing vitality». M. Terrusi, *L'albo illustrato: una panoramica fra storia, storie, visioni e contemporaneità*, in S. Barsotti, L. Cantatore (ed.), *Letteratura per l'infanzia. Forme temi e simboli del contemporaneo*, Carrocci editore, Roma, 2019, p. 179. (Translation by the author).

Children's literature is able to engage people's thoughts, transporting them to other worlds and introducing them to diverse realities, as well as to different personalities and ways of living. Its impact lies in its power to reach people: by employing multiple languages to convey stories and concepts, this discipline becomes universally approachable.

Quando è arte la letteratura riesce in un intento che è tipico e solo dell'arte: trascendere l'esperienza e la realtà; superare i limiti del vissuto per far approdare a una possibilità percettiva – sensibile – epifanica altra, differente; spostare il lettore e fruitore oltre i limiti del dato per permettere una rivisitazione estetizzata dell'esperienza. Quando è arte la letteratura trova parole per dire qualcosa che spesso è solo intuibile o celato nel profondo inconscio dei vissuti affettivi [...] Così è della letteratura per l'infanzia quando ha la complessità, la bellezza, la profondità [...] l'inesauribilità dell'arte⁹.

Indeed, its visual, textual, and artistic dimensions broaden its reach to a wide audience, thus making it an inclusive field. In fact, it offers a range of opportunities tailored to the target audience and their needs, spanning areas such as cultural and social history, pedagogical and educational development, lifelong learning grounded in developmental psychology, and the realm of imagination and creativity.

«La lezione pedagogica che dalla poetica di questi libri scaturisce riporta alle pratiche dell'ascolto, del dialogo e dell'osservazione reciproca, nel rispetto e nell'omaggio alla molteplicità del mondo»¹⁰.

With regard to the cultural dimension, through children's literature texts readers are exposed to a variety of textual forms that offer diverse stimuli, both in terms of content and structure (such as picturebooks, illustrated books, silent books, and informational texts). Concerning the pedagogical and educational dimension, this refers to the inherent potential of children's literature as a set of

⁹ «When literature becomes art, it achieves something that is distinctive to art alone: it transcends experience and reality; it moves beyond the limits of lived experience to open up other perceptual – sensory – and even epiphanic possibilities; it shifts the reader beyond the given, allowing for an aesthetic reworking of experience. When literature is art, it finds words for what is often only intuited or lies hidden deep within the unconscious layers of emotional life [...] So it is with children's literature when it attains the complexity, beauty, depth [...] and inexhaustibility of art.». G. Brancaloni, *Letteratura per l'infanzia: lasciate che sia letteratura! Lasciate che sia smarrimento!*, in a cura di A. Mazzini, A. Nobile, *Quale letteratura per l'infanzia? Morfologia di una disciplina in trasformazione*, Marcianum Press, Venezia, 2024, p. 157. (Translation by the author).

¹⁰ «The pedagogical lesson emerging from the poetics of these books brings us back to practices of listening, dialogue, and mutual observation, in respect for and celebration of the world's diversity.». M. Terrusi, «Leggere controvento: riflessioni sui libri senza parole fra realtà e prospettive», in a cura di A. Mazzini, A. Nobile, *Quale letteratura per l'infanzia? Morfologia di una disciplina in trasformazione*, cit. p. 233. (Translation by the author).

tools that enables children to develop observation skills, reflection, critical thinking, as well as to cultivate habits of dialogue and interaction with peers and adults, thereby fostering both educational relationships and peer ones. It therefore involves a combination of curiosity, participation, and the construction of meanings that highlight the potential for active citizenship even in early childhood. «Attraverso la storia narrata, reale o immaginata, con i suoi tempi dilatati e innescando lo spazio della sosta, l'azione intenzionale dello stare fermi [...], l'uomo scopre qualcosa di sé [...] 'un fermati-e-pensa' [...] la possibilità continua di prendere e darsi forma»¹¹.

It also contributes to the development of literacy and writing skills.

Stories convey lessons that can be internalised over a lifetime, supporting ongoing learning and personal growth, which develop through emotional experience and relationships with others and the environment, also within surreal and imaginative settings.

L'essere umano è [...] intimamente e costitutivamente intriso di narrazione in primis perché, nel momento in cui incontra l'altro e con lui si relaziona, si racconta e ascolta un racconto. La narrazione appare insomma non solo come il primo e fondamentale modo di condividere il proprio pensiero e i propri atti, ma anche ciò che essenzialmente si è¹².

Finally, it stimulates creativity and creates opportunities to encounter and engage with diversity and difference.

In this context, proposing children's literature events as opportunities to bring the university and academic knowledge closer to the public (and vice versa) aims to provide stimuli and occasions for reflection on the topic through practical engagement. This leads to «[...] aspire to educational processes that empowered citizens – providing the intellectual skills and the practical knowledge to individuals who will critically engage with, and seek to affect the course of, social events. Active citizenship is, very broadly, about doing things».¹³

¹¹ «Through the narrated story, whether real or imagined, with its expanded sense of time and its invitation to pause, the intentional act of being still [...], the individual discovers something about themselves [...] a 'stop-and-think' moment [...] the ongoing possibility of shaping and reshaping oneself». A. Mazzini, *Da un lavoro al proprio lavoro. Una teoria dell'educazione e formazione nella letteratura per l'infanzia e l'adolescenza*, Marcianum press, Venezia, 2022, pp. 61-62. (Translation by the author).

¹² «Human beings are [...] intimately and constitutively imbued with narrative, first and foremost because, when they encounter others and relate to them, they tell stories and listen to stories. Narrative thus appears not only as the primary and fundamental way of sharing one's thoughts and actions, but also as what one essentially is.». Ivi, p. 58. (Translation by the author).

¹³ R. Alistair, *Education for Active Citizenship: Practices, Policies, Promises*, cit., p. 8.

This is made possible through community-based activities, workshops, and projects involving both children and adults, as well as local organisations, alongside opportunities to access spaces and resources within an environment that fosters the exchange of ideas.

This situation enables participants to become a community of inquiry, grounded in the «[...] idea che imparando gli uni con gli altri non solo mettiamo in atto una ricerca aperta (e senza fine), ma costruiamo il noi, che è qualcosa che si chiama 'comunità', oggi. Ciò equivale a creare [...] una comunità di vita e d'esperienza»¹⁴. In this way, participants become active agents in a workshop-based experience that, by its very nature, becomes «mezzo di lettura e di interpretazione della realtà [...], [...] un potente generatore di senso [...] stimola la messa in gioco dell'interesse della persona»¹⁵.

For the purposes of this study, only a selection of the most representative examples of public engagement projects focused on children's literature were identified for each continent, based on the following criteria: free events led by a public university, annual initiatives or editions of projects with long-term perspectives and the availability of accessible information regarding outcomes, feedback, and data related to the project's development. The selection includes some borderline cases due to limited availability of comparable university-led initiatives across all continents.

In this comparative study, the project *Uni in Fabula*, promoted by the Department of Human and Social Sciences at the University of Bergamo and coordinated by Professor Alessandra Mazzini, is adopted as the primary case study due to its strong focus on children's literature, its hybrid format in terms of the modes of delivery, its broad target audience and significant territorial dimension.

¹⁴ «[...] idea that by learning with and from one another we not only engage in an open (and ongoing) process of inquiry, but also build a sense of 'we', what we call a 'community' today. This amounts to creating [...] a community of life and experience.». F. C. Manara, *Il principio della comunità di ricerca in Lorenzo Milani*, «Orientamenti pedagogici», LXIII, 3 (2016), p. 488. (Translation by the author).

¹⁵ «A way of reading and interpreting reality [...], [...] a powerful generator of meaning [...] that engages the whole person». A cura di G. Bertagna, *Fare laboratorio. Scenari culturali ed esperienze di ricerca nella scuola del secondo ciclo*, La Scuola, Brescia, 2012, p. 185-186. (Translation by the author).

Disseminating Children's Literature beyond Academia

In general, the dissemination of children's literature is a multidimensional process that integrates educational purposes, cultural valorisation, academic dissemination, artistic expression, and social impact.

L'uso di alcuni strumenti della critica estetico-letteraria [...] permette di far vedere al giovane lettore anche il non evidente, il celato e di comprendere come anche fra le righe di un testo visivo vi è molto di non detto. [...] L'assimilazione di una grammatica del visivo e la maggior dimestichezza con l'analisi comparativa predispone il giovane fruitore alla possibilità di prendere in considerazione orizzonti visivi poco frequentati¹⁶.

From a pedagogical perspective, children's literature is recognised as a valuable resource for developing linguistic competences, including vocabulary expansion and literacy skills, while also fostering critical thinking and both introspective and interpersonal reflection. Moreover, through stories featuring real or imaginative characters, children are able to experience emotions and engage in their earliest forms of relationships with peers and adults.

Si potrebbe [...] affermare [...] che la letteratura per l'infanzia è [...] un crocevia. [...] non solo è costitutivamente composita, ma è anche collocata su una soglia, [...] "porta" [...] che consente il passaggio. La fitta rete di rimandi storici, filosofici, psicologici, sociologici, antropologici, educativi, letterari stessi e culturali [...] è un fronte mobile, che avanza verso terre indeterminate. [...] è proiezione verso l'esterno, [...] un inizio e non una fine [...]¹⁷.

Children's literature is also an integral component of future teacher and educator training programs: thanks to its multiple potential applications, it enables professionals to develop a deeper awareness of the field and to broaden their perspective beyond conventional boundaries.

¹⁶ «The use of certain tools from aesthetic and literary criticism [...] makes it possible to reveal to young readers what is not immediately apparent, what lies hidden, and to understand how even within the lines of a visual text there is much that remains unsaid. [...] Acquiring a grammar of the visual and greater familiarity with comparative analysis equips young viewers to consider less familiar visual horizons.». M. Campagnaro, *La pluridimensionalità della visual literacy. Albi illustrati e itinerari educativi*, in a cura di S. Barsotti S., L. Cantatore, *Letteratura per l'infanzia. Forme, temi e simboli del contemporaneo*, cit., p. 124. (Translation by the author).

¹⁷ «It could [...] be argued [...] that children's literature is [...] a crossroads. [...] It is not only inherently composite, but also situated on a threshold, a "door" [...] that allows passage. The dense network of historical, philosophical, psychological, sociological, anthropological, educational, literary and cultural references [...] constitutes a moving frontier, advancing toward indeterminate territories. [...] It is a projection outward [...] a beginning rather than an end [...]». A. Nobile, *Introduzione*, in a cura di A. Mazzini, A. Nobile, *Quale letteratura per l'infanzia? Morfologia di una disciplina in trasformazione*, cit., p. 12. (Translation by the author).

A second perspective links children's literature to territory and culture through a variety of modalities. These include physical spaces where tangible and accessible materials can be found, such as bookshops and libraries; events, festivals, and workshops that foster participation and the sharing of experiences and knowledge. Nowadays there's also the possibility to have access to virtual environments where content about children's literature can be published, and online resources can be consulted, such as websites, blogs and social media contents.

«All'interno della nuova dimensione narrativa, emerge la figura del racconto transmediale. [...] questo approccio distribuisce elementi chiave della storia su vari canali comunicativi, offrendo al lettore un'esperienza olistica e sinergica [...]»¹⁸.

This ensures the material (book reviews, educational pathways, training programs, ...) is available at any time and facilitates its circulation, enhancing its accessibility through the use of a device. Certainly, however, this possibility exposes users to risks concerning the reliability of sources and the accuracy of the content.

Methodology

This study adopts a qualitative comparative approach to analyse public engagement initiatives focused on children's literature promoted by public universities worldwide.

[...] building their intercultural understandings and abilities to successfully interact across cultures [...] This approach [...] also encourages [...] critical thinking and cross-cultural investigations. In addition, experiences with culturally diverse literature contributes to enlarging interdisciplinary content-area knowledge (social studies, arts, history, etc.) and supports a more engaged discussion about responsible and participative global citizenship [...]¹⁹.

The projects were selected in order to ensure representation across continents, with at least one country included for each, thus enabling a global perspective and a broader comparison. Rather than adopting a fixed temporal framework, this study

¹⁸ «Within the new narrative dimension, the figure of transmedia storytelling emerges. [...] This approach distributes key elements of the story across different communication channels, offering the reader a holistic and synergistic experience [...]». T. Mascia, J.-A. Aerila, *Oltre il libro cartaceo: le nuove frontiere della letteratura per l'infanzia*, in a cura di A. Mazzini, A. Nobile, *Quale letteratura per l'infanzia? Morfologia di una disciplina in trasformazione*, cit. p. 281. (Translation by the author).

¹⁹ M. Campagnaro, N. Daly, K. G. Short, *Editorial: "Teaching Children's Literature in the University: New Perspectives and Challenges for the Future"*, «Journal of Literary Education», 4 (2021), p. 2.

focuses on recent and ongoing public engagement initiatives. Projects were included if they were active, implemented, or had at least one documented edition in recent years (up to 2025), regardless of their original date of establishment. This choice is motivated by the significant heterogeneity in the operational structures of the analysed initiatives, which range from long-term and continuous programmes to recurring events and one-off activities. Such variability makes the application of rigid temporal or continuity-based criteria only partially effective.

The analysis of each public engagement project is based on publicly available information, including academic articles, university websites, project or event webpages, and social media platforms. The projects are examined according to common analytical categories, such as types of activities, target audiences, places of the events and modes of engagement.

A common limitation across the analysed cases is the lack of systematic impact evaluation, with most initiatives relying on descriptive or qualitative feedback rather than structured assessment tools. Not all cases fully met the selected criteria; the purpose is also to find at least a case for every continent to provide different perspectives about the same field.

Comparative Analysis

University of Bergamo: Uni in Fabula (Italy)

L'idea di un'Università in grado di catalizzare e contribuire al cambiamento e alla giustizia sociale ha acquisito rapidamente rilevanza e ha assunto una valenza strutturale, anche alla luce di crisi globali – ambientali, sanitarie, democratiche – che richiedono risposte complesse e collaborative, orientando il sistema universitario verso una logica di impatto sociale [...] È importante, inoltre, non considerare la misura dell'impatto sociale esclusivamente finalizzata a esercizi valutativi o di rendicontazione ex-post, utili a verificare il raggiungimento di obiettivi prefissati. È, soprattutto, uno strumento da applicare ex-ante e in itinere, capace di generare consapevolezza e trasformazione²⁰.

²⁰ «The idea of a university capable of catalysing and contributing to social change and social justice has quickly gained prominence and taken on a structural role, also in light of global crises – environmental, health-related, and democratic – that call for complex and collaborative responses, steering the university system towards a logic of social impact [...] It is also important not to view the measurement of social impact solely as a tool for evaluative or ex-post accountability exercises, useful for verifying the achievement of predefined objectives. Rather, it should be understood above all as an ex-ante and ongoing instrument, capable of generating awareness and transformation.». A. De Bortoli, P. Lombardi, *Perché è importante misurare l'impatto*, in G. Conti et al., *I ruoli delle università per il progresso della società. Dalla Terza missione alla Valorizzazione delle conoscenze*, CRUI, Roma, 2025, pp. 106-108. (Translation by the author).

In this context of the University's contribution to social change, children's literature emerges as a key medium for fostering awareness through forms of expression that are characteristic of childhood. Various Italian Universities are engaged in involving diverse audiences through initiatives that make it possible to explore different narrative forms while also encouraging engagement with the 'other'. Using tools appropriate to children's age and developmental stage, these activities help cultivate new sensitivities and bring participants closer to pressing contemporary issues.

Uni in Fabula, which illustrates this point, is a project focused on children's and young adult literature. It is promoted by the University of Bergamo as part of its knowledge exchange activities and is coordinated by Professor Alessandra Mazzini. Launched in 2024,

Uni in Fabula is a Public Engagement project [...] promoted by the Department of Human and Social Sciences and aligned with the Third Mission objectives of the Department's Strategic Plan 2023–2025. It positions itself as a 'key interlocutor for local institutions and communities' with the aim of 'addressing contemporary cultural challenges' affecting the worlds of childhood and adolescence, while fostering 'awareness' of how quality literature and reading can serve as effective tools for promoting individual and social wellbeing²¹.

The initiative engages children, families, professionals, and enthusiasts through a series of free events that take place within academic settings and also across the local area, in collaboration with local partner organisations. Activities vary in format and participants, and this multidimensional approach is intended to foster greater awareness and critical understanding of the complexity of children's literature across its cultural, pedagogical, aesthetic, and publishing dimensions. Through activities for children, discussion moments, workshops, and dissemination and training events, *Uni in Fabula* pursues four main objectives: social engagement, cultural promotion, the valorisation of local knowledge, and the creation of new shared scientific knowledge.

The project promotes citizen participation through initiatives that build networks between the university, the local area, and participants, transforming academic knowledge into a shared knowledge. From a cultural perspective, the activities foster a stronger awareness of children's and young adult literature, enhancing its

²¹ <https://uni-in-fabula.unibg.it/home> (accessed June 25, 2026).

multiple forms of expression and engaging diverse audiences through an interdisciplinary approach.

The project also supports the valorisation of the local area by strengthening the role of local institutions such as libraries, bookshops, and cultural associations, while also attracting new audiences. This participatory approach encourages the co-construction of knowledge between the university and citizens, generating new insights and perspectives for research.

Uni in Fabula delivered three editions and the fourth is currently ongoing. The first one ran from 22 March to 8 June 2024, the second from 23 November to 16 December 2024, the third from 6 to 19 May 2025. Each event consists of a series of events held throughout the year, in collaboration with local and national partners, as well as professionals both within and beyond the university. Some of these initiatives have been repeated across editions and have become distinctive features of the project.

Project activities have taken place in a variety of settings, including academic and institutional spaces (such as university classrooms, libraries, and schools), as well as open and informal environments, such as a botanical garden and a public park, thus promoting broad and inclusive participation. The multidimensional nature of the program is grounded in the idea of diverse forms of engagement—an approach designed to educate and, in some way, transform («Nella formazione è [...] l'io che modella se stesso e che esperisce [...] questo 'dar forma' a sè [...]»²².) participants. Each event has been designed and implemented in different contexts, selected according to the target audiences and the skills to be fostered. This has encouraged multiple forms of participation, ranging from hands-on workshops to shared reflection, from the use of natural and recycled materials to the co-construction of meaning.

Among the recurring activities across all editions, particular attention has been given to events centred on the use of *Kamishibai*, a traditional Japanese paper theatre. These activities have generated strong interest among families with young children, as well as among future educators and teachers.

Another key type of activity is the seminar format, which has involved university lecturers and field experts in dialogue with audiences composed of enthusiasts,

²² «In education [...] it is the self that shapes itself, engaging in [...] this process of 'forming itself' [...]». G. Bertagna, *Tra educazione e formazione. Plaidoyer per una distinzione nell'unità*, in Id., *Educazione e formazione. Sinonimie, analogie, differenze*, Studium, Roma, 2018, p. 126. (Translation by the author).

educators, teachers, and students, focusing on specific dimensions of children's literature. A recurring theme has been poetry, explored both through practical workshops with children and families and through seminar sessions featuring distinguished guests from other universities and professional organisations.

A further distinctive feature of *Uni in Fabula* is the systematic collection of feedback at the end of each event. This is conceived not merely as a moment of evaluation, but as a genuine guiding tool for the design and improvement of future initiatives. Participants, both adults and children, are invited to share their perspectives through differentiated and inclusive methods.

Children are offered a free expressive space, where they can create drawings, write short comments on *Say it your way* sheets or on a satisfaction survey (via QR code) with the possibility to use ACC. Adults, on the other hand, can share their feedback by scanning a QR code or accessing the project's website. In the 'Fablog' section, the collected contributions, anonymous yet publicly accessible, reflect participants' perceptions and experiences, while also offering suggestions and insights for organisers and the wider community, thus fostering an ongoing and shared process of reflection and redesign. Moreover, the social media pages of the University of Bergamo publish content such as reels and posts related to the events. The website, and 'Fablog' in particular, serve as a unique channel for direct communication with the organising team and for staying updated on upcoming events.

University of Padova: Piccole letture in città (Italy)

Piccole letture in città is a knowledge exchange project conceived and organised by the *Working Group on Children's and Young Adult Literature* (LETIN, coordinated by Professor Marnie Campagnaro) within the Department of Philosophy, Sociology, Education and Applied Psychology (FISPPA) at the University of Padua.

LETIN UNIPD combines research leadership, higher education, international collaboration, and public engagement. Its work is developed through research projects, international conferences, editorial initiatives, advanced training, and collaborations with universities, research centres, and cultural institutions in Italy and abroad. A distinctive feature of the group is its capacity to connect rigorous scholarship with educational and cultural practice, generating impact across academic, school, library, and community contexts while fostering dialogue between research, teaching, and the public sphere. For this reason, the group is also

actively engaged in innovative teaching practices and coordinates an advanced Postgraduate Course in Children's Literature²³.

The program, addressed to the local community, aims to promote knowledge, experience, and reading practices related to children's literature through training activities, workshops, seminars, and cultural initiatives that connect academic research with educational and social contexts in the Veneto region.

The activities are structured in different formats, with the aim of exploring children's and young adult literature from theoretical, pedagogical, and critical-educational perspectives. It promotes sharing of good educational practices in both formal and non-formal contexts and encourages interactive and sensory experiences with narrative and illustrated materials.

It also builds concrete educational networks between academia and the local area, including libraries, schools, and civic institutions.

La città non è solo un luogo di attraversamento, ma un'estensione della casa; e la casa, a sua volta, riflette, modella e talvolta contesta il modello di società che la città incorpora e rielabora. Il passaggio tra interno ed esterno non è mai soltanto spaziale: è narrativo, esistenziale, politico. È in questa oscillazione tra intimità ed esposizione, tra rifugio ed esplorazione, che si costruisce l'esperienza infantile del mondo. Ripercorrere le tappe di questo iter non significa solo intessere un filo conduttore, ma riconoscere come ogni passaggio abbia ridefinito il percorso stesso, tracciando una mappa di interrogazioni sempre più ramificata. Ogni approdo non è stato un punto di arrivo, ma un varco che ha aperto nuove prospettive [...]»²⁴.

The project combines seminars and conferences with experiential workshops and practical initiatives designed to experiment with active, dialogic, and creative reading pathways for children, families, and professionals.

The first cycle of activities of *Piccole letture in città* took place during the 2023/2024 academic year in a variety of settings, with the aim of reaching and

²³ <https://www.childrensliterature-unipd.it/about/> (accessed June 20, 2026).

²⁴ «The city is not merely a place to pass through, but an extension of the home; and the home, in turn, reflects, shapes, and sometimes challenges the model of society that the city embodies and reworks. The transition between inside and outside is never purely spatial: it is narrative, existential, and political. It is within this oscillation between intimacy and exposure, between refuge and exploration, that the childhood experience of the world is constructed. Retracing the stages of this journey does not simply mean weaving a connecting thread, but recognising how each passage has redefined the path itself, tracing a map of increasingly branching questions. Each arrival has not been a point of arrival, but a threshold that has opened up new perspectives [...].» M. Campagnaro, *Paesaggi d'infanzia. Radici storiche, prospettive critiche, immaginari ecologici, narrazioni letterarie*, Edizioni Sinestesie, Avellino 2024, p. 17. (Translation by the author).

engaging a broad audience. It was repeated in a second, shorter edition, mainly seminar-based, held during the 2024/2025 academic year and delivered online. The project promotes concrete experiences aimed at engaging participants in the promotion of interactive reading within a framework of pedagogical reflection and integration between theory and *praxis*. It fosters a convergence between the everyday lives of people within the local community and the vision of the university as a community of people. *Piccole letture in città* is embedded within a broader context of research and training activities on children's and young adult literature promoted by the LETIN group, which also includes further interdisciplinary training initiatives and collaborations with local programs focused on reading promotion and the pedagogy of texts.

A key element ensuring continuity and fostering closer engagement between the public, the project, and the LETIN group's public engagement initiatives is the Instagram page 'childrensliterature.unipd'. Through the content shared on the profile, users can stay updated, discover new initiatives, with information on how to participate in the events. Moreover, the immediacy of social media facilitates accessible interaction between organisers and participants.

Swansea University: Children's and Young People's Literature Festival (UK)

Over the past two decades, the conceptualisation of public engagement in UK research has undergone a marked transformation. Initially dominated by outreach and communication models aimed at raising public awareness, engagement is now increasingly framed in terms of participation, co-production, and dialogue. This evolution reflects a broader 'relational turn' in engagement thinking, emphasising mutual learning, trust-building, and the need to share power between researchers and communities. [...] the literature reflects a shift from 'engagement-as-event' to 'engagement-as-process', one that is relational, reflexive, and sustained. This conceptual progression aligns with wider debates on research justice, inclusion, and public accountability, reinforcing the view that engagement is not merely desirable, but integral to responsible and impactful research²⁵.

Swansea University's initiative can be understood within a relational framework of public engagement. In this perspective, public engagement is conceived as an ongoing and evolving process that involves participants in shared practices of

²⁵ R. Allinson, K. Nielsen, S. Ray-Coquai, V. Seth, L. Sutinen, A. Vingre, *Factors Affecting Public Engagement by UK Researchers 2025*, Royal society, London 2026, pp.4-5.

reflection and exchange. Through a range of dedicated events and activities, young participants are introduced to children's literature and encouraged to develop a pleasure in reading. At the same time, the project fosters intergenerational dialogue, creating opportunities for meaningful encounters and mutual learning across different sectors of the community.

Children's and Young People's Literature Festival is a public engagement event to connect children and families with authors and literature. For this occasion, Swansea's National Waterfront Museum opened the doors to host workshops, authors meetings and collective readings of different kind of books.

«The two-day festival will feature storytelling and story-making sessions in both English and Welsh, offering families, schools, and young readers the opportunity to engage with a wide range of contemporary authors and illustrators from Wales and across the UK»²⁶.

The Festival took place in two editions, the first one in 2023 and the second one in 2025 with the possibility to book tickets for free and involved practical activities for children, meetings and conversations with authors and workshops.

In the event's website is possible to find a review about the 2023's edition, which reports a strongly participatory and multidisciplinary approach, offering author talks and practical session with storytelling, creative workshops, as well as music, theatre, and performance activities. Events were conducted in both English and Welsh, contributing to the promotion of the local cultural and linguistic context.

Conceived and developed through collaboration between the university and various cultural organisations, including *Save the Children Cymru and Literature Wales*, the festival placed a strong emphasis on openness and accessibility, making it engaging for families and schools.

The project was widely successful, as reflected in the feedback highlighting the quality of the organisation, the variety of activities, and the opportunity for children to meet and interact with authors. The festival helped bring younger audiences closer to reading and offered them the chance to be part of a stimulating and enriching environment.

²⁶ <https://www.swansea.ac.uk/cultural-institute/news-archive/childrens-and-young-peoples-literature-festival-2025/swansea-university-announces-stellar-line-up-for-childrens-and-young-peoples-literature-festival-2025.php> (accessed June 25, 2026).

Dresden University: “KinderLeseUniversität” (Germany)

There is a widely entertained, societal obligation on the part of scientific institutions to serve society with social impact and to engage citizens in research policy (Ziman, 1984, 173ff.). This is also evidenced in recent policy documents (e.g. the European Union Framework Programme for Research and Innovation define tackling societal challenges through research as one of the main priorities for Europe in the next decade (RRI, 2013)), and by procedures of research funding bodies that require plans for engaging society with the results of the funded research. As a result, universities and scientific institutions face an imperative to facilitate ‘pathways to impact’ for their research [...] ²⁷.

One of the roles of the University within the framework of knowledge valorisation is, therefore, to engage people in a meaningful and impactful manner. This exchange between communities, places and the University is mutually enriching, as it establishes a learning process that involves all parties and generates new perspectives for reflection. It fosters greater awareness and creates opportunities for change, as illustrated by a specific project conducted by the Dresden University of Technology, known as *KinderLeseUniversität*.

It concerns a service-learning program aimed at pupils and students, combining the acquisition of subject-specific knowledge with social engagement. The project was launched in 2011 and took shape in 2012 through the collaboration between Nicole Berg, a teacher seconded to the ZLSB, and Dr. Ulrike Günther, a research associate at the Chair of NDL and Didactics.

Implemented since 2012, it remains an ongoing service-learning initiative organised in recurring cycles where school classes take part free of charge and visit the Technical University. There they are introduced to the university environment and gain an initial sense of their potential future educational paths.

The *Children’s Reading University* also offers student teachers the opportunity to design, reflect on, and organise children’s literature seminars as part of their academic training. In this way, theory and practice converge within their educational experience through direct interaction with the project’s participants. The open dialogue among all those involved in the *KinderLeseUniversität* serves as a stimulus for the continuous improvement and enrichment of the project itself.

²⁷ M. Entradas, M. W. Bauer, *Mobilisation for public engagement: benchmarking the practices of research institutes* «The London School of Economic and Political Science Research Online», XXVI, 7 (2016), p. 2.

University of South Africa (South Africa)

[...] is engagement or community engagement a core and central purpose, function, or role of universities? [...] The roles that African universities must play in society [...] will [...] be shaped by the structural and conjunctural conditions [...] with the economic and social challenges of their local, national, regional, continental, and global contexts. Louise Vincent (2016) [...] argues that issues “related ultimately to the purpose of the university entails a deep engagement, both literally and theoretically, [...] with the idea ‘of the university as situated in ‘place’ – geography, history, social relations, economics and politics – all the forces that combine to make an empty space a ‘place’. [...] A ‘critical pedagogy of place’ offers [...] the opportunity to root and knit the university within the fabric of its society and to pursue its social purposes in close connection with its diverse economic, social, and political challenges²⁸.

This approach can be illustrated by various initiatives developed in African Universities in the field of children’s literature, where academic engagement is closely linked to the specificities of the local context. In these cases, the proposals and dissemination about children’s literature are not isolated activities, but rather become tools through which the university is rooted in its own ‘place’, responding to concrete educational, cultural and social challenges.

The Department of Library Services at the University of South Africa hosted a public engagement program at the Mamelodi Campus, designed to involve preschool children in an event introducing them to the world of reading. The program took place on 12 September 2024 in the university’s sensory garden and welcomed young learners from Amogelang Preschool. The university’s community engagement team dedicated the day to fostering a passion for books and reading through collective reading sessions and play-based activities, with the aim of «support vulnerable and underserved members of the community»²⁹.

Mzuzu University: “Mzuzu University Children Libray” (Malawi)

The case of Mzuzu University offers a different perspective on how to engage young people within both the physical and perceived university environment. The

²⁸ S. Fongwa et al., *Universities, Society and Development: African Perspectives of University Community Engagement in Secondary Cities*, Sun Press, South Africa 2022, pp. 261-263.

²⁹ T. Sithole, *Storytelling: A Heartfelt Outreach at Mamelodi Campus*. 2024, available at <https://www.up.ac.za/departments-of-library-services/news/storytelling-heartfelt-outreach-mamelodi-campus> (accessed June 20, 2026).

Malawian university has proposed extending academic space into a public space, specifically aimed at young learners. As stated, «The Children's Library is one of the vehicles for accomplishing part of the University's mission of providing complementary services to meet the technological, social, and economic needs of individuals and communities in Malawi»³⁰.

This library, opened in 2004, aims to promote awareness of the importance of reading and being informed among children in communities surrounding the university. Concurrently, it provides the institution with opportunities to develop outreach and research activities.

University of Central Missouri: "Children's Literature Festival" (Missouri, US)

Rebuilding the relationship between America's universities and society may seem like a daunting challenge, one requiring radical transformation of centuries-old institutions. [...] It stands to reason that institutions benefiting from substantial public support should demonstrate clear societal impact. [...] the idea that institutions which have historically led scientific advancement should recommit themselves to solving society's most pressing challenges is simply a return to their core mission. University leaders and policymakers have the opportunity to forge a path forward where higher education once again serves as a powerful force for [...] social progress³¹.

In a broader context of engagement with social challenges and the promotion of social progress through educational institutions, American universities, in their diverse forms and geographic settings, offer opportunities for engagement with children and their families. By creating spaces for sharing and exchange, they provide tangible ways to experience children's literature in different contexts, fostering a more conscious and meaningful form of interaction with it.

An example of this can be found in *The Children's Literature Festival* at the University of Central Missouri was established in 1969 by Philip Sadler and Ophelia Gilbert, who initially invited a small group of Missouri authors to engage with local students. Over time, the event has expanded significantly and is now recognized as the longest-running children's literature festival in the United States specifically dedicated to young audiences. The festival is hosted within the university campus

³⁰ https://bwengu.mzuni.ac.mw/pages/main_pages/child_lib.php (accessed June 20, 2026).

³¹ R. R. Banks et al., *An Agenda for America's Universities to Serve the Public Interest*, Stanford Centre for Racial Justice, Stanford 2025, p. 8.

and mainly consists of author-led sessions, readings, and interactive encounters with school groups. It regularly features a diverse range of authors and illustrators from both Missouri and across the country, combining returning participants with new guests each year.

For many students, attending the festival represents a memorable experience, often marking their first visit to a university campus and their first opportunity to meet authors whose works they admire.

The program took place from 9 to 11 March 2025 in Warrensburg, Missouri. After participating in the festival, a survey was sent to each attending school and the festival website published the results in its annual report.

«Nearly 72% of all respondents indicated that the 2025 presenters either exceeded or far exceeded expectations for engagement. An even higher percentage (74.3%) found the presentations to be relevant to their students' grade levels or ages.»³²

As indicated in the report, the *University of Central Missouri Children's Literature Festival* brought together around 3500 participants, offering a range of public events with a strong focus on inclusion and accessibility, as shown by the significant participation of schools from socio-economically disadvantaged contexts.

National University of La Plata: "Reading and Writing in Unit 33: Mothers, Children and Educational Institutions" (Argentina)

The National University of La Plata has developed a project in collaboration with Women's Prison Unit 33 in the Province of Buenos Aires and local educational authorities. This initiative can be regarded as a public engagement project, as it fosters exchange between the university and a marginalised community, thereby promoting participation and social inclusion. Launched in 2010 and running continuously ever since, the programme is based on non-formal educational and cultural activities centred on reading, writing, and other forms of expression, including music, play, and theatre. Its aim is to encourage interaction between mothers and their children and to support children's educational development.

Through early childhood educators and teaching staff, institutional stakeholders including university teams, public education and penitentiary authorities, the

³² University of Central Missouri, *Annual Report 2025*, available at <https://clf.ucmo.edu/CLF%202025%20Annual%20Report.pdf> (accessed June 30, 2026).

program involves incarcerated women and their children aged 0–4 living in prison. Practically, the activities lead children to discover the reading word through free exploration of books, reading sessions and discussions, play-based activities shared with their mothers.

Children's literature acts as both an educational and relational tool, supporting literacy development, strengthening mother–child interaction, and fostering inclusive opportunities in contexts of social deprivation.

From the beginning of the project, it was evident that women, with or without children in the unit, needed their own space to [...] reconnect with their own experiences in order to build collective experiences, the reparative value of which has already been documented in critical contexts of marginalization and confinement. [...] The continuity of the work situations organized and themes to be addressed over time makes these proposals more predictable in a context characterized by discontinuity in attendance and flexibility in the arrival time of its participants. [...] The creation of a space for interaction between books and readers is strengthened by the provision of quality materials and varied exchange proposals. [...] The periodic registration of the activities developed by the team and discussion about them are indispensable to support and/or review the proposals implemented³³.

An analysis of the testimonies provided by participants reveals the significant impact and engaging nature of this initiative, highlighting how it stimulated new reflections and generated further intellectual and personal development.

For example, Marta describes 'La Ronda' as a space where it was possible to recover what she had lost: laughter, a little freedom, a living space. Yole considers that it was a milestone in her life [...]: «Here, I began to talk [...] whereas before, in the street, or even when I arrived here, they called me 'dumb' because I didn't speak». All of the participants commented on the place of reading in their own subjectivity, the possibility of 'inhabiting other worlds', and, from there, reading their own 'between the lines'. Marta expresses renewed interest in books and tells how, through them, she can find traces of her own history: «there is a lot in common [...] I find sentences or stories or things that are like my life». For some interviewees, shared reading was an activity that they had never experienced; for others, it was an opportunity to learn to read, to practise something that they had rarely been able to do or to recover the lost value of reading and writing. Mara's experience enabled her to find the answer to a longstanding question: the meaning of reading for readers (why did people sit reading on trains and at stations, or buy books, in the places where she went to steal?). She says, «Now

³³ U. Hanemann, L. Krolak, *Fostering a culture of reading and writing: examples of dynamic literate environments*, UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning, Hamburg 2017, p. 120.

I understand that I am doing, what these people were doing and I can do it when I am free again [...]»³⁴.

These testimonies point to the concept of impact, understood as the capacity of such initiatives to bring about change. This is made possible through carefully designed programmes tailored to their target audiences, which foster awareness through meaningful and well-structured activities.

University of Hong Kong: “Storytelling for Social Impact” (Hong Kong)

Universities are physically embedded in their communities and can play an important role in transforming these communities through their conduct. They serve as an important space for intellectual and cultural thought, to explore social meaning and aspirations, and to develop core and collective values of sustainability and equity within society. Contemporary societies which have progressed have done so by achieving an alignment between knowledge, which is a core function of the university to advance and adapt, and social needs³⁵.

In this perspective of openness and dialogue with childhood, some Asian universities have developed public engagement activities related to the topic and connected to cultural belonging and the experience of local spaces.

The *Storytelling for Social Impact* program at The University of Hong Kong (HKU) is a service-learning initiative combining training and community outreach through children’s storytelling and picture books. It’s composed of three working stages: public lecture, workshop and community service. It took place from 13 February to 8 March 2025 held both at the University of Hong Kong for the students training and in external schools and community centres across Hong Kong for the storytelling activities with children.

The purpose of the program involves the training session for university students in storytelling skills, the application of picture books and narrative techniques in educational contexts and the support of children’s imagination and learning through reading activities.

³⁴ Ivi, p. 119.

³⁵ M. Sohoni et al., *New models of university social engagement in Asia*, in Id., *Innovations in Asian Higher Education*, Taylor & Francis, Abingdon 2019, p. 54.

Diplomatic Academy of Vietnam: Dream 4.0 – A Ticket Back to Childhood (Vietnam)

In celebration of *Vietnam Book and Reading Culture Day* (April 21), the Library Department, the Department of Science, Information and International Studies, and the Book Club of the Diplomatic Academy of Vietnam organized a series of events from 14 April to 19 April 2025, titled *Dream 4.0 – A Ticket Back to Childhood*. The diplomatic Academy of Vietnam in Hanoi hosted the program in order to revisit childhood through books and games, promote Vietnamese folk culture and encourage reading among students.

University of Wollongong: “Indigenous Literacy Day” (New South Wales, AU)

Looking to universities as partners in civics education, participation and engagement is a critical step in actively addressing the challenges facing democratic representation and engagement in Australia. University research capabilities can support critical action areas that can reveal important insights into what Australia can do to address civics engagement. [...] Policy settings that recognise the interconnected role between education providers (primary through to tertiary) and local communities in supporting each other are fundamental to addressing concerns associated with civics education and engagement in Australia. Ensuring these settings are conducive to effective community and mission-based programs and engagement strategies is essential to meet the challenges facing current and future democratic representation³⁶.

Civic participation represents one of the key ways in which universities can contribute to building more inclusive and aware societies, particularly in contexts marked by deep historical inequalities, such as those suffered by Indigenous peoples in Australia.

University-led public engagement initiatives play a crucial role in this regard, as they create structured spaces make visible narratives that are often absent from dominant public discourse.

Within this perspective, children’s literature emerges as a particularly effective tool of cultural and educational mediation. Through stories, pictures and accessible languages, it can introduce children to actual themes. In this manner public engagement events can generate meaningful learning experiences capable of leaving lasting awareness.

³⁶ Universities Australia, *Universities Australia response to the Joint Standing Committee on Electoral Matters Inquiry into Civics Education, Engagement, and Participation in Australia*, Parliament of Australia, 2024, pp. 7-8.

The University of Wollongong organised a public engagement event specifically on the occasion of *Indigenous Literacy Day*, a national initiative celebrating the stories, languages and cultures of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples.

The activities took place on 4 and 5 September 2024 at the Early Start Discovery Space and involved preschool children from several local early learning centres.

It included a guided *Country walk* with university academics, art-based workshops inspired by Indigenous stories and knowledge, storytelling and reading activities connected to *First Nations narratives*.

The initiative aimed to help children understand the deep connection between land, culture, and storytelling, promoting an expanded concept of literacy that includes environmental awareness and Indigenous knowledge systems.

University of Newcastle: “Children’s Book Council Family Fun Day” (New South Wales, AU)

The *Children’s Book Council Family Fun Day* associated with the University of Newcastle is a public engagement event focused on children’s literature and reading promotion.

The event features activities related to children’s literature, including storytelling sessions and read-aloud activities, picture book displays and author/illustrator engagement, creative workshops, games and literacy-based activities for families and the local community.

It’s an annual chance to celebrate being together within exploring the children’s literature world through different proposals. In 2024, it was held on 17 August, aiming to foster early literacy and a culture of reading through participatory, family-oriented activities centred on children’s literature, while strengthening the connection between the university and the local community.

Approaches to Knowledge Valorisation

The dissemination of knowledge and research on Children’s literature beyond the university happens through different perspectives, shaped by distinct macro-geographical frameworks and approaches to promotion.

A first approach that emerges from the analysis is a community-based and territorially embedded model, characterised by the openness of the university to the local community and by the continuity of initiatives over time.

Projects such as *Uni in Fabula* (University of Bergamo) and *Piccole letture in città* (along with other public engagement initiatives promoted by the LETIN research group at the University of Padua), exemplify this model. Their activities are hosted across multiple spaces, both within and beyond the university, and are grounded in the principles of accessibility, free participation, and inclusivity. These initiatives prioritise the creation of networks among schools, libraries, families, and cultural organisations, fostering a shared cultural environment in which children's literature becomes a vehicle for dialogue, participation, and community building.

A second approach to public engagement primarily involves university students as future professionals in the educational field, through activities and initiatives addressed to children. Their contribution entails the development of organisational, relational, and pedagogical competences. In this perspective, initiatives such as the *KinderLeseUniversität* (Dresden University) and the *Storytelling for Social Impact* program (University of Hong Kong) integrate theoretical learning with hands-on experience in interaction with the public.

A third approach is oriented towards social inclusion, highlighting the potential of children's literature to create opportunities for vulnerable communities, depending on the specific context. The initiatives promoted by the University of South Africa and the National University of La Plata aimed to be impactful, to create relational spaces through children's literature.

A fourth approach is more closely linked to institutional and infrastructural development, as exemplified by Mzuzu University. This model emphasises continuity, accessibility, and the creation of stable resources such as dedicated children's libraries that support literacy and learning over time.

A fifth approach is based on periodic or event-based initiatives, which involve the public in a non-continuous but highly concentrated manner. This model includes initiatives such as the *Children's Literature Festival* at the University of Central Missouri and the *Children's Book Council Family Fun Day* associated with the University of Newcastle. These events bring together a variety of activities, such as author talks, performances, and workshops designed to engage diverse audiences around children's literature.

A sixth approach involves the cultural dimension of a country: a model through which to engage with and open up to cultural heritage, as exemplified by the University of Wollongong, Swansea University (UK), and the Diplomatic Academy of Vietnam. Their initiatives aim to valorise children's literature as a means of connecting individual experience with culture and with knowledge of places.

Within this framework, *Uni in Fabula* stands out from other public engagement projects due to its well-structured and continuous design, the flexibility of its activities, and the systematic collection of participants' feedback. While maintaining a focus on the dissemination of knowledge in the field of children's and young adult literature, the project engages a wide range of stakeholders (including enthusiasts, professionals, children and families, and students) through diverse activities such as workshops, seminars, and public events. These initiatives foster the co-construction of knowledge, helping to build a meaningful link between the university and the wider community.

Final Considerations and Future Perspective

As this study has shown, the aim is not to provide an exhaustive mapping of all public engagement initiatives related to children's literature at a global level. Rather, it seeks to compare projects that are structured in ways similar to the main case under examination, *Uni in Fabula*. The selected cases were identified based on the availability of accessible and documented information, prioritising those initiatives that, while not always fully comparable to the reference model, appear among the most relevant and representative with respect to the defined criteria and the focus of the study.

A key issue identified of the knowledge valorisation is the « [...] lack of metrics to measure social impact»³⁷, which limits the systematic assessment of ongoing and potential initiatives. As a result, the social value generated by these projects often remains under-quantified, which in turn reduces their visibility and their capacity to attract external recognition and funding.

Nevertheless, children's and adolescence literature emerges as a particularly meaningful field for opening up academic knowledge to society, fostering dialogue with broader communities, and enriching it through participatory and inclusive

³⁷ M. Grębosz-Krawczyk, M. Sowa, *Where is the social impact? Key barriers to knowledge valorisation*, vol. LV, cit., p.13.

practices. The cases analysed show that, despite differences in geographical and operational contexts, a common direction can be identified: a shift away from the mere transmission of knowledge towards its co-construction.

This suggests not only the current relevance of the field, but also its potential for further development as a space of interaction between universities and communities. In this sense, *Uni in Fabula* stands out as a particularly structured and potentially replicable model, capable of integrating continuity, scientific rigour, and participatory openness, thus offering valuable insights for future research and for the design of new public engagement practices.

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